

WHO IS THE HONORARY AMBASSADOR BEST SUITED TO REFLECT YOUR ORGANIZATION'S IDENTITY?

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We developed a unidimensional evaluation scale to enable managers of organizations to appoint the most suited individuals as honorary ambassadors. We chose the factors on which the scale is based through an extensive literature review, interviews with experts, exploration of their reviews, and online surveys of Korean public relations practitioners. The 8 factors we selected for evaluating an honorary ambassador best suited to reflect an organization's identity were attraction, trustworthiness, charisma, influence, expertise, uniqueness, similarity, and congruence. This measurement scale provides scientific guidelines both for future researchers and for public relations practitioners to enable them to maximize their use of honorary ambassadors for maximum ambassador endorsement success for their client organizations.

Keywords: organization's identity, honorary ambassadors, endorsement, public relations tactics, public figures, organizational image.

Celebrities are often appointed as honorary ambassadors to carry out strategic public relations activities for organizations and enhance their public image. For example, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association appointed Pelé, who is widely regarded as the greatest football player of all time, as its 2014 World Cup honorary ambassador (The Associated Press, 2011). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) named Laura Bush as its honorary ambassador for the United Nations Decade of Literacy (UNESCO, 2003). Singer Michelle Williams became a celebrity ambassador

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for Hyundai in its Hope On Wheels campaign in support of childhood cancer awareness (BlackCelebrityGiving, 2014).

Public relations researchers have examined the influence of honorary ambassadors on public relations by exploring the diverse activities of celebrity ambassadors (Y. J. Jin & Yoo, 2014; Yoo & Jin, 2013). However, few researchers have systematically examined the criteria that public relations practitioners consider when evaluating honorary ambassadors, appointing them to organizations, and involving them in the public relations activities of the organizations. Thus, we developed a measurement scale for evaluating honorary ambassadors. Future researchers can use the scale to empirically examine the influential predictors of the effect of appointing honorary ambassadors as a public relations tactic. Public relations practitioners can also use the scale to determine the best ambassadors for their clients.

Literature Review

Honorary Ambassadors

Honorary ambassadors have been defined as information sources who promote public understanding of, and cooperation with, an organization's aims and activities (M.-C. Lee, 2010; Yoo & Jin, 2013). Interest in enlisting the services of honorary ambassadors as a public relations tactic for organizations has increased in recent years (Y. J. Jin & Yoo, 2014). Researchers have mainly investigated the effectiveness of honorary ambassadors in promoting government campaigns or policies, according to related theories in the field of advertising, with a focus on the concepts of source credibility, source attractiveness, meaning transfer, celebrity endorser-product congruence, and parasocial interaction and identification (e.g., Aaker & Myers, 1987; Brown & Fraser, 2004; Deshpandé & Stayman, 1994; Erdogan, 1999; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; K. Y. Lee, 2005; M.-C. Lee, 2010; McCracken, 1989; Ohanian, 1990; Yoo & Jin, 2013).

Source credibility is defined as "a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of a message" (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). In the source credibility model it is contended that the effectiveness and persuasiveness of a message depends on the receiver's perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness of the source (McCracken, 1989; Ohanian, 1990). McCracken (1989) stated that in the source attractiveness model the effectiveness of a message depends on the source's familiarity, likability, similarity, and attractiveness to receivers.

Expertise refers to the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). It involves the knowledge, experience, and skills possessed by an endorser in the relevant field (Erdogan, 1999). Expert sources have been found to be more persuasive (Aaker & Myers

1987) and to generate greater intention to buy a brand's products (Ohanian, 1991), compared to nonexpert sources. However, some researchers argue that it is immaterial whether a spokesperson is an expert, because the main criterion is how the target public perceives the spokesperson (Ohanian 1991). Trustworthiness, a factor derived from source credibility, indicates confidence in a source's ability to provide information in an objective and honest manner (Erdogan, 1999). Researchers have developed celebrity endorsers' credibility scales after carrying out extensive literature reviews and conducting statistical tests (K. Y. Lee, 2005; Ohanian, 1990).

Trustworthiness refers to honesty, integrity, and believability of endorsers (Erdogan, 1999). M.-C. Lee (2010) suggested that trustworthiness is an exemplary characteristic of honorary ambassadors. Researchers have found that perceptions of endorser trustworthiness are affected by the ethnic status of endorsers, and, as a result, brand attitudes (Deshpandé & Stayman, 1994), because people trust individuals who are similar to themselves (Erdogan, 1999). Thus, Erdogan (1999) suggested that, when specific ethnic groups are targeted, the ethnic background of spokespersons should be carefully evaluated.

The meaning transfer model, which is a useful theoretical framework for understanding celebrities' persuasive effectiveness as ambassadors, involves a three-stage process: the celebrity's cultural meaning, the transfer of the meaning from celebrity to product, and the subsequent transfer from product to consumer (McCracken, 1989). Researchers have discussed the various meanings conveyed by celebrities, with regard to factors such as status, class, gender, age, personality, and lifestyle (Erdogan, 1999). Celebrity endorser-product congruence is another pivotal factor that can affect celebrity endorsement success (Yoo & Jin, 2013). The message conveyed by the celebrity image and the product must be congruent for advertising to be effective. Thus, greater congruence will lead to a more persuasive advertisement (Ohanian, 1990). Parasocial interaction and identification is also a crucial basis as an explanation for the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. Brown and Fraser (2004) defined *parasocial interaction* as the process by which television viewers shape a personal attachment with a television personality through his or her media persona. Brown and Fraser demonstrated that the more strongly that people identify with celebrities, the more they adopt the values and behavior of the celebrities by supporting their values or imitating their behavior.

Scale Development in Public Relations Strategies

Public relations researchers have developed measurement scales to examine the underlying dimensions of public relations concepts. We classified the scales in terms of outcomes and strategies. The following concepts have been addressed in scales for measuring public relations outcomes: the organizations' stance in

relation to the public (Y. Jin & Cameron, 2006), organization–public relationship (Huang, 2001), public relations value assessment (Huang, 2012), chief executive officer image (K. Y. Lee, 2005), and government agency image (Shin, Jo, & Kim, 2008).

Y. Jin and Cameron (2006) developed a scale to examine organizations' movements in terms of stance in diverse public relations campaigns. In their scale stance is a central dependent variable in the contingency theory of accommodation in conflict management. They further qualified the abstract concept of stance with 10 measurement items obtained through a series of systematic scale development processes. The items are bundled with two clusters of enactments of stance: action-based accommodation and qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodation. This scale has been used in numerous contingency studies.

Organization–public relationship (OPR), which is another important concept, has been defined by Huang (1998) as “the degree that the organization and its publics [sic] trust one another, agree on who has rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another” (p. 12). Four relational features derived from Western literature represent the OPR construct, and the fifth factor reflects Eastern culture (Huang, 2001). The resulting 21-item OPR Scale consists of the five dimensions of control mutuality, trust, relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment, and face and favor. The scale has also been conducive to the development of subsequent studies, in which predictors that enhance OPR have been examined (e.g., Huang, 2012).

Huang (2012) created a two-level public relations value assessment (PRVA) model based on the OPR Scale. The PRVA model includes measures of media publicity, OPR, organizational reputation, cost reduction, and revenue generation. The first three are upper-level factors of public relations effectiveness, and the other two are factors of organizational effectiveness. Huang found that public relations effectiveness factors positively influence organizational effectiveness, which is important because this result empirically supports the effectiveness of public relations with regard to business goals, and the concept of public relations value is specifically refined.

Lee (2005) investigated the components of chief executive officer (CEO) image with a focus on the domain of presidential identity, and developed a CEO image measurement scale, of which the three dimensions are quality, personality, and outward characteristics. *Quality* consists of leadership, resolution, vision, and personal networks, *personality* consists of honesty and reliability, and *outward characteristics* are educational background and appearance. Lee found that CEO image, in particular, quality and personality, is highly influential with regard to individuals' attitudes toward a company and company image.

Shin et al. (2008) developed a scale for measuring government agency image. Their 12-item measurement scale comprises four dimensions that they classified

as leadership, trust, fairness, and openness, and is useful for scientifically measuring the reputation management of government agencies (Shin et al., 2008).

The main concepts affecting the outcomes of strategic public relations activities are addressed in these measurement scales. Public relations strategies are considered in other measurement scales. For example, Huang (2004) developed the Public Relations Strategy Assessment Scale, which comprises the dimensions of mediated communication, social activities, interpersonal communication, two-way communication, and symmetrical communication. The results of Huang's study empirically demonstrate the nature of public relations strategies.

Ki and Hon (2008) investigated a scale for measuring strategies that cultivate OPR. They acknowledged that relationship maintenance strategies can be positively influential in producing better-quality relationship outcomes (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999), and proposed a measurement model comprising six dimensions of relationship cultivation strategies: access, positivity, openness, sharing of tasks, networking, and assurances. Ki and Hon emphasized that their model is useful for understanding how to cultivate and maintain relationships with the target public.

After reviewing the trends in scale development for public relations, we concluded that few of the scales could measure public relations tactics. Thus, we aimed to create a scale for evaluating the use of honorary ambassadors as a public relations tactic. By narrowing the scope of scale development in public relations, we proposed a research question to scientifically evaluate honorary ambassadors.

Research Question: What is an appropriate measurement scale for evaluating honorary ambassadors?

Method

Measure

First, we developed items for assessing honorary ambassadors in public relations and diverse related fields on the basis of the extant literature. Second, we interviewed 10 experienced practitioners who had worked for more than 10 years in the field. We asked them what criteria practitioners consider in evaluating honorary ambassadors, and we requested that they explain these standards with 10 statements. After comparing these statements with the related measurement items drawn from the literature review, we added statements suggested by the practitioners. Third, three public relations experts reviewed the pool of items. Fourth, we developed the final survey, which comprised 50 evaluation statements. Finally, we reviewed the statements in terms of item difficulty by pretesting them with 20 graduate students and we removed expressions that students had found awkward or difficult.

Procedure

Of the 34 public relations agencies belonging to the Korea Public Relations Consultancy Association (<http://www.kprca.or.kr/>), we chose 12 from which to gather data, by using the SPSS random selection function. We conducted online surveys from March 1 to July 20, 2014, with the permission of the agencies' CEOs. Then, we sent an online survey invitation to 1,250 practitioners, of whom 353 replied. After we had eliminated replies from 15 respondents because of incomplete answers and 23 multivariate outliers, $\chi^2 (df = 50) = 87.56, p < .001$, we obtained 315 valid responses for the final analysis. Respondents were requested to assume that they were tasked with selecting an honorary ambassador for a public relations campaign with one of their clients, to think of a suitable candidate, and to evaluate him or her with specific evaluation items. Participants responded to the items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, and were rewarded for their participation with a mobile device gift coupon with a value of 4,000 won (US\$4).

Participants

On average, participants were aged 30.81 years ($SD = 6.13$, range = 22 to 62 years), they had worked for approximately 3 years in their field, and 216 were women (68.57%). Participants mainly worked in the field of corporate public relations (174, 55.24%), followed by government/public organization public relations (112, 35.56%), with 29 (9.2%) employed in various other public relations roles. More were employed as managers (180, 57.14%) than as technicians (135, 42.86%). The majority of the participants had graduated from an undergraduate university program (234, 74.28%), and 70 (22.22%) had attended or graduated from graduate school, 10 (3.17%) were undergraduate students, and the highest educational qualification of one person (0.3%) was a high school diploma. The number of employees in the participants' companies was as follows: fewer than 50, 86 (27.3%), between 51 and 100, 43 (13.65%), between 101 and 150, 93 (29.52%), between 151 and 200, 88 (27.94%), and 201 or more, 5 (1.59%). In the survey participants assumed that they were working for a corporation (155, 49.21%), government/public organization (137, 43.49%), nongovernment organization (9, 2.86%), or other type of organization (14, 4.44%).

Results

We first employed exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring with varimax rotation with roughly half the sample ($n = 150$). SPSS 21 was used for the analysis. We extracted 13 factors that satisfied the eigenvalue standard of being higher than 1. Next, items with factor loadings of less than .50 and items with loadings greater than .40 for two or more factors were eliminated. Five

factors with one or two items only were eliminated by considering their variance. This led to the selection of eight factors that accounted for 47.36% of the total variance, and their loadings ranged from .52 to .84.

Factor 1, with an eigenvalue of 4.08, consisted of five items that accounted for 8.16% of the total variance. The items were designed to evaluate whether the respondents perceived that the celebrities were considered charming, classy, or nice, and to what extent they were well-known to the public and could attract public attention. We named this factor *attraction*. Factor 2, with an eigenvalue of 3.37, comprised five items that accounted for 6.74% of the total variance. The items dealt with the extent to which respondents perceived that the celebrities were reliable, honest, fair, exemplary, and truthful. We named this factor *trustworthiness*. Factor 3, with an eigenvalue of 3.35, consisted of four items that explained 6.71% of the total variance. The items were designed to evaluate respondents' perception of the celebrities' charismatic views on value, leadership, positive drive, and the authoritative characteristics of honorary ambassadors. We named this factor *charisma*. Factor 4, with an eigenvalue of 3.21, was composed of four items that accounted for 6.42% of the total variance. We named this factor *influence*, because the items were designed to evaluate whether the respondents perceived that the celebrities could positively influence their target public. Factor 5, with an eigenvalue of 2.70, bundled three items that accounted for 5.40% of the total variance. We named this factor *expertise*, because the items were designed to elicit respondents' perception of whether the celebrities were experienced, knowledgeable, and skilled in their field. Factor 6, with an eigenvalue of 2.50, consisted of three items that accounted for 5% of the total variance. These items were designed to address whether the respondents perceived that the celebrities had unique individual features, special distinguishing characteristics, or clear differences in their image. We named this factor *uniqueness*. Factor 7, with an eigenvalue of 2.30, comprised three items that accounted for 4.59% of the total variance. We named this factor *similarity*, because the items were designed to measure whether the respondents perceived that the celebrities shared characteristics with their target public in areas such as age, gender, and experience. Finally, Factor 8, with an eigenvalue of 2.17, was composed of three items that explained 4.34% of the total variance. We named this factor *congruence*, because the items involved the respondents' perception of the congruence of the celebrities' image with that of the client organization and the public relations campaign.

Next, on the basis of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results, we analyzed the scale's convergent validity with the rest of the sample ($n = 165$) using Amos 18. We performed a chi-square test to assess the model fit. The result was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (df = 377) = 690.59, p < .001$. However, the χ^2 value was too sensitive to evaluate the model's fitness. Therefore, we calculated other

fitness indices, namely, minimum discrepancy divided by the degrees of freedom (CMIN/*df*), root mean square residual (RMR), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The results were as follows: CMIN/*df* = 1.83, RMR = .09, AGFI = .74, NFI = .85, TLI = .91, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .07. The modification indices suggested that four items had a high factor loading for the unintended factors, indicating a high degree of cross-correlation between the factors and certain items in the model (Segars, 1997). After deleting these items, we conducted a CFA for the modified model, with the results indicating a highly acceptable model fit, χ^2 (*df* = 263) = 364.8, $p < .001$; CMIN/*df* = 1.39, RMR = .08, AGFI = .82, NFI = .90, TLI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05. All factor loadings were greater than .60 and statistically significant (see Table 1).

We assessed the reliability of the measurement items for each latent variable. Cronbach's α results indicated that the reliability of the measurement items for each factor was acceptable, ranging between .75 and .94 (standard $\alpha \geq .70$). The composite factor reliability (CFR) for each factor ranged from .75 to .94 (standard CFR $\geq .70$). Average variance extracted ranged from .51 to .84, which satisfied the standard value of being above .50 (see Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

We also checked the scale's discriminant validity with a χ^2 difference test between a model that constrained the correlation between the factors to unity and a freely estimated model. The χ^2 difference between the constrained and freely estimated model was 489.5 (*df* = 291) - 364.8 (*df* = 263) = 124.7 (*df* = 28; $p < .001$). That is, the factors were distinct, and the underlying measurement scales satisfied the requirements for the level of discriminant validity (Segars, 1997).

Finally, we performed a second-order CFA ($n = 165$). Each latent variable can be examined individually, or the variables can be summated into one scale with a hierarchical model providing a valid description of the data (Noar, 2003). In order to develop a unidimensional scale we used the Amos statistics program to draw a higher level of latent variable that conceptually included other lower levels of latent variables. After running the model in the program, we found a good fit and could then choose the measurement items with the highest factor loadings for each low (first) level of latent variable. We developed a shorter version of the scale with the items with the highest factor loadings for each first-order factor (Noar, 2003). The second-order CFA results indicated the goodness of fit: χ^2 (*df* = 278) = 391.4, $p < .001$; RMR = .08, AGFI = .82, NFI = .89, TLI = .96, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .05. As the fit was good, this made it possible for us to develop an eight-item scale ($\alpha = .82$), entitled the Evaluation of Honorary Ambassador Scale (see * in Table 1).

Table 1. *Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results*

Factor	Item	Factor loading	CFR	AVE	α
Attraction	Charm	.69	.85	.52	.85
	Classiness	.70			
	Niceness	.70			
	Ability to attract attention *	.76			
Trustworthiness	Public fame	.76	.91	.78	.93
	Honesty	.88			
	Fairness *	.86			
	Exemplary qualities	.91			
Charisma	Leadership	.93	.89	.74	.88
	Positive drive	.96			
	Authoritativeness *	.66			
	Public awareness of the public relations campaign owing to the celebrity	.95			
Influence	Positive public evaluation of the campaign owing to the celebrity *	.95	.94	.84	.92
	Public participation in the campaign owing to the celebrity	.85			
Expertise	Experience of own field	.89	.94	.83	.94
	Knowledge of own field *	.93			
	Skill in own field	.92			
	Unique individuality	.84			
Uniqueness	Special distinctiveness *	.92	.88	.72	.88
	Clearly different image	.77			
	Similar in age to target public	.67			
	Same gender as target public	.64			
Similarity	Similar experience to that of target public *	.81	.75	.51	.75
	Celebrity's image coincides with that of client organization	.80			
Congruence	Celebrity's image coincides with that of the public relations campaign *	.96	.91	.78	.91
	Celebrity's image coincides with the purpose of the public relations campaign	.88			

Note. * Refers to the eight-item scale for evaluating a honorary ambassador. CFR = composite factor reliability, AVE = average variance extracted.

Discussion

To capture the strategic facets involved in appointing honorary ambassadors, we developed a unidimensional measurement scale for evaluating ambassadors. We conducted an extensive literature review, carried out interviews with experts, examined their reviews, performed a pilot test, and then conducted an online survey with Korean public relations practitioners. As a result, we identified 26 items that could be grouped within eight factors that influence the appointment of an honorary ambassador for an organization: attraction, trustworthiness, charisma, influence, expertise, uniqueness, similarity, and congruence.

Our results have several important theoretical and practical implications for the use of honorary ambassadors in public relations roles. Our research represents a pioneering endeavor to provide a theoretical foundation for the selection of the honorary ambassador that is most appropriate for an organization. Managers have developed a variety of public relations strategies to align their organization and their policies or campaigns with honorary ambassadors who can draw attention to these policies or campaigns. Management personnel also expect the values of their organizations to be transferred to their messages by virtue of their honorary ambassadors' profiles and engaging attributes (Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Kamins, Brand, Hoeke, & Moe, 1989). Although many researchers have discussed scale development to measure public relations strategies and public relations outcomes (e.g., Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Huang, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2012; Y. Jin & Cameron, 2006; Ki & Hon, 2008; K. Y. Lee, 2005; Shin et al., 2008), there were few scales that can be used to measure public relations tactics. Thus, our study is significant because we have created a scale for evaluating the use of honorary ambassadors as a public relations strategy. Our results have advanced public relations theory and offer a promising synthesis of practice by integrating into one scale several theoretical frameworks in regard to celebrity endorsement in advertising (e.g., Brown & Fraser, 2004; Erdogan, 1999; M.-C. Lee, 2010; McCracken, 1989; Ohanian, 1990; Yoo & Jin, 2013). Our results support the reliability of the eight factors and 26 items we developed for our scale, which were drawn from diverse accepted theories in advertising.

We developed the measurement scale after rigorously testing a large pool of items for their reliability and validity and performing second-order CFA. This scale goes beyond appointment of honorary ambassadors that is based on instinctive or indiscriminate behavior, making it possible for honorary ambassadors for organizations to be appointed on an interpersonal basis. Future researchers can use the scale as a tool for empirical and scientific measurement at the organizational level. The factors we investigated can be regarded as public relations practitioners' guidelines that can be used to maximize the practical use of honorary ambassadors. Public relations practitioners can use our scientifically

and systematically investigated measurement scale to evaluate ambassador candidates, to determine who is the best fit for a specific organization and a specific campaign, to simplify the process of choosing an ambassador, and to produce more positive public relations effects, and, ultimately, to achieve the aims of their client organizations.

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