

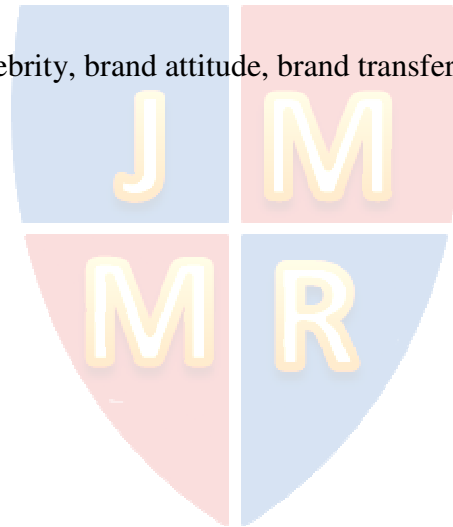
The transference of brand attitude: the effect on the celebrity endorser

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Abstract

This paper examines the attitude of a brand and its transference on the celebrity endorsing the product. Past studies of celebrity endorsements have analyzed the effects of the celebrity on the endorsed product but not the reverse transference. This study found that a celebrity's overall credibility, as well as expertise, is influenced by the perceived attitude toward a branded product. Additionally, a poorly perceived brand may also influence a celebrity's attractiveness and trustworthiness negatively. However, it was found that a positively viewed brand does not necessarily increase the same attributes of attractiveness and trustworthiness on a less admired celebrity.

Keywords: endorsements, celebrity, brand attitude, brand transference



INTRODUCTION

It is thought that approximately 20-25% of television advertisements in the US include a celebrity (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995; Shimp 2000). These numbers are low in comparison to the United Kingdom with over 25% of all advertisements including some aspect of a celebrity endorsement, South Korea where 57% of television commercials employ celebrity endorsers, while Japan jumps to 85% of television advertisements having a celebrity involved (Choi, Lee and Kim 2005; Datamonitor 2006; License! 2007; McCaughan 2007). Celebrities have been used to promote products since 1893 when actress Lillie Langtry was hired as an endorser of Pears' Soap (Mistry 2006). In side-by-side comparisons, celebrity endorsers were found to be more trustworthy, competent, and slightly more attractive than non-celebrity endorsers (Atkin and Block 1983). Because of these qualities, the use of celebrities in company advertisements can give a competitive advantage in differentiating a firm's products from competitors.

Celebrity endorsements now appear in advertisements for almost any type product or service available. Celebrity endorsers, in general, are defined as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (McCracken 1989, p. 310). The use of celebrities has resulted from the associative personal qualities of attractiveness, likeability, reputation, and believability of the celebrities toward the products being endorsed (Atkin and Block 1983; Nelson 1974). Throughout this paper, celebrities will be viewed beyond typical television and movie personalities by including individuals from the "worlds of sport, politics, business, art, (and) the military" (McCracken 1989, p. 319). An additional criterion in defining celebrity endorsement was that the celebrity could not have his/her achievements based on the product being endorsed (Friedman and Friedman 1979). This, however, should no longer be the case, as some of the celebrities viewed today have begun their careers and achieved notoriety as a particular endorser of a product.

Companies use a brand's perceptions and image to enter new product lines and product classes by transferring its properties to other entities (Keller 2003). These intangible properties can help corporations add competitive strategies by expanding the brand, and its image, to other products. Care must be given in abiding by the perceived "fit" required (Aaker and Keller 1990), otherwise, a failed extension of a line or class can damage the asset of the brand image. This perceived fit must be adhered to with all associations with the branded product, including advertisements with celebrity endorsers.

There have been several studies devoted to the effect that a celebrity has on product and brand equity that he/she is endorsing (Atkin and Block 1983; Friedman and Friedman 1979; Langmeyer and Walker 1991; McCracken 1989; Mowen and Brown 1981; Till and Busler 2000; Till and Shimp 1998). These studies have shown that there can be an impact on a product and brand's attributes through a celebrity endorsement. To date, little research has been done on a product and brand's effect on a celebrity's image beyond Till (2001). Till's (2001) study had a limitation in utilizing athlete endorsers as the celebrities for contribution to the sports marketing literature.

To date, most studies using celebrity endorsements have focused on using a celebrity's credibility as the core construct in the research. A celebrity's credibility is viewed as having the three dimensions of physical attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Ohanian 1990, 1991). In application, it appears that the transference properties of a brand's image can influence a celebrity endorser as some celebrities do not want non-Japanese consumers to know or see the

products that they endorse in Japan (Bodsworth 2003). Apparently, the celebrities believe that exposure of the commercials to their home countries would negatively alter the celebrity status that has been achieved. This research will shed some light on the attributable significance that a brand can transfer onto the celebrity endorser.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Celebrity Endorsers

There are two forms of celebrities in advertising: celebrity license and celebrity endorsement (Mistry 2006). The former is not used often, as it tends to be a long-term, co-branding commitment by both the corporation and the celebrity as the celebrity adds his/her likeness or name directly to a product. The crux of this relationship is that the celebrity and the product are directly associated with each other; this can be either a strength or a weakness depending on the status of the celebrity and the quality of the product. Examples of this type of agreement include the Reggie Bar (candy bar named for former professional baseball player, Reggie Jackson) and the George Foreman Grill (kitchen appliance named for former professional boxer, George Foreman).

Celebrity endorsements are the more widely used strategy of using celebrities as a promotional tool. These endorsements can have celebrities giving expert opinions, being a spokesperson for a product, or just being associated with a product (McCracken 1989; Seno and Lukas 2007). Types of endorsements “can be explicit (‘I endorse this product’), implicit (‘I use this product’), imperative (‘You should use this product’), or co-presentational (merely appearing with the product)” (Seno and Lukas 2007, p. 123).

Firms may see positive outcomes when using a celebrity as an endorser: an instant recognition by the consumer with an immediate cut-through of the clutter of other advertisements, an implicit preference by the celebrity, a potential “cool” factor, a competitive advantage of brand recall, and an increase on company market value (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995; Armbruster 2006; Friedman and Friedman 1979; Mathur, Mathur and Rangan 1997). The instant recognition can assist consumers in achieving an emotional tie with the endorsed product as the celebrity is quickly recognized while “cutting through” the clutter of other advertisements. The implied preference is the assumption that if consumers already like the work that the celebrity does (film, television, sports, etc.), then these consumers will also like the products that the celebrity likes. Finally, as some celebrities are considered “cool”, the endorsed product in turn, should be “cool” and form a competitive advantage through credibility. This competitive advantage is shown in a study comparing celebrities, “experts” and “typical consumers” in advertisements; “the celebrity endorser was most effective in sustaining brand-name recall and recall of the advertisement” in print advertisements (Friedman and Friedman 1979, p. 70).

Interestingly, it is not a requirement for a celebrity to endorse a product where there is associative relevance with the celebrity (Speck, Schumann, and Thompson 1988). For example, an automobile company will not necessarily achieve higher success from its celebrity endorsement by using a celebrity racecar driver instead of a celebrity non-racecar driver. Furthermore, celebrities do not need to be considered experts or have expert testimonials in endorsing a product (Speck et al. 1988). However, “advertising effectiveness can be strongly influenced by consumers’ inferences concerning whether the endorser truly likes the product”

(Silvera and Austad 2003, p. 1524). Therefore, companies should produce advertisements with a “believability” factor at the forefront while employing a celebrity who likes and uses the product.

When surveyed about actual purchases because of celebrity tie-ins, 40% of retailers believed that consumers would buy the products because of the celebrity association (License! 2007). In contrast to this, only 5% of consumers actually stated that they would purchase the products. This survey reiterates the findings of another project that found that a celebrity endorsement in the United Kingdom is “one of the least trusted means of conveying product information, only faring better than door-drooped leaflets” (Datamonitor 2006, p.29). Further research should be performed to confirm or deny these findings. Companies can still have effective advertisements if any type of endorser is used though; it was found that any endorser, celebrity or not, leads to “higher taste expectations, intent-to-purchase and believability than did the control advertisement which had no endorser” (Friedman, Termini and Washington 1977, p. 24).

There are, however, negatives associated with hiring a celebrity as an endorser: affluent consumer resistance, celebrity personal responsibility issues, overselling, opportunistic hiring, and changing tastes (Armbruster 2006, p.12). Past research found that high-income US consumers are not as influenced by celebrity endorsements as consumers in other income levels. Therefore, using a celebrity to endorse a product to affluent consumers might not produce a strong impact. McCracken (1989) also believes that the choice of the celebrity should match the cultural and societal level associated with the product being endorsed. A caveat must be made though—research has shown celebrity endorsements do not alleviate consumer risk perceptions as strongly as expert testimonials for high technology-oriented products (Biswas, Biswas and Das 2006) Thus, there must be care given to the extent to which a celebrity’s expertise is used for an endorsed product. Additionally, corporations that hire a celebrity must take into account that the celebrity’s private life might negatively influence the product if a personal scandal occurs. It was found that negative information about a celebrity results in lowered perceptions of the product and brand being endorsed (Till and Shimp 1998).

Celebrities benefit from endorsement contracts monetarily and by additional exposure of their brand. Top celebrities of film and music have been able to command millions of dollars in single endorsement contracts at home and abroad (Bodsworth 2003). The contracts, either short-term or long-term can benefit the celebrity beyond the money. By having an endorsement campaign, the celebrity is more visible to the public eye and can leverage this into future contracts within his/her respective industry. As stated by Till (2001), product endorsements by athletes have not only been lucrative to the endorser but extend the life of the athlete’s brand in the public eye.

Credibility of Endorsers

The credibility of celebrity endorsers is considered to consist of three constructs: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Ohanian 1990). As has been further tested for validity and reliability (Ohanian 1991; Pornpitakpan 2003), the attractiveness scale consists of the semantic differentials of unattractive/attractive, not classy/classy, ugly/beautiful (or handsome), plain/elegant, and not sexy/sexy. Trustworthiness is measured through not dependable/dependable, dishonest/honest, unreliable/reliable, insincere/sincere, and untrustworthy/trustworthy. Finally, the semantic differentials for the expertise scale include not

expert/expert, inexperienced/experienced, unknowledgeable/knowledgeable, unqualified/qualified, and unskilled/skilled.

The construct of credibility is an important factor to be considered during celebrity endorsements. It was found that a message's effectiveness (e.g. an advertisement) is stronger when the credibility of the endorser is higher (Sternthal, Dholakia and Leavitt 1978). To maximize the use of credible endorsers, there should be a congruence, a "match", and a "fit" between the product being endorsed and the credibility of the celebrity (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995; Friedman and Friedman 1979; Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990; Till and Busler 2000). Therefore, a match-up emphasizes a proper relationship of the product and the celebrity. Without a perceived fit between the product and the celebrity, confusion and surprise can occur by the consumer (Ang and Dubelaar 2006).

Companies should produce credible advertisements with a "believability" factor at the forefront while employing a celebrity who likes and uses the product while ensuring that the celebrity does not overshadow the product. Some companies have opted to change their advertising campaigns by dissolving relationships with celebrity endorsements since consumers recall little about the advertisement other than the name of the celebrity. Pepsi Cola Company severed ties with pop singing endorsers Beyonce Knowles and Britney Spears partially because the focus during the advertisements drew consumers away from Pepsi brand and onto the celebrities (Datamonitor 2006). This is what was also thought to have happened with singer Celine Dion's endorsements of Chrysler Corporation; some believe that the commercials did not help sell automobiles, but aided the sales of Dion's records (Mistry 2006).

Attitude toward a Brand

A brand's image is the perception of the public as a whole (Margulies 1977). The brand image goes beyond the functional characteristics of the product itself and involves symbolic features associated with the product (Aaker 1991; Gardner and Levy 1955; Levy 1959). Aaker (1991) suggests that brand image is equivalent to brand associations, those items in one's memory linked to a brand. As further discussed by Keller (1993), these brand associations are the attributes, benefits, and attitudes perceived by the consumer concerning the brand. Attributes are the features that describe and characterize the brand, while benefits are the self-identified values that the product can do for the consumer. Finally, attitudes are the overall evaluations of the brand from the consumer's perspective. It is the attitude toward the brand that is used for this study.

Transfer Theory

During a celebrity endorsement, there will be an "association transfer" (De Mooij 2005) or a "meaning transfer" (McCracken 1989) through the direct relationship between the celebrity and the product. The relationship process is thought to allow the celebrity to "transfer" his/her perceived qualities to the actual product. Langmeyer and Walker (1991) found that there can even be transference of qualities from celebrities to ordinary products, such as bath towels. Additionally, further support of the meaning transfer model was discovered when the sex of the endorser altered the perceived gender of the endorsed product (Debevec and Iyer 1986).

Based on the previous work of Ohanian (1990, 1991), and similar to Till's (2001) research, this study looks at the attitude toward a brand and its transfer of meaning on the

celebrity endorser's attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and overall credibility. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed and separated into hypotheses based on an overall poorly perceived brand and a positively perceived brand.

Hypothesis 1a: The attitude toward a poorly perceived endorsed brand influences the perceived attractiveness of the celebrity.

Hypothesis 1b: The attitude toward a positively perceived endorsed brand influences the perceived attractiveness of the celebrity.

Hypothesis 2a: The attitude toward a poorly perceived endorsed branded product influences the perceived trustworthiness of the celebrity.

Hypothesis 2b: The attitude toward a positively perceived endorsed brand influences the perceived trustworthiness of the celebrity.

Hypothesis 3a: The attitude toward a poorly perceived branded product influences the perceived expertise of the celebrity.

Hypothesis 3b: The attitude toward a positively perceived branded product influences the perceived expertise of the celebrity.

Additionally,

Hypothesis 4a: The attitude toward a poorly perceived branded product influences the perceived overall credibility of the celebrity.

Hypothesis 4b: The attitude toward a positively perceived branded product influences the perceived overall credibility of the celebrity.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

In order to test these hypotheses, 12 celebrities were brainstormed by the author's colleagues. The desire was to determine 6 celebrities that would be viewed with an overall positive image and 6 celebrities that would be perceived somewhat negatively. Additionally, this was done with 12 brands divided evenly into positive and negative perceived images. A pretest was conducted to establish both a celebrity and a brand that individuals have a positive attitude toward. A celebrity and a brand each with negative connotations were also required. For the purposes of simplicity, these celebrities and brands will be denoted henceforth as Positive Celebrity, Negative Celebrity, Positive Brand, and Negative Brand.

A total of 284 respondents (average age = 22; sex = 50 per cent male) from two large universities in South Texas participated in the main study. All participants were given fabricated print advertisements. Each advertisement consisted of a general picture, name and logo of the branded product, a picture and name of the celebrity, and a statement by the celebrity of "My Choice". The measurement instrument consisted of a nine-item, seven-point semantic differential scale evaluating the attitude toward the brand (Batra and Stephens 1994), and a fifteen-item, seven-point semantic differential scale evaluating the celebrity (Ohanian 1990).

Each participant was randomly assigned to two of the four conditions in a 2 (Positive or Negative Celebrity) x 2 (Positive or Negative Brand) between-subjects design. Approximately half (n = 140) of the participants were given an advertisement consisting of Negative Brand with Positive Celebrity and a separate advertisement of Positive Brand and Negative Celebrity. Similarly, the other half (n = 144) received the advertisement of Negative Brand with Negative Celebrity and the advertisement of Positive Brand with Positive Celebrity. Thus, a survey respondent independently viewed no advertisement containing the same two celebrities or the

same two product brands. Additionally, all advertisements used identical layouts and typeface, as well as having a consistent general appearance.

Reliabilities for all the constructs are well above the acceptable range: attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = 0.956$), attractiveness ($\alpha = 0.926$), trustworthiness ($\alpha = 0.974$), expertise ($\alpha = 0.961$), and credibility ($\alpha = 0.962$). A manipulation check was performed to ensure that the manipulated variable, the brand, was perceived differently by the respondents as intended. The mean of Positive Brand ($n = 282$) was assessed at 5.842 (1 = far left of the semantic differential scale, or negative, 7 = far right of the semantic differential scale, or positive), while the mean of Negative Brand ($n = 284$) was assessed at 4.441. This resulted in a significant difference between the responses ($t = -13.077$, $df = 564$, $p = 0.000$), indicating a successful variable manipulation.

Analysis of the data utilized separate one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs): one for the potential influence of Negative Brand and one for Positive Brand. The comparison of means obtained in the study can be viewed in Table 1.

In the first analysis (Table 2), the attitude toward Negative Brand significantly influenced the perceived attractiveness, ($F [1, 280] = 3.480$, $p < 0.1$), the perceived trustworthiness ($F [1, 280] = 5.199$, $p < 0.05$), and the perceived expertise ($F [1, 280] = 3.576$, $p < 0.1$) of Positive Celebrity. This shows that *Hypotheses 1a*, *2a*, and *3a* were supported, as it is determined that a poorly viewed brand influences the attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise of a positively perceived celebrity. Additionally, the attitude toward Negative Brand significantly influenced the overall credibility ($F [1, 280] = 6.516$, $p < 0.05$) of Positive Celebrity supporting *Hypothesis 4a*. Thus, the results suggest that a poorly viewed brand influences the overall credibility of a positively viewed celebrity.

In the second analysis (Table 2), the attitude toward Positive Brand did not significantly influence the perceived attractiveness ($F [1, 284] = 0.479$, $p > 0.10$) nor the perceived trustworthiness ($F [1, 284] = 0.845$, $p > 0.10$) of Negative Celebrity. Hence, *Hypothesis 1b* and *2b* were not supported. Thus, it is viewed that a positively perceived brand neither influences the attractiveness nor trustworthiness of a poorly perceived celebrity. However, the attitude toward Positive Brand significantly influenced the perceived expertise ($F [1, 284] = 6.328$, $p < 0.05$) of Negative Celebrity. Moreover, the attitude toward Positive Brand significantly influenced the overall perceived credibility ($F [1, 284] = 2.954$, $p < 0.1$) of Negative Celebrity. Thus, *Hypothesis 3b* and *Hypothesis 4b* were supported; it is viewed here that positively perceived brands influence the expertise and the overall credibility of a poorly perceived celebrity.

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

According to previous studies, a celebrity's image has an influence on the attitude toward the endorsed branded product. In further support of transference theory, the attitude toward an endorsed brand can transfer onto the celebrity endorser. The results of this study were somewhat mixed yet were significant in the case of well liked celebrities and poorly viewed brands. Therefore, popular celebrities need to be especially conscious in selecting the brand that they will endorse as there can be a decrease in perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and credibility. In the case of poorly viewed celebrities, the results were only partially supported. The positive attitudes of the brand that a celebrity endorses may not fully transfer toward the celebrity as there is no significant increase in the celebrity's attractiveness or trustworthiness.

As discussed by Thomson (2006), celebrities are considered human brands that must be professionally managed. It is, therefore, imperative for a celebrity to fully understand the

influence an endorsed brand may have on the overall image of that celebrity. Care should be taken in considering existing and future endorsement contracts. As shown in this study, the endorsement of a poorly perceived brand can decrease consumers' perception of the celebrity's attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and credibility. Although these are not the only aspects in consideration of a celebrity's brand, they are instrumental in developing a celebrity's overall brand image.

This study has several limitations that should be addressed in future studies. To begin with, this research was based on fabricated advertisements depicting only two celebrities, one with perceived positive attitudes and one with negative attitudes. In order to have a more enriched view of the phenomenon, future studies should increase the number of celebrities, as well as the brand in the research. Secondly, the attitudes towards the celebrities and brands studied here are based on opinions from respondents that live in a specific area of the US. Celebrities and brands, which may be viewed negatively in this particular region, may not necessarily be viewed negatively in other parts of the country. Future studies should base the research on a wider geographical location resulting in more generalizable representation. Thirdly, the age of the respondents may also influence the results. Different generations have different attitudes toward brands and celebrities. Future researchers may want to increase the average age of the respondents beyond a convenience sample of university students. Adding more diversity to the sample can only enhance and strengthen the study's results. Finally, as a limitation on the research by Till (2001) and this study, verifying that there is a potential match and fit between celebrities and brands used will further support the two studies.

The results of this study support the practice of western celebrities not allowing Japanese advertisements to be shown outside of Japan (Bodsworth 2003). The use of non-Japanese celebrities was frequent in the 1980s and can still be seen on a regular basis in Japan. The celebrity and the endorsed company sign for exclusive use in Japan and the advertisements are not to be released outside the country. Today, the Internet has allowed for those who are not in Japan to view commercials that westerners might regard to be unlikely pairings of celebrities with products (e.g. actor Nicolas Cage and pachinko machines, actor and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and instant noodles). A tongue-in-cheek name for these western celebrities is "japanders", who once could earn \$1 million to \$3 million for less than one week's work starring in Japan-only advertisements (Bodsworth 2003). The interest in having non-Japanese celebrities in advertisements has, however, decreased as Japanese are more traveled and western faces are not considered as fresh and different as before (The Times 2005).

McCracken (1989) posited the meaning transfer model that explains how a perceived celebrity's image is transferred to an endorsed product, and ultimately to the end consumer. The meaning transfer does somewhat have the ability to be reversed and have the perceived attitude of an endorsed brand influence the perception of the celebrity endorser. The results of the study show that the attitude towards the brand being endorsed can be transferred toward the perceptions of the celebrity's credibility and expertise regardless of the original perceptions, negative or positive, of the brand; both an unpopular brand and a popular brand can influence the expertise and credibility of the celebrity endorser. Importantly, for currently popular celebrities, a poorly perceived brand can also influence the perceptions of attractiveness and trustworthiness negatively. Unfortunately, for an unpopular celebrity, a strongly viewed brand does not necessarily increase the attractiveness or trustworthiness of the celebrity. Rather than using endorsements, unpopular celebrities should investigate other avenues of self-promotion when attempting to increase their overall brand image.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations

	<i>Positive Brand</i>		<i>Negative Brand</i>	
	Mean*	Std. Dev.	Mean*	Std. Dev.
<i>Positive Celebrity</i>				
Attractiveness	5.983	1.505	5.682	1.173
Trustworthiness	5.273	1.248	4.928	1.289
Expertise	4.419	1.628	4.0578	1.572
Credibility	5.225	1.111	4.890	1.091
<i>Negative Celebrity</i>				
Attractiveness	2.072	1.398	1.968	1.124
Trustworthiness	2.336	1.609	2.177	1.280
Expertise	2.825	1.762	2.339	1.485
Credibility	2.411	1.365	2.161	1.065

Notes: * Based on a converted 7-point scale from labeled from 1 to 7

Table 2: One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results

	<i>Attractiveness H1a</i>		<i>Trustworthiness H1b</i>		<i>Expertise H1c</i>		<i>Credibility H2</i>	
	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p
<i>Positive Celebrity*</i>	3.480	0.063	5.199	0.023	3.576	0.060	6.516	0.011
<i>Negative Celebrity**</i>	0.479	0.489	0.845	0.359	6.328	0.012	2.954	0.087

Notes: *n = 280, **n= 284