

Product promotion: When do emotional appeals trump celebrity spokespeople?

March 5 2013

Emotional appeals could be more effective than celebrities when promoting products related to a consumer's identity, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Specific emotions can help consumers strengthen their identities by providing information about how to feel a particular [identity](#), especially when emotions are associated with distinct patterns of action.

Consumers tend to choose products that bolster emotions associated with a particular identity," write authors Nicole Verrochi Coleman (University of Pittsburgh) and Patti Williams (Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania).

Imagine you are selling a new energy drink targeted at two different groups of consumers—athletes and business people. Each group might respond very differently to the same upbeat and energetic appeal consistent with the product's benefits.

In one study, athletes chose to listen to "angry" music and indicated they would pay more to see "angry" bands in concert, while volunteers chose to listen to "sad" music and were willing to pay more to attend "sad" concerts. In another study, athletes found an advertisement more persuasive when the model's face in the ad expressed anger, while volunteers were more persuaded by a model with a sad face, and [environmentalists](#) by a model expressing [disgust](#).

Consumers can benefit from matching their [emotional experiences](#) to

their identity. For example, turning up some angry head banging music on the way to the gym might make you a better athlete, or listening to sad love songs on the way to the soup kitchen might make you a better volunteer.

"Identity-based marketing has generally used spokespeople but poor performance or [personal issues](#) can undermine a spokesperson's reputation and reflect poorly on a brand. However, companies can employ identity-based marketing without directly mentioning an identity by simply incorporating emotions related to that identity," the authors conclude.

More information: Nicole Verrochi Coleman and Patti Williams. "Feeling Like My Self: *Emotion* Profiles and Social Identity." *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2013.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Product promotion: When do emotional appeals trump celebrity spokespeople? (2013, March 5) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-03-product-emotional-appeals-trump-celebrity.html>

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