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Consumers under the influence: Endorser effectiveness through source characteristics and attributions of authenticity

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Abstract

Both research and advertising practice support the proposition that endorsers, particularly celebrity endorsers, are effective in persuading consumers to buy products. Unfortunately, our understanding doesn't go far beyond that point. The existing literature presents a number of factors (e.g., expertise, attractiveness) that increase persuasion under certain circumstances, but the relative importance of different factors and the circumstances that moderate which factors are most important remain poorly understood. We contend that one of the main reasons for our poor understanding of endorsement effectiveness is the lack of a systematic framework explaining the persuasion processes associated with endorsers. The present paper examines theories and empirical research relevant to endorsement advertisements over the last four decades in order to provide such a framework. The resulting framework uses the social influence processes of identification and internalization to provide an organizational structure to integrate previous research and to develop potential avenues for future research.

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Consumers under the influence: Endorser effectiveness through source characteristics and attributions of authenticity

Their faces are plastered in subway stations. On billboards during the daily commute. In magazine ads. In the flashing imagery of header and sidebar ads when scrolling through the daily newsfeed online. In the flickering glow that interrupts TV programs. More than a quarter of all advertising in the Western media market today is infiltrated with the faces and names of endorsers (Shimp, 2000; Silvera & Austad, 2004), from celebrities and sports heroes to experts, everymen and created characters. Although Western consumers are reared on knowledge of attempts to persuade, these ads still get our attention. And, sometimes, spur us to open our wallets and engage our fleeting loyalty to a brand.

Endorsers can be of many different types, from typical consumer or peer endorsers, to experts, created product characters, CEOs and company presidents, and of course celebrities (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Celebrities have always been among the favored choices for promotional flare (Shimp, 2000), perhaps because of their cache and the image and status they project as well as the attention-drawing appeal of a famous name paired with a product. Beginning as early as the mid-1950s, consumers saw, heard and read more celebrity appeal advertisements than non-testimonial advertisements.

Something works about using an endorser: Since the 1970s, corporations have invested their marketing dollars in paid endorsements that have eaten up larger and larger percentages of advertising budgets with each passing year. The top-earning celebrities now boast multi-million dollar sponsorship and endorsement contracts, and making endorsements has become a lucrative and sought-after part of show business. However,

the biggest problem for the marketing and psychology literatures is that we are still uncertain precisely why endorsers have appeal—and if they are as effective as marketing practitioners hope. We know the persuasive attributes that marketers tend to rely on when determining the appropriateness of an endorser: popularity, attractiveness, expertise, likeability, and familiarity (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Yet we cannot conclude which is the strongest determinant of endorser effectiveness, and what combination or interaction produces the most compelling results for the marketing message.

That is not for lack of empirical research, which since the late 1970s has included numerous journal articles testing theories ranging from source credibility and the Elaboration Likelihood Model to product match-up hypotheses and biased attributions of endorsers' motivations for sponsoring a product. We cannot expect to uncover the mechanism at work in a single examination of the literature's evolution. But in this review of endorser effectiveness we will track the trajectory of research into endorsers, describe known factors that make endorsers more or less effective, and discuss potential launching points for future empirical work into endorser effectiveness.

First, we offer a refreshed look at the endorsement system as a route of persuasion, pointing to the relevant theories that connect product, advertising message, and endorser to the consumer.

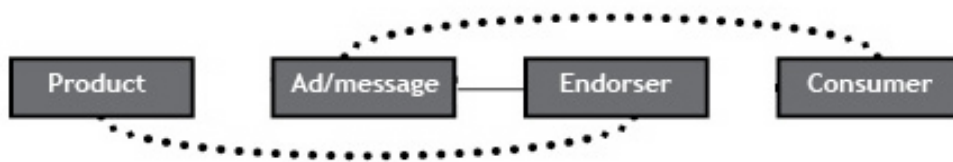


Figure 1: The Endorsement System

The Product-Endorser Connection

Products turn to endorsers as a promotional strategy to create rapport with consumers and to promote recognition and recall in the marketplace. Finding an endorser who can successfully convey product attributes to the target market, help the product reach into new markets, and enhance demand makes finding the right endorser the holy grail in advertising and branding. If there is no association between a product and its endorser, is there any room for a consumer to buy into the message? On the other hand, if that association is too strong, can that potentially undermine endorsement effectiveness?

In a marketplace where differentiation determines the bottom line, it seems apparent that a particular type of endorser possessing a particular set of attributes will not be effective across all product categories. “One size fits all” is not the Madison Avenue way. But can we find any given attributes that tend to work in some or many cases? The empirical literature has been searching for a kind of “one size fits many” approach with the emergence of the concept of endorser/product fit in the match-up hypothesis.

The Match-up Hypothesis

According to social adaptation theory (Kahle & Homer, 1985), people choose to engage with only the information that is relevant to help them meet a need. So as consumers flip through magazines or television channels, on some level they are weighing the adaptive merit of the messages presented, and choose to either keep browsing or stop and more deeply consider the information. Kahle and Homer theorized

that a match-up between an endorser's characteristics and a product's attributes facilitates this process.

In effect, we are attracted to the information we need to successfully live in our environments, and fit between the product and endorser can cue those needs. Thus, the physical attractiveness of an endorser might signal the merit of a product that enhances attractiveness. Consistent with this possibility, Kahle and Homer (1985) found that endorser attractiveness was positively related to purchase intentions, recall of the ad, and attitudes toward the product for a product that aids grooming (a disposable razor). Kahle and Homer also tested involvement and likeability as potential moderators of these effects, but only a simple effect for endorser attractiveness emerged. This is consistent with the prediction of the match-up hypothesis that product-endorser fit signals that the product provides needed or desired adaptive information and thus make the ad more salient for a viewer, reader or listener.

Early research on the match-up hypothesis continued to focus on product-endorser fit based on endorser attractiveness. Kamins (1990) found that the attractiveness of a celebrity endorser led to higher endorser credibility and more favorable attitudes toward the product when the product category was attractiveness-related (luxury cars) but not attractiveness-unrelated (home computers). Parekh and Kanekar (1994) extended this finding to peer endorsers using beauty-related and non beauty-related products. Solomon, Ashmore and Longo (1992) turned this research stream into a literal beauty match-up hypothesis, eventually concluding that consumers distinguish between six types of attractiveness, and that these types of beauty ideals fit in different ways with products according to their categories, such as perfumes or fashion.

The literature turned to expertise and credibility as a matching factor as work on the match-up hypothesis matured (Till & Busler, 1998; Premeaux, 2005). Till and Busler (1998) questioned the strength of the match-up hypothesis for matching based on attractiveness, finding that endorser attractiveness boosted evaluations for both cologne (attractiveness-related) and pens (not attractiveness-related). Yet, Till and Busler did find a clear match-up in terms of varying levels of expertise: Endorsers matched with products they were perceived to have more expertise with— an athlete endorsing an energy bar versus an actor endorsing the same energy bar— produced a match-up effect that raised brand attitude and purchase intent. Premeaux (2005) found that professional golfers Tiger Woods and Jack Nicklaus both got and held attention among male consumers, and were rated nearly equally trustworthy, likeable and attractive. However, Woods endorsing golf balls— an arena in which he would be perceived as expert— had more impact on purchase intentions than Nicklaus did promoting tires.

Kamins & Gupta (1994) found that a match between a celebrity endorser and brand resulted in increased endorser believability and increased perceptions of endorser attractiveness. However, these relations were non-significant for a non-celebrity endorser (company president). This might signal a deeper process at play with the meaning inherent in pairing a product with a more familiar spokesperson image.

Transfer of Meaning

McCracken's (1989) meaning-transfer model explores how endorsers transfer their meaning to products, and then to consumers who purchase, use, wear or carry those products. Marketplace exchange is re-envisioned as the site of meaning exchange. As Atkin and Block (1983) have shown, consumers have a preconceived image of a celebrity

endorser, and this image can be transferred to the brand. McCracken describes the meaning of these endorser images as dynamic, and rendered malleable in the hands of designers, advertisers, producers and consumers. Advertising can shape products to take on any relevant meaning, depending on how the message is framed and the associated meaning of an endorser paired with the product (McCracken 1989).

Scottish anthropologist J.G. Frazer (1922) observed that an object can become imbued with the meaning of those connected to the object: Once touched by a respected person in a tribe or society, the object carries that person's essence. Modern endorsers lend their essence to the products they support, and in so doing render the objects more valuable via that connection. In McCracken's (1989) conception, celebrities serve as the site for social meanings to converge. Endorsers become carriers of those meanings into whatever social arena that uses their name, face or image.

For meaning to adhere to a product, McCracken (1989) indicates the match must synchronize the celebrity image and endorsed product. Merely employing a familiar face might not achieve that synergy. For example, Byrne, Whitehead and Breen (2003) examined a grocery store chain's contrasting success with the use of two British television stars: a thrifty chef on a cooking show known for capitalizing on inexpensive yet quality products, and a popular actor best known for crass comedy roles on shows such as "Monty Python." Byrne et al. find that the television chef elicited images of quality food and expertise, and had appropriate age-appeal that served as a stronger image for the brand.

Meaning transfer seems to hinge on audience perceptions and the associations an endorser has already cultivated. St. James (2003) investigated image transfer on

evaluations of high-technology products. She finds the strongest evaluations of a digital cable recorder emerged when pairing an endorsement from science fiction television show actors versus endorsements from a situational comedy show actor or a pop singer. Although entertainers do not in reality necessarily have expertise in relation to new technology products, the image of a science-fiction starship captain lent the actor who portrayed him a stronger association with technology and thus more credibility for endorsing the technology product in St. James' study.

Misra & Beatty (1990) found that the a given level of expected congruency promotes recall and liking of the brand, as when actor Clint Eastwood promoted rugged blue jeans (vs. board games) and Olympic gymnast Mary Lou Retton promoted an energy drink instead of a pricey wine. But an extremely congruent match might not be required to generate affinity for a brand. Lee & Thorson (2008) examined the a continuum of endorser-product matches and concluded that a moderate celebrity-product mismatch was just as effective as a strong congruence in predicting attitude towards ad and brand, and was at times more effective in producing purchase intentions. This is the case especially when the level of consumer involvement is high and enduring.

The Impact of Bad News

Endorser imagery is a powerful tool for brand equity. But can it also damage equity? Byrne et al. (2003) point to the potential pitfalls of a product paired with a celebrity endorser whose reputation has been questioned or whose image otherwise poorly exemplifies the brand.

Till (1998) examined the question of damaging endorser information, finding that negative brand attitudes resulted from any type of negative public information about

celebrity endorsers. The less is publicly known about the brand or about the discredited endorser, Till's study concluded, the more impact damaging news will have on brand evaluation. Till & Shimp (1998) determined that the link between endorser and brand must be enduring, forming a strong association between the two, before bad news about celebrities has a negative effect on brand and product evaluation.

In a meta-analysis examining endorser effectiveness in 32 studies, Amos, Holmes and Strutton (2008) concluded that damaging news about an endorser has the largest impact on endorser effectiveness. They noted a negative directional trend in studies, such that bad news about celebrities tends to result in a negative effect on the related advertising campaign. Louie, Kulik and Jacobson (2001) investigated abnormal stock market returns in relation to 52 instances of bad news about endorsers, and determined that the market reacts significantly to undesirable news about an endorser. When the endorser is blameless (e.g., when ice skater Nancy Kerrigan was attacked with a tire iron before the Olympics) the stock returns are positive and result in an increase in firm value. Low-blame events promote sympathy, likeability and visibility for the spokesperson— a visibility and likeability which is then shared with the brand. When the endorser is in a high-blame scandal (such as when pro-golfer John Daly was accused of beating his wife), the market reacts unsympathetically and negatively to the news. Louie and Obermiller (2002) later found that companies fared best when firing the high-blame endorsers and hiring or retaining low-blame endorsers, yet brand evaluations were worse when companies fired as opposed to retained moderate-blame endorsers.

It is nevertheless possible that a strong match can still transfer the intended meaning to a product, despite endorser scandal. Premeuax (2005) showed that damaging

news can be overpowered by the well-matched attributes of an endorser. Home décor, cooking and etiquette celebrity Martha Stewart resigned her role on the New York Stock Exchange in 2002 and was jailed in 2004 after a widely publicized insider-trading scandal. Yet Stewart (selling her home collection) was rated more expert and had more impact on desire and intent to purchase than talk show host Oprah in Premeaux's study. Even given Stewart's troubled name, her expertise generated stronger intentions to purchase the brand. This finding could speak to the role of celebrity entrepreneurs who are intimately involved with their brands: In Stewart's case, her expertise extends beyond just promoting a product, as she ostensibly designed and placed her name on her collection of home décor items.

Multiple Endorsers

Will meaning still transfer from an endorser to a product if the endorser juggles multiple sponsorships? Or, will consumers discredit the celebrity lapping up cash in endorsement deals? Mowen and Brown (1981) found that an endorser signed exclusively to one brand heightened evaluations and purchase intentions toward the brand. They argued for the role of distinctiveness in aiding attributions about the endorser's true disposition toward the brand.

Tripp, Jensen & Carlson (1994) found that as the number of products endorsed increased, so did the perceived credibility of a celebrity. But the more products or brands a celebrity endorsed, the more negatively participants rated celebrity likeability and attitude toward the advertisement. Based on semi-structured follow-up interviews with participants, Tripp et al. concluded that most consumers don't actively process information about how many products a celebrity endorses. However, when that fact is

made salient, it can lead to questions about trustworthiness and expertise. Most interviewees attributed endorsements to a desire for money, and acknowledged that seeking more endorsements means the endorser earns more money. But that didn't emerge as a negative; respondents instead seemed to dismiss money as a matter of fact in show business (Tripp, Jensen & Carlson, 1994). This leads to an interesting question about how an audience views endorsers' engagement with, usage of, and liking for a product they endorse. This question of attributions will be explored in a later section.

Um (2008) also concluded that multiple product endorsements by a single celebrity led to higher evaluations of endorser expertise. Um compared brands sponsored by many endorsers to single-endorser brands, finding that single-endorser advertisements led to higher advertisement and brand evaluation, as well as higher purchase intent. Multiple endorsers did not negatively impact brand evaluations, but they didn't generate product evaluations as high as those in single-endorser pairings. Hsu and McDonald (2002) examined a series of 50 ads that featured 50 different celebrity endorsers, each wearing their "milk moustache" for the national dairy council. They found that the diversity of celebrities (entertainers, athletes, teen stars and adult, political figures, and fictional characters) promoted a view of consensus that may be particularly salient for a trade product.

The Message-Consumer Connection

We live in a within-subjects world: Consumers accept and reject persuasive messages on a one-by-one basis, cued by attention-grabbing aspects of the advertisement or a higher involvement that intrinsically drives them toward engagement with a message. The immediate response and enduring engagement with the message creates an

impact on attitudes and, ultimately, behavior. How does an endorser facilitate or detract from that process, either embodying the message or driving attention toward it? To explore this link in the process, we examine the source-characteristics perspective and the Elaboration Likelihood Model.

The literature in communication, marketing and persuasion emphasizes the basic role that source characteristics—including attractiveness, trustworthiness, credibility, expertise, likeability and similarity—have on influencing attitude change. Early work with endorsers examined source attractiveness, finding that physically attractive communicators tended, as a rule, to be more persuasive (Kelman, 1961; McGuire, 1969; Miller, 1970). The first studies found simple main effects, with source characteristics resulting in positive attitudinal effects no matter what product category they were paired with.

An attractive message source is foremost one that a consumer identifies with: Kelman (1961) concludes that source attractiveness and a perceived degree of similarity are key drivers of social influence. An endorser is attractive and persuasive if he or she is familiar, likeable and perceived as similar to oneself (McGuire, 1969). Consumers conform to the persuasive influences of attractive others they perceive as similar to themselves through the process of identification (Kelman, 1961). Observers then internalize the messages the attractive and similar other bears, conforming to and complying with the message. Friedman and Friedman (1979) explained that satisfaction comes from conformity, though belief in the message is the channel through which the audience adopts such conformity.

Miller (1970) indicates that physical attractiveness is a proxy for power and control, an informational cue associated with free will and control over one's decisions. In Miller's investigations, less attractive sources were seen as coerced or as subject to influences in the situations or environment around them. Miller points to a more primal mechanism, that somehow "what is beautiful is good," a phenomenon explored throughout the psychology and social psychology literatures. For a more in-depth exploration of the role of source attractiveness in endorsements, Erdogan (1999) offers a historical look at source persuasion.

Studies have shown that endorser attractiveness serves as a shortcut for product evaluation, but perhaps that only occurs when observers are not motivated to process product information contained in a message. Petty and Cacioppo (1980) established the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to explore two basic routes of engagement with a persuasive message, each of which affects how likely a target is to elaborate on the message. The central route to persuasion is accessed when one has the willingness, ability and motivation to engage with a message source, and more deeply process its arguments and its utility. In the peripheral route, simple cues in the communication environment lead to superficial processing of information. Although the peripheral route may lead to some degree of initial attitude change, it is less likely than central route processing to leave a lasting impact on a target, specifically on later recall (attitude persistence). This dual-process model stands in opposition to the match-up hypothesis advanced by Khale & Homer (1985) and Kamins (1990).

Petty and Cacioppo (1980) tested their model in the context of the endorsement environment, varying involvement and attractiveness of product endorsers as they

demonstrated that more involved consumers responded to stronger arguments in an advertisement, whereas less involved consumers responded more to the attractiveness of the source and peripherally process the message. Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983) also found support for the ELM: Argument strength, involvement and endorser type influenced attitudes differentially. In the high-involvement condition, stronger argument but not celebrity status influenced attitudes towards the ad and the brand. In the low-involvement condition, celebrity endorsers but not argument strength influenced attitudes. Petty et al (1983) concluded that argument strength appealed to cognitive elaboration via the central route; however, celebrity likeability served as the peripheral cue.

Cognitive Resources

Some findings point to mediating situations in which peripheral cues override cognitive processing in the laboratory setting, including high-stress situations and cognitive overload. Sanbonmatsu and Kardes (1988) explored the link between higher physical stress levels and the subsequent role of celebrity endorsers in increasing persuasion. Participants exercised for seven minutes, then rated print advertisements at intervals after the exercise, representing varying levels of physical stress. In high-arousal or high-stress situations, Sanbonmatsu and Kardes found that a celebrity endorser positively influences brand attitudes regardless of argument strength. Under moderate or no stress, argument strength had more impact on brand and ad evaluations. Thus, attention becomes more selective and responsive to peripheral cues under higher levels of physical stress.

Kang & Herr (2006) found that limiting the availability of cognitive resources produces positive effects on brand evaluation from a positive source, regardless of the product category. When participants were cognitively loaded with an interfering task while evaluating print advertisements, positive source characteristics influenced evaluations. But when cognitive resources were not taxed, positive source characteristics only boosted attitudes for products matched with endorser characteristics. This finding links the routes defined by the ELM with a theory of product/endorser fit.

Central-route or cognitive processing availability is determined by motivation and ability to process, but is also affected by enduring involvement with the message, as Petty and Cacioppo (1980) demonstrated. The mediating role of involvement with a given product category operationalizes the degree of personal relevance or importance of a message. Park and Young (1986) explored three levels of involvement with a television commercial—(1) utilitarian or cognitive involvement based on high degree of relevance of the content and issue in a message, (2) affective or self-expressive involvement, and (3) low or no involvement—and found that cognitive involvement leads to higher brand and commercial evaluations when no background music interferes with processing. Later studies collapsed affective and low involvement modes into a general low-involved concept.

Elaboration likelihood allows a single source characteristic to serve as a persuasion variable that may influence attitudes in different ways. Shavitt, Swan, Lowrey and Wanke (1994) found that when goals for processing a message are varied, endorser attractiveness can serve either as a persuasive argument for central processing or as a peripheral cue. When the product's sensory attributes (taste and aroma) were emphasized,

endorser attractiveness was a predictor of brand and product evaluations under low involvement only. Yet when the product's image attributes (social impression goals) were emphasized, endorser attractiveness predicted higher evaluations among those in the high-involvement condition. Changing cognitive processing goals, as Shavitt et al. manipulated here with priming, changes the way a single source input is used within the elaboration likelihood framework.

Consumers with less internal motivation to carefully process or with lower involvement with a product category tend to rely more heavily on endorsers when making purchase decisions. In a detailed study, St. James (2003) concluded that involvement in the high-tech product category predisposes study participants to higher purchase intentions toward a technology product such as digital TV-recording device (a TiVo). Study participants who are in the market for the product have an increased positive attitude toward the product and increased purchase intentions, but report lower evaluations of endorsers.

Source Credibility

In addition to attractiveness, the role of credibility has been explored as another chief determinant of communicator effectiveness, especially in making first impressions. Communications that stem from an expert have been shown to produce greater agreement with the subject than non-expert messages. Biswas, Biswas and Das (2006) compare expert to celebrity endorsers, and found that expert endorsers are more effective in increasing brand evaluations than celebrities with higher-risk products such as new technology. That was especially the case among consumers with more knowledge about the product category. But Biswas et al. also pointed to a salient boundary condition,

finding that perceived endorser-product congruency plays an influential role in the kind of processing route a consumer takes and can override the effect of an expert endorser. This speaks to St. James' (2003) findings that fit might drive persuasion, such that an actor who has acted on futuristic or science fiction shows is perceived as a better fit for endorsing a technology product than an actor in a sitcom. Through a role in a science-fiction TV show, an actor can garner a degree of perceived credibility and expertise for technology products.

Source credibility, as a composite of source honesty, trustworthiness and expertise, can encourage evaluations and purchase intentions differentially depending on the type of endorser. For example, Wang (2005) found that typical consumer endorsers in some channels can benefit more than expert endorsers. Wang studied endorsements in the form of online movie reviews posted by major news outlets versus typical consumer reviews. When both expert institutional and consumer endorsements were positive, subjects rated the product more positively. But Wang found the greatest intentions to actually purchase a movie ticket when the regular consumer endorsement was positive and perceived as more credible. Despite the fact that institutional reviewers were known experts, Wang noted that regular consumers' positive reviews outweighed expert endorsements, an effect which might hold for experiential, hedonic products such as the movie-going experience.

Celebrity versus non-celebrity endorsement is a basic contrast in the literature that can pinpoint what aspects of an endorser influence elaboration. Mehta (1994) relied on differences in endorser status to reveal the divergent processes study participants experience when evaluating advertisements. Participants in her study recorded thoughts

about the commercial as they watched. Mehta found that the presence of a celebrity endorser resulted in more thoughts about the source (the celebrity) and fewer thoughts about the brand and product featured in a commercial. A non-celebrity endorser generated fewer thoughts about the source and led to lower evaluations of the commercial, but produced more thoughts about the brand and positively predicted brand attitudes and buying behavior. Of note is the role source in Mehta's study played in driving the connection between the message and the consumer when the source was a famous face. Although both forms of endorsers were persuasive and led to a positive evaluation of the brand, source characteristics and commercial attitude were significantly more important in persuading viewers when the endorser was a celebrity.

The Message-Endorser Connection

Source attractiveness and the concepts advanced in Petty and Cacioppo's work on elaboration likelihood address some of the questions about the mechanisms underlying endorser effectiveness. But another, less explored stream of literature focuses on the connection between the message and the endorser. Although this is filtered through the lens of an observing consumer, the connection between the endorser and the advertising message drives the perceptions of how authentic, as well as how credible and trustworthy, an endorser appears.

Kelman (1961) pointed to three sources of social influence: (1) Identification, grounded in attractiveness and perceived similarity; (2) compliance, when a person is influenced by a social communicator in hopes of gaining a favorable response; and (3) internalization, which can only occur when the communicator is perceived as honest and sincere. Compliance is not a possible route of influence with endorsers, because there is

no interpersonal interaction involved in commercial endorsements. The research explored previously addresses social influence through identification based on source credibility models, some researchers question the ability of endorsers to influence consumers through internalization processes based on perceived authenticity and honesty (Kamins, 1990). Internalization asks an audience to imprint a social actor's belief system by adopting ideas as their own. But if endorsers are widely known to be accepting pay for their statements of support, does the audience trust that the beliefs endorsers ascribe to are genuine?

The fundamental attribution error occurs when an observer, watching the behavior of another, misattributes the cause of the behavior to some incorrect source of internal motivation or external environmental factor. Also known as correspondence bias, the error can be produced by a lack of awareness of the situational constraints upon an actor (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). An observer, for instance, might assume a person is endorsing a product because he or she likes the product, uses it often, and believes it to be a quality product. Yet, by the 2000s, the vast majority of commercial watchers are savvy enough consumers to be aware that endorsers are paid to say positive things about products.

In another relevant cause of correspondence bias, observers often have difficulty adjusting for situational knowledge after arriving at an initial dispositional or personality-based judgment. Even if the observer knows that New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady is paid to endorse a particular athletic drink, it is easier to assume that Brady likes, values and uses that drink to boost his own energy on the field than to re-adjust one's views to factor in the impact of Brady being paid substantially to say he likes the drink. In the crowded modern marketplace, that ease of biased attribution may be facilitated by

the many choices celebrity endorsers are assumed to have; because Tom Brady could be paid to endorse any athletic energy drink he wants, he must really value this drink to agree to endorse it. In this way, even the situational constraints of being paid an average of \$500,000 to \$2 million for a one year endorsement campaign can fail to factor into an observer's evaluation.

Some of the first work dealing with attributions in advertising appeals sought to understand dimensions of advertisement claims: Do more varied arguments or statements in the claim result in a more persuasive advertisement? The literature poses a compelling set of explanations for the persuasiveness of message claims. Jones and Davis (1965) theorized that the more an action fits into the norm, the more observers assume the action stemmed from the situation or environment. Conversely, they argued that behaviors or actions that are more unexpected, non-normative, or less likely to occur more frequently result in attributions to some unique or inherent disposition in the actor. Settle and Golden (1974) varied the complexity of print advertisement statements, finding that advertisements that claimed a combination of superior and inferior attributes were rated as more credible by participants. Their experiments, along with later conceptual replications from Smith and Hunt (1978), showed that participants viewing advertisements with varied claims attributed the promotional claims to true product characteristics and dispositions instead of to the company's desire to sell the product, whereas participants viewing all-positive, nonvaried claims attributed the promotional claims to a desire to sell the product.

In one of the earliest examinations of consumer biases in viewing endorsers, Sparkman (1982) concluded that when consumers are given viable alternative

explanations, they discount the monetary cue and infer internal motivation for endorsements (see also Kelley, 1971). Sparkman asked two survey panels to respond to questions about Frank Sinatra's endorsement of Chrysler cars. One group of respondents was told that Sinatra would accept only \$1 a year for his endorsement and said he was "impressed with [then-Chrysler chairman] Iacocca's personal crusade to save Chrysler and protect American jobs" (Sparkman, 1982, pg. 278). The control group was only told Sinatra might appear in ads endorsing Chrysler. The control group reported more belief that Sinatra was endorsing the auto company for the money; the experimental group conversely rated Sinatra as more truthful and reported higher beliefs that Sinatra was endorsing because Chrysler is a good brand. Although this shows that observers can discount obvious cues (i.e., payment for endorsement) when given alternative reasons, Sparkman's particular design also varied—and neglected to further examine—the role of argument strength in this finding.

Several studies have focused on payment of endorser fees as a reason to disbelieve endorsers. Moore, Mowen & Reardon (1994) examined persuasiveness of multiple sources of information in advertising and tested to see if payment incentives affected the influence of those sources. Study participants exposed to unpaid, multiple sources of information in the form of product user testimony in an advertisement generated more positive thoughts and attitudes than those in the paid, multiple sources condition. However, no effects were found for single-source on attitudes, whether the testimonial was listed as paid or unpaid. Cronley et al (1999) also examined the payment issue, tracking evidence that consumers make stronger inferences about endorsers liking, using and valuing a brand when participants evaluating ads first learn that the celebrity

was not paid for her endorsement. Correspondence bias, attributions that the celebrity truly likes the product, was strongest in the non-paid condition. However, the researchers found evidence that, even when participants were told that the endorser (Cindy Crawford) was paid \$6 million, participants still inferred that Crawford liked, used and valued the product she endorsed. Cronley et al. also found that belief in endorsers' claims were increased when the "intensity" of the endorsement, represented by how often the endorser's name was mentioned in connection with the brand, was increased.

Sorum, Grape and Silvera (2003), working with a population of Norwegian study participants, instead find evidence of an anti-correspondence bias, such that participants rated paid endorsers as liking, using and valuing the brand not only less than non-paid endorsers, but also less than the average person. Silvera and Austad (2004) confirmed that tendency again among a Norwegian respondent pool, who judged that when accepting payment, the celebrity likes and uses the brand he endorses less than the average person would like and use the brand. Although these studies use a population with different norms than the American cult of celebrity, these findings point to the uncertain path of inferences that decision-making consumers may automatically make when observing an endorser.

In South Africa. Van der Waldt, Schleritzko and Van Zyl (2007) examined the interaction between an endorser's reputation and payment of endorsement fees by showing respondents paid or unpaid endorsement ads featuring Britney Spears or Jackie Chan. The results indicated that payment reduced correspondent inferences that Britney Spears liked the product, but had no impact on attributions about Jackie Chan. The authors concluded that a positive reputation might be a buffer against potentially

unfavorable attributions driven by endorsement fees. More broadly, this finding extends the attribution question to another non-American population, and again suggests that the more factors are in play in the endorsement context than in classic attribution studies conducted by social psychologists.

Endorser involvement may help draw the line to distinguish when and where consumers are more likely to make correspondent attributions about endorsers. McCracken (1989) identifies four types of endorsements: (1) explicit (“I endorse this brand”), (2) implicit (“I use this brand”), (3) imperative (“you should use this brand”) and (4) co-present (mere association with the brand). A potential fifth type of endorser is the celebrity-entrepreneur, a celebrity endorser who is involved in the management or creation of the brand he or she promotes. Boxer George Foreman, for instance, tied his name to a counter-top meat grill, the George Foreman Lean Mean Fat-Reducing Grilling Machine, and basketball great Michael Jordan has been selling Air Jordan sneakers since 1984, releasing a new design every year under Brand Jordan. It is possible the enhanced connection between celebrity-entrepreneur endorsers and the brand will increase believability and result in stronger correspondent attributions about endorsers.

Skeptical Consumers

A potentially important moderator that affects correspondence inferences (and thus evaluations of celebrity endorsers) is consumer skepticism. Fein, Hilton and Miller (1990) determine that the perception of ulterior motives—multiple competing explanations for an act— might arouse suspicion that undermines the correspondence bias. The suspicious mind engages in more active and mindful processing of attribution-related issues (Fein, 1996). Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) classified consumer

skepticism as an awareness of advertisers' selling motives and beliefs that advertisements may be biased and untruthful. Obermiller and Spangenberg caution that skepticism is not necessarily deterministic, but rather probabilistic and influential of evaluations. Yet a basic and straightforward relation is apparent – St. James (2003), for instance, found that purchase intent, brand and product evaluations hinged on consumers' attitudes toward endorsements in general: The more favorable the attitude toward celebrity endorsements, the more willing participants were to consider buying the product.

Because most exposure to endorsers and advertising occurs beyond the confines of the lab, the nature of information presented seems to be a key cue for what type of processing suspicious or wary consumers will engage in. Obermiller, Spangenberg & MacLachland (2005) mirror Fein's work (1996) in finding a straightforward connection between skepticism and processing of advertising messages: The more skeptical the consumer, the less he or she likes advertisements and responds to them. Obermiller et al (2005), however, find a contrast to Fein's explanation: High-skeptics in their study were less likely to attend to advertisements than low-skeptics. Skeptics in their study did respond more positively to emotional appeals than information appeals, and skeptics still responded well to advertisements for products that they were highly involved with.

Bailey (2007) examined information about endorsers that had a positive, neutral, or negative valence and pinpointed an interesting effect for skeptical consumers: Neutral news fared worse in the hands of skeptical consumers, who may access *a priori* thoughts of distrust when making a judgment call in evaluations. In positive and negative news conditions, the valence of the judgments matched expectations no matter where raters fell on the skepticism scale.

Conclusion

The motivations in a selling situation are transparent. Consumers know what endorsers are trying to do: Make money for themselves and for their product. Yet since celebrities and everymen have been paired with products in print, television and radio commercials, endorsement advertisements have been effective: Endorsers have helped products to sell, and have opened hearts and minds to the products they support. “She’s beautiful and glamorous and thinks that shampoo is a good product? I’ll take it,” say both the housewife of 1960 and the skeptical, media-savvy college student of 2010. “He stars in a sci-fi show and is telling me this is the best TV on the market? Maybe I ought to think about buying that TV,” say the head of the house in 1975 and the married man contemplating the latest appliance store displays in 2005. For even some of the most skeptical, the deepest thinkers, an endorser makes a product more entrancing, more inviting, and in short more buyable.

Radio programs and early black-and-white variety shows and soaps had their brand presenters, but it wasn’t until the 1970s that a promotion contract became the norm, making endorsement deals another facet of the Hollywood success story for any celebrity. As the number of endorsements grew, so did the literature in marketing and psychology seeking to understand if, why, and how such endorsements are effective. Though researchers have been seeking to understand endorser appeal and the mechanisms underlying persuasive endorsements since the 1970s, four decades of scholarship has yielded only a handful of viable models for tracing the route of persuasion and has touched on the magical, non-quantifiable transfer of meaning from endorser to product. Still, no definitive formula has emerged for determining precisely

what characteristics of an endorser combine with what aspects of a product and advertising message to produce the most effective message for consumers. As a body of literature, we still aren't sure what works when, and namely—why.

In the scatter-shot media marketplace of the 2010s, when sales messages dance, shout and reach out from every channel, it is of particular importance to examine what inputs determine whether endorsements are as powerful as advertisers hope. In this review, we examined the theories and hypotheses that have dominated the study of endorser effectiveness since the 1970s, and we pointed to the gaps in providing full explanations of the mechanisms for the appeal of endorsers with the goal of generating fruitful directions for future research.

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