

Am I Positive, Negative, or Neutral?

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Quite often, advertisers hire real people to speak for and/or represent their companies, whether it be for television, radio, or print advertisements. While it would be cheaper to use someone in the advertisement who is unknown to the target market, the effectiveness of such a person in terms of getting the consumer's attention and having a persuasive impact may not be as high as that achieved by someone who is better well-known and liked by the desired target market (e.g., popular singer, actor, or sports celebrity). An individual of this nature would be considered to be a positive communicator and, as a result, would cost a lot more to hire. A marketer definitely would not want to use a person who is considered to be a negative communicator as perceived by the desired target market. Unfortunately, a positive communicator can become a negative communicator at some point (e.g., Tiger Woods, Pee Wee Herman, Pete Rose, Kobe Bryant, Martha Stewart, Boy George - Culture Club, and O. J. Simpson). It is also possible for a neutral (and, perhaps a negative) communicator to become a positive communicator (Jared in the Subway commercials).

The Jenny Craig® weight loss program has used this approach to include a human spokesperson in the advertisements for the company. Relatively recently, four main spokespersons have appeared in the weight-loss commercials: Valerie Bertinelli, of "One Day at a Time" (television) fame; Jason Alexander, of "Seinfeld" (television), "Pretty Women" (movie) and "Shallow Hal" (movie) fame; Sara Rue, of "Grand" (television), "Popular" (television), "Less Than Perfect" (television), and "Eastwick" (television) fame; and Jenny Craig, herself (identified by her name tag [Jenny]), promoting a \$49 special. In each of the first three cases, the spokesperson lost weight by using the program. The fourth spokesperson just promotes the product, not that she was a participant in the weight-loss program.

Focus: Advertising, sleeper effect (positive communicator - prestige effect, neutral communicator, negative communicator - negative effect), AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action), persuasion, attitude change.

Questions:

1. Define each of the terms listed above. Explain how each of the concepts relates to the identified marketing situation.
2. Go to the Internet Movie Database web site (<http://www.imdb.com>) and become familiar with the careers of each of the three identified television/movie actors who were hired to do Jenny Craig commercials. Given the roles that these people have played, and their personalities, do you think that the target market for Jenny Craig would view these individuals as positive, neutral, or negative communicators? Explain.

3. Evaluate the impact that the fourth spokesperson identified in terms of getting the consumer's attention and being persuasive. Would this person be considered a positive, neutral, or negative communicator? Explain.
4. Rank order the four spokespersons: first, in terms of attention-getting; next, in terms of persuasiveness; and, finally, in terms of overall effectiveness (i.e., attention-getting and persuasiveness combined) with respect to the target market for the product. Explain why you ranked the individuals as you did.
5. What other celebrities can you think of who serve(d) as positive communicators in advertisements (identify the products/services)?
6. What other celebrities can you think of who were neutral or positive communicators in advertisements who became negative communicators (identify the products/services)?
7. What individuals can you think of who were neutral communicators who became positive communicators (identify the products/services)?
8. What are the laws in your country with respect to the use of individuals in ads?
9. What are the laws in Muslim countries in terms of the type of person who can be used in ads?
10. Is it possible for animated "human" characters to be viewed as positive, neutral, and/or negative communicators? Explain. What are some examples?
11. When animated or real animals are used in commercials, can these "actors" be viewed as positive, neutral, and/or negative communicators? Explain and illustrate.
12. Can an animated character/animal or a real animal change from a neutral or positive communication to a negative communicator? Explain. Do you know of any such examples? Explain.
13. If a positive or neutral spokesperson in an ad becomes a negative communicator (e.g., O. J. Simpson [football player/actor] and Tiger Woods [golf pro]), what is the best thing that a company can do with respect to using such a person in an ad? Explain. What are some of the problems for a company with using someone in ads who changes from a positive to a negative communicator?
14. Go to the Retro-Junk web site (<http://www.retrojunk.com>) and view old commercials that used celebrities in the ads - click on "Commercials" on the left and then pick the desired decade, once at the web site.