

EFFECT OF ATHLETE CREDIBILITY ON BRAND ENDORSEMENT IN MANUFACTURING COMPANIES IN KENYA

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Abstract: Celebrity endorsement, as a marketing strategy, is effectively in fashion. The success stories of this strategy have turned this trend into a movement which is gaining its momentum all over the world. The strategy has advanced from celebrities appearing in commercials to having a stake in the endorsed brand. Despite the widespread use of athletes as product or brand endorsers, there is a relative lack of published research that investigates the influence these athletes may have on a target market particularly in Kenya. This study therefore looks at the effect of athlete credibility on product endorsement among manufacturing firms in Kenya. The study employs a cross sectional survey research design. The target population is comprised of all the marketing officers in the 625 manufacturing firms in Kenya. A sample of 166 respondents is drawn from the target population to participate in the study. Simple random sampling is used to select 166 firms to take part in the research. The study uses structured questionnaires that are distributed to the 166 marketing officers. The questionnaire was pilot tested before commencing data collection to help in removing errors and enhance clarity. The questionnaire was further tested for validity and reliability. Data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24. Analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used in the form of percentages, frequencies and mean scores. Hypothesis testing was done using chi-square statistics. The study findings established that athlete credibility have a significant influence on brand endorsement. Thus it was concluded that athlete credibility is greatly important in brand endorsement as a marketing strategy. It was therefore recommended that manufacturing companies should ensure they choose the right celebrity as they play a huge role in how customers view both advertisement and the brand.

Keywords: Athlete, Brand Endorsement, Credibility, Manufacturing Company, celebrity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current market place is full of products, abundant substitutes and complimentary items that give customers choice dilemma. As such, a product alone is not enough as customers would be looking for that “something extra”, that makes it stand out from the rest-the brand. Consumer brands are no longer merely a sign to distinguish one manufacturer’s make from the other. Brands have become embedded in the consumer psyche (Carrol, 2009). The brand distinguishes a company from its competitors using the unique assets connected to the company, which therefore means that having a strong brand is extremely important (Ueltschy & Laroche, 2004). It has been found that certain brand dimensions and associations have led to increased marketplace recognition and economic success for marketers, as a result of the value consumers place on these status products (O’Cass & Frost, 2002).

Celebrity endorsement, as a marketing strategy, is effectively in fashion (Biswas, Hussain, & O'Donnell, 2009). The success stories of this strategy have turned this trend into a movement which is gaining its momentum all over the world. The strategy has advanced from celebrities appearing in commercials to have a stake in the endorsed brand. Nowadays, celebrities look for the best ways to benefit from endorsement deals. Celebrity endorsement has the potential for creating a win-win situation for the company and the celebrity endorser (Shimp, 2008).

Marketers spend enormous amounts of money annually on celebrity endorsement contracts based on the belief that celebrities are effective spokespeople for their products or brands (Katyal, 2007). Celebrity Endorsement is viewed as a billion dollar industry in today's era (Kambitsis et al, 2002). Various companies are signing deals with celebrities in the hope that by using celebrities they can accomplish a unique and relevant position in the minds of the consumers (Temperley & Tangen, 2006). Celebrity endorsement is increasingly being employed across various industries regardless of the product type. It is known to be playing the role of a signaling strategy (Mustafa, 2005). Also according to Reynolds (2000) celebrity endorsement can give a brand a touch of glamour.

Celebrities are a creature of capitalism: they involve the commoditization of reputation, as noted by Charles (2005), and the construction of audiences, as emphasized by David (1997). Max and Theodor (2002) argued in the 1940s that celebrities are the product of a "culture industry" that measures its interchangeable starlets solely by their box-office earnings, turning all performances into advertisements. Murray (2005) noted that a celebrity is a distinctive form of status in part because it matches the vast scale of modern social organizations and the commoditization of mass communications.

The level of maturity in the retail brand concept has directed retailers in recent years towards the use of specific brand image building strategies such as celebrity endorsement (Burt 2000). It is generally believed that retailers have a better chance of communicating their message to consumers when celebrities are featured in advertising campaigns (Choi & Rifon 2007). Celebrities develop their image from the way they behave within a society, and how they are portrayed in media. Organizations' seize upon the image of celebrities to assist them with brand promotion. When a famous person endorses a particular brand, it is believed that their image is transferred to that brand (Cianfrone & Zhang, 2006). Typically, celebrity endorsement includes entertainers such as, athletes, singers, actors, actresses or models, business people, and politicians (Hsu & McDonald, 2002).

Estimates suggest that as much as 25% of all television commercials (Erdogan et al. 2001) and 10% of advertiser's budgets involve celebrity endorsements (Agrawal & Kamakura 1995). As many as 25% of American companies, use celebrities in their advertising campaigns (Shimp, 2000). In 2001, US companies paid \$897 million to athletes, coaches, and sports personalities. Ten years later, White, Goddard & Wilbur (2009) found this figure to have doubled meaning that celebrity endorsement has become an important and integral aspect of modern-day advertising. In 2003, Nike spent \$1.44 billion on celebrity endorsements (CNN Money 2003). Between two and three billion dollars were spent on celebrity advertising in 2006 in USA alone (White et al. 2009). In Korea and Japan, that number is over 70% (Kim, 2006). Such popularity of celebrity endorsements is hardly surprising.

There is a bulk of anecdotal evidence linking the use of celebrities in advertising campaigns to improvement in operating performance. With improved technology of mass media, celebrity athletes have proven to be a powerful force by which to influence the perceptions and attitudes of consumers and lead them to purchase intention. Michael Jordan, perhaps the best loved sport star in the world and the most valuable endorser, had enormous economic leverage in the US, earning as much as \$ 10 billion in endorsements during the fourteen years of his NBA career (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001). All sport constituents such as players, owners, businesses, and media benefit from professional athletes. Sport business is an estimated \$213 billion industry; of this figure, advertising is 14.1 percent, spectator spending is 13.4 percent, gambling is 9.7 percent, media broadcasting rights is 3.6 percent, and endorsements is 1 percent (Adams, 2009).

Celebrity athletes bring with their endorsement, consumer recognition and image awareness of the brands they represent (Keller, 1998). Such endorsements are a key component in driving the sales of retail products and enhancing manufacturers' stock value (Mathur et al., 1997; Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995). Athlete endorsers are popular in their use as they provide both free publicity and testimony for the product or the service they endorse, especially when the product is anticipated to have contributed towards their performance in products such as sports shoes and equipment (Cianfrone & Zhang, 2006; Stone, Joseph & Jones, 2003).

Athletes are commonly used as celebrity endorsers by companies and marketers to promote consumer products and services (Shanklin & Miciak, 1997). Their utility lies in mediating the brand equity creation process (Seno & Lukas, 2007) by creating meaning and values in consumers' minds that transfer to brands. Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta (2010) confirmed that athlete endorsers were capable of creating meaning and value transfer at levels generated by brands. This led them to state that athlete endorsers and brands are an 'alliance of equals'. Athletic endorsements have helped sales of athletic apparel like sport jerseys and footwear; in 2002 athletic sales soared to \$37.2 billion (Janoff, 2004). Consumers spent around \$7.3 billion on athletic footwear in 2003 fueled by the release of the Retro Air Jordan sneakers (Michael Jordan's signature sneaker) and new Air Force One (Janoff, 2004). U.S. companies paid more than \$1 billion to nearly 2,000 athletes for endorsement contracts or agreements and licensing rights (Lane, 1996).

The importance in understanding use of athletes as celebrity endorsers is demonstrated through the increasing quantity and range of studies in this area that includes selection of athlete endorsers (Wheeler, 2003), athlete endorser effects (Liu & Brock, 2011), athlete endorser effectiveness on advertising (Braunstein-Minkove, Zhang, & Trail, 2011), athlete endorser credibility and product fit (Fink, Parker, Cunningham, & Cuneen, 2012) and athlete-brand match-up effects (Koernig & Boyd, 2009). Everything said and done, one has to weigh the potential risks vs. the potential rewards as celebrity endorsements are always a high-risk, high-reward situation and there is always a human element that is unpredictable.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Athletes have been endorsing products for numerous years and their endorsements have been known to be the best way to sell a product to consumers (Stotlar, 2005). In today's society, social status can be based on what you wear or buy based on what is popular. Marketers and advertisers who have celebrities endorse products such as clothing or other material items have created these social statuses among consumers (Denham, 2009). Advertisers believe that the use of a celebrity affects advertising effectiveness, brand recall and recognition, as well as purchase intentions and follow through (Spry et al., 2011).

Celebrity endorsers attract supporters as well as fans to try the brand, increase brand awareness and consumption intentions. Celebrity likeability and congruence between endorser and the endorsed brand influence predisposition towards the advertisements, which in turn affect attitude toward the brand purchase intention (Fleck et al., 2012). The purchase confidence comes from the credibility and profitability attached to employing a celebrity as an endorser. Effectiveness of the celebrity in endorsement depends on three constructs of the source including expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness. The marketing implication is that marketers need to select celebrities that are the most attractive and believed to be most entertaining to the audience, popular and with high talents.

Companies all over the world in a bid to distinguish their brands from existing and potential competitors have utilized athlete celebrities to market their products through brand endorsements. Kenyan athletes have been on the cover of local dailies for their brilliant performance for decades now (Karuku, 2010) for example, Paul Tergat dominated the world marathon competitions having become world record holder for years. On the other hand, Julius Yego emerged to be a Kenyan icon in javelin throw in the world arena. David Rudisha has been the world record holder in 800m race and an Olympic champion. In 2010 David Rudisha was named the IAAF World Athlete of the Year. Ezekiel Kemboi Cheboi in his athletic career dominated the 3000m steeplechase for more than ten years. He is the only athlete to win four (successive) world championships in the steeplechase. These and many more athletes in Kenya have made remarkable achievements in their athletic careers and acquired a celebrity status in world championship. Despite their achievement, little has been documented in regard to the athletes' role as brand endorsers for the Kenyan manufacturing industries. They command both international and regional recognition and respect. It's worth noting that no corporate has exploited such great publicity through an endorsement deal. Kenyan companies need to move from simply sponsoring sports teams to building brand equity through these sports heroes and heroines. Celebrity endorsements, if done properly, are more profitable for the brand than mere sponsorships. Despite the widespread use of athletes as product or brand endorsers, there is a relative lack of published research that investigates the influence these athletes may have on a target market particularly in Kenya. It is against this backdrop that this study is undertaken to establish the impact of athlete celebrity on brand endorsement in manufacturing companies in Kenya.

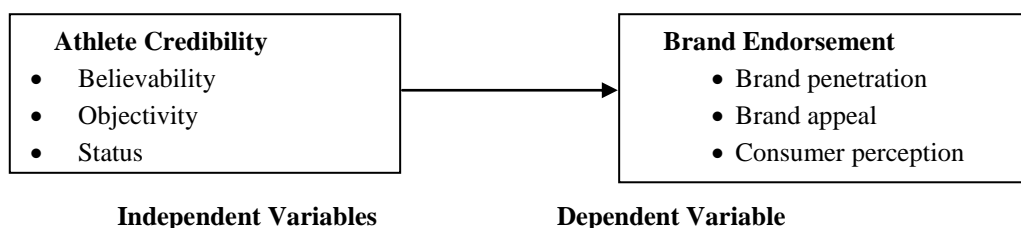
3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To examine the effect of athlete credibility on brand endorsement in manufacturing companies in Kenya

4. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

H_{04} : Athlete credibility has no statistically significant effect on brand endorsement in manufacturing companies in Kenya.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Roizen model

Celebrity credibility is used to imply a communicator's positive characteristics to affect the receiver's acceptance of a message. The celebrity credibility model of Hovland et al. (1953) analyses the factors leading to the perceived credibility of the communicator. Hovland et al. (1953) concluded that the two factors trustworthiness and expertise underscore the concept of Celebrity credibility. Trustworthiness is defined as the degree of confidence in the Communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid. Research shows that when a communicator is perceived to be highly trustworthy, an opinionated message is more effective than a non-opinionated communication in producing attitude change (Ohanion, 1990).

Expertise is defined as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions (Hovland, et al. 1953). Already in the early eighties, research results have indicated that in a selling context, an expert salesperson induced a significantly higher number of customers to purchase than did a non-expert salesperson (Woodside and Davenport, 2004). This study was done in the United States of America.

7. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Athlete Credibility

A central goal of advertising is the persuasion of customers, through the active attempt to change or modify consumers' attitude towards brands (Solomon 2002). In this respect, the credibility of an advertisement plays an important role in convincing the target audience of the attractiveness of the company's brand. Yeung-Jo and June-Hee (2007) found that the credibility and attractiveness of the celebrity athlete endorser depended on whether or not the athlete endorser was compatible with the endorsed product. According to Siemens, Smith, Fisher and Jensen (2008), a consumer's perceived credibility of an endorser plays a vital role in an advertisement's persuasive power. A credible source can be particularly persuasive when the consumer has not yet learned much about a product or formed an opinion on it. If the source is highly credible, there will be more positive attitude changes and stronger behavioral changes towards the advertisement (Amos, Holmes, and Strutton, 2008).

Rossiter and Percy (1998) stated that the two major components that comprise credibility are objectivity and expertise. Objectivity is the endorser's reputation as a trustworthy and unbiased person, able to give a rational argument as to why he or she chooses a certain brand. Expertise, however, refers to the endorser's perceived knowledge about the product and product category in question. Furthermore, many celebrities make the mistake of endorsing too many products, which leads consumers to perceive them as insincere and less reliable, simply driven more by monetary interests (Keller et al., 2008). To prevent this loss of faith, celebrities limit the number of brands that they endorse and choose only the brands that best fit and complement their own images (Parulekar & Raheja, 2006).

Koernig and Boyd (2009) found that perceived trustworthiness, a component of credibility is higher for those athletes that endorse an athletic related product versus those who endorse non-athletic related products. According to Stone et al. (2003), the success of celebrity sports endorsers relies on their ability to project a likable and trustworthy image to potential consumers and their athletic prowess. They suggest that the athlete must be at the top level in their sports to create the most effective endorsement relationship.

Brand credibility is increased when the spokesperson has a higher likelihood of actually using the product. Within sports related products, believability is enhanced in ads with domain experts such as Michael Jordan endorsing Nike (Biswas et al., 2009). Biswas et al. (2009) recommend that if athletes are to be used, they have to be known for their achievement in their sports and be ranked in the top 1-2% of their field. The associated risk with this strategy relates to poor athletic performance and the perception that this may be linked to a specific product. Choi and Rifon (2012) suggest that the endorser credibility theoretical approach has been criticized because it considers the persuasive nature of a credible celebrity to be autonomous from the product endorsed.

Brand Endorsement

Research has shown that the use of celebrities in advertising can have a positive influence on the credibility of and preferences for advertising, and ultimately on purchase intentions (Farhat & Khan, 2011). In spite of any arguments against celebrity endorsement, this type of advertising remains one of the most popular advertising strategies. Indeed, it is a “ubiquitous feature of modern day marketing” (Biswas, Hussain & O'Donnell, 2009).

The popularity of celebrity endorsement as a marketing tool can be seen by the increase in its use in the marketing of goods. In the 1970's, 17% of advertisements used a celebrity, where the number has increased to 25 % in 2003 (Keel & Natarajan, 2012). Due to the substantial cost associated with endorsement, research has largely focused on the effectiveness of endorsement to enhance attitudes towards advertising, product recall and purchase intention (Keel & Natarajan, 2012). Celebrity endorsement has also been shown to create abnormal positive stock returns (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995) and it was proven that positive expectations and news about a celebrity in endorsement can increase or decrease future cash flow expectations (Russel, Mahar & Drewniak, 2005).

Athletes are chosen by companies as endorsers to associate the company's brand with the athlete's celebrity image (Carlson, 2008). Companies benefit from having an athlete endorse their product because consumers feel connected to the brand. Often companies decide on whether or not they should use an athlete to endorse their product even if the product is not sport related. According to Koernig and Boyd (2009), they determine the effective use of having athlete endorsements for sports and non-sports brands. The results of the data collected showed that there was a bigger effect on consumers for a famous athlete to endorse a sport brand rather than a non-sport brand. The study relates to the circumstances in when the athletes should be used for endorsements and when athletes shouldn't be used to endorse brands. Using certain athletes can be more effective for brands based on what the brand is trying to sell. Companies will use stronger athletes to sell products such as muscle building products (Simmers, Damron- Martinez, & Haytko, 2009).

Companies are always looking for the best way to get their product or brand name out to the general public especially if they are a new company (Van Heerden, Kuiper, & Saar, 2008). This means that if the brand or product is not well known, the company can use a celebrity endorsement to give their brand a jump start in the market. When there is an uncertainty about a product, athletes or celebrities are cued to make the consumer feel more comfortable with the product (Van Heerden, Kuiper, & Saar, 2008). Most often these jump starts are expensive for companies to do, yet previously displayed research explains that celebrity endorsed products are the best way to sell a product. The researchers conducted a study of two-hundred people and resulted in consumers finding a significant enhancement of brand relation when a celebrity endorsed the product (Van Heerden, et. al., 2008). The study emphasizes the importance of companies using athlete endorsed brands and its major effect it has on the public.

Athletes, especially high performing and well-recognized ones can be effective in creating brand awareness during a product launch. They can also be used to ‘cut through’, an act that is essential in today's cluttered media environment (Charbonneau & Garland 2005). Similar to celebrity endorsers, athletes as endorsers are most successful when the products they endorse are believable, and the athlete is sincere. Many researchers have found that athletes provide effective testimonials for products that have contributed to their own performance and success in their particular sport (Stone, Joseph & Jones 2003).

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed cross sectional survey research design. According to Upagade and Shende (2012), research design is the arrangement of condition from collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure. This study targeted all marketing officers working in 625 manufacturing companies in Kenya. The sample frame for this study was from a list of all the manufacturing companies obtained from the ministry of industrialization database. A sample size of 166 marketing officers was selected. The study used structured questionnaires that were distributed to all the marketing officers involved in the sample. Questionnaires were used to cope with the constraints of limited time and budget. It helps to obtain more responses from a large number of respondents in a short time and is used for obtaining structured responses which is also convenient in data analysis (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). The instruments were tested for validity and reliability. The data was processed and analyzed based on the objectives and research hypotheses using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 for windows. This was done using both descriptive and inferential analysis. Descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, standard deviation and means) was used to organize and summarize data and to describe the characteristics of the sample and then presented in tables.

9. FINDINGS

Athlete Credibility and Brand Endorsement

In order to assess athlete credibility, the respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on relevant statements on **Athlete Credibility and Brand Endorsement**. The responses were rated on a five point Likert scale where: 5-strongly agree, 4- agree, 3-Undecided, 2-Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree. From the findings, the average score for Athlete Gender was rated at **4.06**. Respondents rated highly (4.33) athletes who projecting trustworthiness to the public and were better product endorsers followed by athletes who were able connect with their fan base improved their chances of product endorsements (4.26) while Athletes honesty in their profession was key in product endorsement (4.22). However, Ethical athletes appealing more to customers generated the lowest score of 3.65.

Table 1: Athlete Credibility and Brand Endorsement

Athlete Credibility	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Athletes who project trustworthiness to the public are better product endorsers	0%	0%	6%	55%	39%	4.33
Athletes ability to connect with their fan base improves their chances of product endorsements	1%	1%	8%	54%	37%	4.26
Athletes honesty in their profession is key in product endorsement	1%	2%	8%	55%	35%	4.22
Athletes with a high sense of dignity are preferred for product endorsement	0%	2%	6%	68%	25%	4.15
Believability is enhanced when athletes endorse products they use in their sports	1%	4%	8%	55%	32%	4.13
Athlete endorsers with a sense of responsibility are mostly preferred by our customers.	1%	1%	16%	57%	26%	4.06
The companies prefers athlete endorsers who participate in charitable activities	1%	13%	19%	51%	17%	3.70
Ethical athletes appeal more to customers	4%	15%	11%	50%	19%	3.65
Average						4.06

Brand Endorsement

In order to assess product endorsement, the respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on relevant statements on **Product Endorsement**. The responses were rated on a five point Likert scale where: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-Undecided, 2-Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree. From the findings, the average score for Athlete Product Fit was rated at **4.08**.

Table 2: Brand Endorsement

Product Endorsement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score
Consumers consider athlete celebrities as role models thus identify with the products they endorse	1%	3%	8%	55%	34%	4.20
Through athlete product endorsement, our company sales have increased	3%	2%	13%	42%	41%	4.15
Use of athlete celebrity advertisement has greatly improved product appeal to customers	0%	1%	6%	74%	20%	4.13
Athlete product endorsement enhances customers buying intention	0%	4%	9%	58%	28%	4.10
Use of athlete product endorsement have helped elevate the market for our brand product	1%	2%	11%	63%	23%	4.04
Our product are perceived positively by consumers who connect with the athlete celebrity endorsers	1%	8%	11%	53%	29%	4.01
Our company uses athlete celebrity athlete in launching products to the market	5%	4%	12%	52%	28%	3.93
Average						4.08

Source: Field data

Hypothesis Testing

Chi-Square Tests on athlete's credibility on brand endorsement in manufacturing companies in Kenya

H_{01} : Athlete credibility has no statistically significant effect on brand endorsement in manufacturing companies in Kenya.

H_{A1} : Athlete credibility has a statistically significant effect on brand endorsement in manufacturing companies in Kenya.

Significance level: $\alpha=0.05$

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	682.197 ^a	342	.000
Likelihood Ratio	248.079	342	1.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	34.619	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	160		

a. 379 cells (99.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

The results indicate that there exists statistically significant relationship between athlete credibility and brand endorsement (chi-square with 342 degree of freedom = 682.197, $p = 0.001$). We therefore accept the null hypothesis that states that Athlete credibility has a statistically significant effect on brand endorsement in manufacturing companies in Kenya.

10. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Athlete Credibility and Brand Endorsement

The study established that athlete who project trustworthiness to the public are better product endorsers. This is consistent with the findings of Amos, Holmes & Strutton (2008) who stated that when a consumers has not yet learned about a

product or formed an opinion on it, a credible source can be mostly persuasive. If the source is highly credible, there will be more positive changes and stronger behavioural changes towards the advertisements. This is in consonance with the findings of Yeung-Jo and June Hee (2007) who stated that the credibility and attractiveness of the celebrity athlete endorser depended on whether or not the athlete endorser was compatible with the endorsed product.

Brand Endorsement

According to the survey, consumers considered athlete celebrities as role models thus identifying with the product they endorsed. This is in line with the findings of Stuart (2007) who stated that athletics can be considered both great athletes as well as heroes, but the most successful endorsers were those that were considered both. Carlson (2008) states that athletes are chosen by companies as endorsers to associate the company's brand with the athlete's celebrity image. This is consistent with the survey findings that states companies use celebrity athletes in launching products to the market.

Conclusions

The study established that Athlete Credibility on Brand Endorsement was perceived as the most important factor by various manufacturing companies that took part in the survey. This was highlighted by the need to have athletes who project trustworthiness to the public and their ability to connect with their fans.

Recommendations

Learning how to choose the right celebrity would be an advantage to manufacturing companies. The celebrity plays a huge role in how customers view both the advertisement and the brand. The celebrity too plays a big part with consumers and their expectation to buy these brands. Increasing brand profits and sales volume are the definitive objectives for retailers and the only way for companies to survive. Using celebrities has already shown that they help increase sales profits and are also a unique way to get consumers' attention.

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