

# How celebrities can be used in advertising to the best advantage?

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**Abstract**--The ever increasing product diversity and competition on the market of goods and services has dictated the pace of growth in the number of advertisements. Despite their admittedly diminished effectiveness over the recent years, advertisements remain the favored method of sales promotion. Consequently, the challenge for an advertiser is to explore every possible avenue of making an advertisement more noticeable, attractive and impellent for consumers. One way to achieve this is through invoking celebrity endorsements. On the one hand, the use of a celebrity to endorse a product involves substantial costs, however, on the other hand, it does not immediately guarantee the success of an advertisement. The question of how celebrities can be used in advertising to the best advantage is therefore of utmost importance. Celebrity endorsements have become commonplace: empirical evidence indicates that approximately 20 to 25 per cent of advertisements feature some famous person as a product endorser. The popularity of celebrity endorsements demonstrates the relevance of the topic, especially in the context of the current global economic downturn, when companies are forced to save in order to survive, yet simultaneously to heavily invest in advertising and sales promotion. The issue of the effective use of celebrity endorsements also figures prominently in the academic discourse. The study presented below is thus aimed at exploring what qualities (characteristics) of a celebrity endorser have an impact on the effectiveness of the advertisement in which he/she appears and how.

**Keywords**--Advertising, Celebrity, Celebrity Endorsements, Effectiveness of Celebrity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

IN order to identify the problems encountered in the use of celebrity endorsements in advertising, it is necessary to begin with an overview of academic research already accomplished in the area. It is only then that the course of this study can be more specifically designated. Scientific inquiries into the use of celebrities in advertising have progressed in several stages. Early surveys encompass the period up to 1980. Most research conducted prior to that date was aimed at estimating the effectiveness of advertisements that use renowned people as well as at comparing them with other formats of advertising.

Rudolph (1947), one of the pioneer researchers in the field, analysed various kinds of advertisements and collated them with the ones in which celebrities appear. Freeman's (1957) work endeavoured to estimate the reaction to and interest in the promoted item on the part of consumers repeatedly exposed to its celebrity featuring advertisement.

Dichter (1966) studied the ways in which an advertisement that uses an eminent person impacts on the sales of the promoted product, whereas Aaker and Myers (1975) assessed the effects of such advertisements when applied to low value commodities. Friedman and Friedman (1979) discovered that in comparison with other types of advertisers, celebrities and experts are more stimulating and thus more capable of generating desirable behaviour in regard to the promoted product.

Some studies suggested that the use of a celebrity could result in a fairly considerable value added to an advertisement, while other researchers contended that only a relatively insignificant number of such advertisements serves the purpose. Hume (1983) was certain of negative consumer reaction to a product in the advertisement of which famous people partake. He mainly attributed this ill-feeling to the realization on the part of consumers that celebrity featuring advertisements are costly and the purchaser who chooses the product advertised in such a way is therefore bound to pay a higher price (Cooper, 1984). Other scholars found that although celebrities are generally appealing, they nevertheless fail to evoke confidence in the promoted product strong enough to in turn motivate customers to purchase it [2, 9].

## II. THE ISSUES OF THE EFFECTIVE USE OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS IN ADVERTISING

Subsequent analyses of the issue were focused more on the credibility of an advertiser and the effectiveness of an advertisement. Among these studies, Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann's (1983) works were landmark [8]. They posited the existence of two routes -- central and peripheral -- by which a consumer receives the information communicated to him and acts in accordance with it. When a consumer is at a low level of involvement, he/she responds via the peripheral route, i.e. reacts to the context, specific details, spokesperson of an advertisement and nonverbal signals within it, without cognitively processing the key message delivered to him/her. The above mentioned authors concluded that the use of celebrities in advertising helps mould desirable consumer response, in the event that the information is received via the peripheral route. Kahle and Homer (1985) traced that attractive celebrities are more acceptable and consequently bring more

influence to bear on a recipient of an advertisement than charmless ones. Ohanian's (1991) categorisation of source credibility in advertising postulated that a celebrity endorser who is perceived as an expert on the promoted product is more convincing and therefore more likely to induce a positive brand attitude among consumers, as compared with its noncelebrity counterparts [16]. It was during this period that the theory of source attractiveness was merged with that of celebrity-product congruence, and their combination came to be regarded as the factor determining the effectiveness of a particular advertisement (Wheeler, 2002) [14].

Actors, athletes and singers have been most extensively used in advertising. Some authors hold that celebrity featuring advertisements attract greater consumer attention as well as generate higher intention to try out the product promoted, in comparison with those that do not (Atkin and Block, 1983; Petty and Cacioppo, 1983) [13]. Other authors add that celebrity endorsement may be directly related to augmenting income from the sales of the advertised product. On the other hand, not every advertisement which has a 'star' in it achieves its goal.

The success of a celebrity endorsement as well as that of an advertisement as a whole depends on a number of variables. Firstly, the use of a prominent person for an advertising campaign requires substantial funding, yet even in the event that it is secured, success is far from guaranteed. Different surveys of advertising frequently offer a one-sided perspective and refrain from explaining why celebrity endorsement is effective in some cases but not others (Misra and Beatty 1990). Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983) discovered that in an advertising environment, when individuals are highly involved with the product or service promoted, it is rational arguments rather than 'star' endorsement that mainly conditions their purchase decisions [6, 13]. And vice versa, at a low level of involvement, an effective use of celebrity endorsers proves much more persuasive than key message arguments.

Consequently, one can assume that the effectiveness of an advertisement does not necessarily hinge on the appearance of a celebrity in it, but is also related to the nature of the promoted product as well as the way in which consumers make their purchase decisions. Given the current pronounced differentiation of substitute goods, Floyd (1999) recommends presenting more facts and reasons why one product is worth choosing over others, instead of relying on the use of celebrities in advertising campaigns.

### III. CHARACTERISTICS OF A CELEBRITY ENDORSER THAT CONDITION THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN ADVERTISEMENT

To date, few studies have been intended to elucidate the reasons why the use of celebrity endorsers in advertising serves its purpose in some cases but not others (Misra and Beatty, 1990). Different authors have offered their interpretations of the peculiarities inherent to the commercial use of celebrities. The effectiveness of celebrity featuring advertisements has often been attributed to the fact that consumers generally regard famous people as highly dynamic, appealing and likeable personalities, which, in turn, attracts their attention to the products promoted (Atkins and Block, 1983). Various academic studies commonly mention *source*

*credibility, source attractiveness, celebrity-product congruence (match-up), celebrity activation* and the influence of *celebrity multiplicity* as well as that of *celebrity and audience gender* among the variables that ought to be considered when selecting an appropriate celebrity to endorse a product.

#### Source credibility

Source credibility is one of the key factors that determines the image of a brand. Goldsmith (2000) defines source credibility as the degree to which a celebrity is assumed to have enough expertise to impart an objective attitude towards the product he/she promotes. Kelman (1961) asserts that information attributed to a credible source can influence the opinions and behaviour of consumers through the internalization process.

*Expertise* and *trustworthiness* are the principal variables in most scholarly accounts of the credibility of 'star' advertisers. Some authors argue that the perceived expertise of a celebrity endorser is one of the most persuasive elements of an advertisement. It therefore affects the purchase decisions of the target market more than the attractiveness of the endorser or, indeed, any other factor (Ohanian 1990; Horai, Naccari and Fatoullah 1974). After estimating the expertise and trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser, customers turn their attention to the arguments presented in the advertisement, and the more reasonable these appear, the more credibility the celebrity endorser is credited with (Hovland, 1953). Consequently, the more favourably consumers assess the expertise and trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser, the more likely the celebrity is to be regarded as a reliable source of information on the product and thus the better the brand he/she endorses is represented (Ohanian, 1990).

The research conducted by Miller and Baseheart (1969) confirmed that consumer behaviour is directly related to the confidence they place in expert endorsers. Ohanian (1990), conversely, traced no significant correlation between the perceived credibility of celebrity endorsers and the intention on the part of consumers to purchase the products they promote. It has been widely assumed that mainly due to their considerable professional achievements and fame, which in turn boosts their credibility, celebrities bring greater influence to bear on customers, as compared with that of unknown endorsers. From his review of literature in the field, Goldsmith (2000) draws a general inference that the perceived credibility of the source of information (celebrity) contributes to persuading consumers and inducing desired behaviour with regard to the advertised product [12]. Arguably, the more reliance is put upon the celebrity endorser, the stronger this positive influence becomes. The fact that information emanating from a credible source is more acceptable is but one possible explanation of the effect. *In summary, the more credibility a celebrity endorser enjoys, the better the image of the brand that he/she endorses can be created.*

#### Source attractiveness

Another equally important attribute of the source of information (celebrity endorser) is its attractiveness. Langmeyer and Shank (1994) maintain that the concept of source attractiveness is not limited to good looks only, but also

encompasses such non-physical characteristics as, for example, abilities in sports, charisma, grace, tact or intelligence.

An attractive celebrity is a force that affects the brand he/she endorses particularly strongly due to the dual effect of his/her 'star' status on the one hand and physical appeal on the other (Kamins, 1990). Various academic studies have revealed that physically attractive celebrity endorsers substantially improve the image of the products and brands associated with them. Joseph's (1982) comprehensive literature review and analysis of fundamental research findings in the area led him to the conclusion that physically attractive celebrity endorsers have a positive impact on the way that consumers think about and assess the products promoted by them. This proposition was confirmed by Kahle and Homer (1985) who proved that physical attractiveness of celebrities evokes greater response to the brand they endorse as well as likings for it in the target audience. Till and Busler (1998) summarized and validated the insights into the issue of the use of physically attractive celebrity endorsers in advertising discussed above. These authors attributed the phenomenon of source attractiveness to the fact that an attractive person generally tends to receive more attention than a charmless one. *Thus, according to this line of reasoning, the exclusive use of physically attractive individuals in advertising is hardly surprising.*

#### *Celebrity-product congruence*

Celebrity-product congruence commonly implies a convergence between the image conveyed by a celebrity and the characteristics of the product that he/she endorses (Misra and Beatty, 1990). Some of the early empirical studies in the field (Friedman and Friedman, 1979) showed that the effectiveness of an advertisement to a significant extent depends on the advertiser's choice of product endorsers. Kanungo and Pang (1973) examined different combinations of products and their male/female endorsers and attributed the identified variations in their effectiveness to the compatibility between the product and the endorser or lack thereof. Subsequently, the idea of celebrity-product congruence came to be known as the 'match-up' hypothesis (Kahle and Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Lynch and Schuler, 1994; Solomon, 1990) [9, 10]. The theory of celebrity-product congruence is supposedly closely related to that of source attractiveness, as attractive endorsers also tend to better match up with the products they promote (Kamins, Brand and Hoeke, 1989) [10]. Nevertheless, the analysis presented by Lynch and Schuler (1994) did not corroborate the above mentioned proposition [1]. These authors sought to trace the correlation between athletic and non-athletic endorsers of sports equipment and the effectiveness of the respective advertisements in which they appeared. Their findings, however, failed to demonstrate that

an athletic, thus more physically attractive, individual has a stronger impact on the target audience.

A considerable amount of research by other scholars (most notably, Kamins, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Misra and Beatty, 1990) also attempted to reveal the effects of celebrity-product congruence both, on the credibility of a communicator of the promotional message – a celebrity endorser, – as well as on consumer behaviour in respect of the product or brand advertised [15]. These studies served to conclusively confirm the positive effects of celebrity-product congruence. Celebrity-product match-up was observed to facilitate desired changes in both consumer attitudes and behaviour towards promoted products, particularly in the case of the so-called attractiveness-related products, such as fashion industry goods endorsed by physically attractive celebrities. This is largely attributable to the fact that the more the nature and characteristics of a product match up with the qualities of its endorser, the faster and easier consumers can form an associative link between these two elements of an advertisement.

The image of an endorser and that of a brand are thus generally conceived as 'intermediates' in the process of value creation for an advertised product. This, in turn, led some authors to conclude that information about a celebrity as well as that about the product endorsed by him/her assumes integrity in the consciousness of consumers (Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Misra and Beatty, 1990; Till, 1998) [8]. In addition to the explanation above, it can also be argued that if the features of a celebrity endorser are directly related to those of the product he/she promotes, a synergetic effect is likely to occur, which significantly enhances the image of the brand (Kamins, 1990; McCracken, 1989). *On balance, therefore, the match-up between a celebrity endorser and the brand he/she promotes arguably has a positive effect on the image of the brand in question.*

#### *Celebrity multiplicity*

Depending on the role of a celebrity or a number of them in an advertising campaign, two distinct types of multiple celebrity endorsements exist. The first type refers to the cases when two or more celebrity endorsers appear together in a single advertisement, whereas the second one subsumes those in which different celebrities promote the same product or brand in a series of advertisements over a certain period of time. Overall, the use of multiple celebrity endorsements attracts and engages diverse consumer audiences, as well as instils a sense of consensus within them. Furthermore, several famous people featuring in an advertisement complement one another in the process of meaning transfer to a product or brand (see Figure 1. Meaning Transfer Model, MTM of McCracken, 1989).

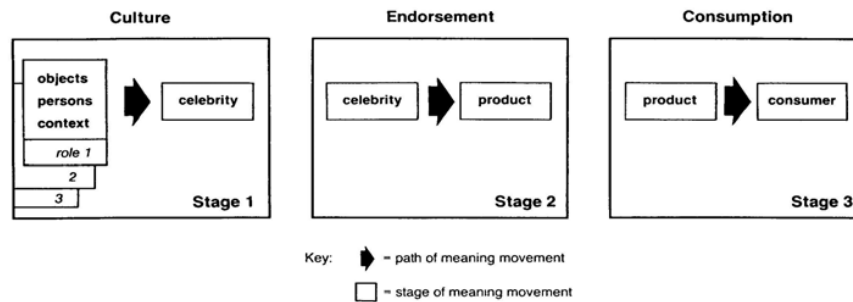


Fig. 1 Meaning-transfer model of McCracken [3]

Little research has been conducted regarding multiple celebrity endorsements in advertising. Hsu and McDonald (2002) suggest two possible outcomes of multiple celebrity endorsements, with regard to meaning transfer. Firstly, not merely one, but a multitude of separate meanings attributed to the celebrity endorsers who feature in an advertisement eventually get associated with the promoted product. Secondly, the specific meaning thereby transferred to the product indicates that the celebrities partaking in the process have certain features in common. Provided that multiple celebrity endorsers are different, their characteristics and thus the symbolic meanings they transfer become complementary. In this case, the product or brand promoted is expected to acquire a wider spectrum of transferred meanings. Conversely, when celebrity endorsers are perceived to possess manifest similarities, that is to say, when they duplicate rather than complement one another, their meaning transfers to the product or brand are likely to be stronger.

#### Celebrity activation

Celebrity activation is defined as the occupation and achievements, public activities, dramatic personal experiences, landmark successes and failures of a celebrity, as well as the repercussions of the above in the society at large. In other words, the term refers to how a celebrity is perceived and appraised in the public sphere and how this, in turn, brings to bear on the brand which he/she represents.

A recapitulation of several academic studies suggests that in the course of the endorsement process, when a celebrity and the brand he/she endorses are presented in repeated advertised pairings, consumers forge associative links between the two entities. It is through a network of such links that the information associated with the celebrity and his/her achievements can be transferred to the image of the endorsed brand (Till and Shimp, 1998) [17]. This process should as far as possible be reinforced by marketing specialists responsible for both limiting the spread of the negative information potentially detrimental to the brand, as well as proactively applying the communication tools aimed at sustaining the connection with the target segment of the market. Daneshvary and Schewer (2000) discovered that the professional success of a celebrity, when publicized, is beneficial, as it translates into higher evaluation of the brand that he/she represents [7]. In his study Farrell also observed regular increases in the sales relative to the brand promoted by a celebrity, after the

information about a professional attainment of its endorser had gone public. *In accordance with Farrell's findings, therefore, it can generally be argued that the more a celebrity endorser excels in his/her professional undertakings – if consumers are duly informed about it, – the more conspicuous his/her positive influence on the endorsed brand becomes.*

#### Celebrity and audience gender

Surprisingly few studies have examined what, if any, impact the gender of a celebrity endorser might have on consumer evaluations of the promoted product and their purchase intentions. Ohanian (1991) found no substantial differences in consumer evaluations of a product, irrespective of whether its endorser was a male or a female. The critics of this analysis, however, have charged it with lack of academic rigour and have expressed serious reservations about its findings, if only because the research focused on a relatively unknown female singer who hence could have simply not been recognized by a large portion of the target audience.

More academic studies ensued. Hsu and McDonald (2002) reported on a study in which they showed pictures of certain male and female athletes to participants [9]. The latter were then asked to identify the athletes as well as to tell whether the athletes could be considered experts on various sports related products and could thus affect their purchase decisions. The experiment yielded some gender-based results: compared to their female counterparts, not only were male athletes recognized much more often, but they also had more influence on the purchase intentions of the respondents.

Silvera and Austad (2004) attempted to determine the effects of gender matching between a celebrity endorser and consumers on the effectiveness of an advertisement [15]. Their findings suggest no clear link between the gender of a celebrity endorser and the way in which his/her attractiveness or expertise with relation to the endorsed product is conceived by consumers, regardless of their gender. Yet the gender of a celebrity endorser was discovered to significantly correlate with his/her perceived trustworthiness: women had more reliance on female endorsers, whereas men, accordingly, demonstrated greater confidence in male celebrities.

The studies discussed above have substantially contributed to the conceptualization of how the gender of a celebrity endorser impacts on the target audience of a particular advertising campaign. Advertisements are frequently gender-specific, i.e. oriented exclusively towards men or women,

depending on the item promoted. It is also noteworthy that, according to some surveys, women are generally more susceptible to promotional persuasion (Widgery and McGaugh 1993). Yet other authors have deemed this proposition untenable, as it does not apply to advertisements with certain inbuilt extremities, such as a persistent assertion of the benefits of the product promoted or, conversely, unequivocal signs of hesitation. Women are bound to develop negative attitudes towards such advertisements more often than men (Klaus and Bailey, 2008) [12]. With the aim of making some

generalizations regarding the role of gender in advertising, Wolin (2003) reviewed seventy six academic articles and other publications on the issue, covering the period between 1970 and 2002. Her analysis confirmed that men, in contradistinction to women, are more inclined to receive the promotional messages transmitted to them via the central rather than the peripheral route (see Figure 2, with reference to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) [6], described by Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1986)) [13].

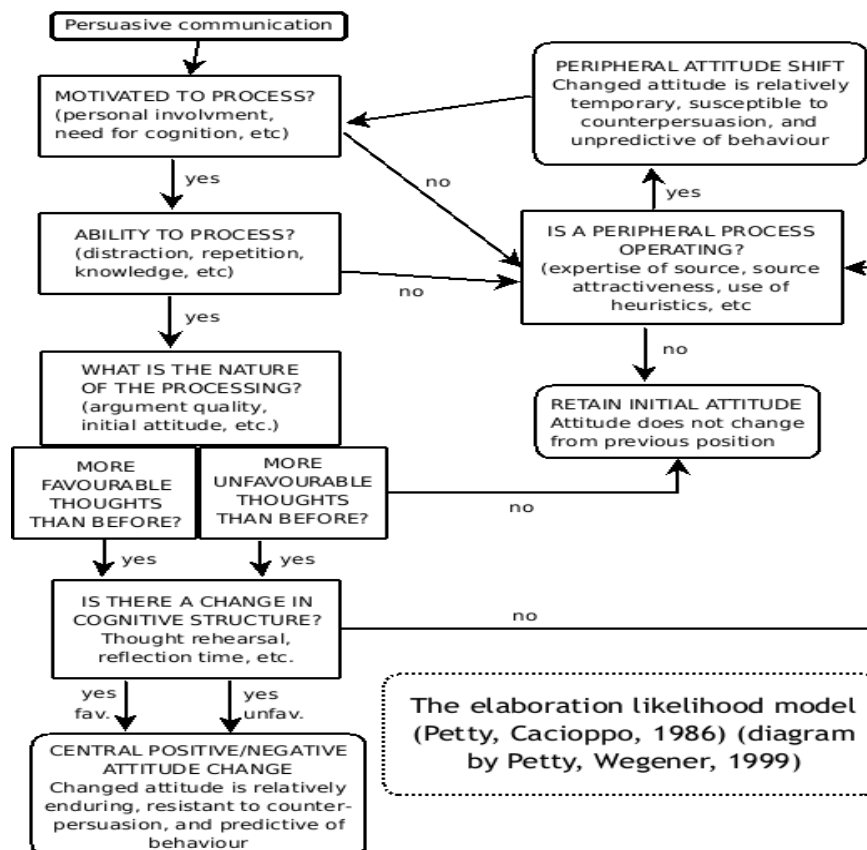


Fig. 2 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), described by Petty, Cacioppo [13]

On the other hand, according to Kempf, Lacznia and Smith (2006), women typically process an advertisement more comprehensively, as they search for hidden cues, whereas men tend to directly assimilate the message communicated to them. Putrevu (2001) attributed the gender-based predispositions in advertising information processing to various factors, including social and biological gender differences. He contended that '... men are more likely to be driven by overall message themes or schemas and women are more likely to engage in detailed elaboration of message content'. Putrevu thus expected men to respond more favourably to an advertisement in which a celebrity endorser appears as compared to women [12]. In developing his arguments, he cited Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983), who had established that an advertisement featuring a celebrity

endorser is more effective when consumers opt for the promoted product without in-depth consideration [13, 14]. Byrne (1971), Gaertner and Dovidio (1977), Shanteau and Nagy (1979) are among the authors who maintain that people in general display a tendency to react more positively to those whom they view as similar to themselves. According to Putrevu, there is abundant evidence in the socialization literature that children tend to socialize with members of their own gender, in the process aligning themselves with the attitudes and actions of their peers. Morimoto and La Ferle's (2006) analysis of Asian American communities yielded analogous race-based results [18]. Simpson (2000) demonstrated that members of a target audience are likely to respond more favourably to an actor with whom they share certain characteristics.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The discussion above suggests that although gender issues in advertising have been the subject of extensive exploration, most research findings in the field have been rather contradictory. It seems plausible to infer that the gender of a celebrity endorser does, to an extent, condition the effectiveness of an advertisement. However, no consensus has yet emerged on how the gender of a celebrity endorser impacts on the purchase intentions of consumers. Various sociological studies provide a firm basis for arguing that advertisements featuring celebrities who closely resemble the potential consumers of the promoted product are more likely to serve their purpose. If that is indeed the case, congruence between a celebrity endorser and target consumers in terms of gender could prove to be one of the dimensions of similarity which strengthens the link between them and, consequently, adds to the success of an advertisement.

The purchase intentions of consumers are inextricably related to the credibility of a celebrity endorser used in an advertisement, their perceptions of expertise of a celebrity endorser, the attractiveness and popularity of the latter as well as celebrity-product congruence.

The effectiveness of an advertising campaign can be enhanced through multiple celebrity endorsements, i.e. the use of multiple celebrities in either a single advertisement, or, alternatively, a series of separate advertisements intended to promote the same product. This way, associations with several different celebrities are transferred to the promoted product. Moreover, provided that the celebrity endorsers are similar (i.e. members of the same musical group or football team), the transfer of their personal qualities to the product becomes more ponderable.

The match-up between a celebrity endorser and his/her target audience gender-wise supposedly contributes to the effectiveness of an advertisement. This is due to the widely recognized fact that information coming from a source similar to recipients in terms of race and gender, tends to be absorbed more easily.

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