



## Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review

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## **Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review**

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*Use of celebrities as part of marketing communications strategy is a fairly common practice for major firms in supporting corporate or brand imagery. Firms invest significant monies in juxtaposing brands and organisations with endorser qualities such as attractiveness, likeability, and trustworthiness. They trust that these qualities operate in a transferable way, and, will generate desirable campaign outcomes. But, at times, celebrity qualities may be inappropriate, irrelevant, and undesirable. Thus, a major question is: how can companies select and retain the 'right' celebrity among many competing alternatives, and, simultaneously manage this resource, while avoiding potential pitfalls? This paper seeks to explore variables, which may be considered in any celebrity selection process by drawing together strands from various literature.*

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### **Introduction**

From a marketing communication (marcom) perspective, it is vital that firms design strategies that help underpin competitive differential advantage for a firm's products or services. Accordingly, marcom activities back up other elements in the marketing mix such as product design, branding, packaging, pricing, and place decisions (distribution channels and physical distribution) in order to attempt to create positive effects in the minds of consumers. In helping achieve this, use of celebrity endorsers is a widely used marcoms strategy.

Companies invest large sums of money to align their brands and themselves with endorsers. Such endorsers are seen as dynamic with both attractive and likeable qualities (Atkin and Block 1983) and companies plan that these qualities are transferred to products via marcom activities (Langmeyer and Walker 1991a, 1991b; McCracken 1989; Walker et al. 1992). Furthermore, because of their fame, celebrities serve not only to create and maintain attention, but also to achieve high recall rates for marcoms messages in today's highly cluttered environments (Croft, et al 1996; Friedman and Friedman 1979; Kamen, et al. 1975; Kamins, et al. 1989; Ohanian 1991; O'Mahony and Meenaghan

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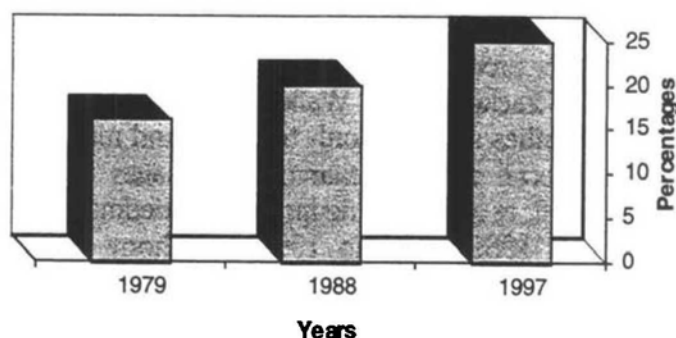
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1997). Initially, this strategy seems a no-risk/all-gain situation, *but*, as with any dynamic marketing communication strategy, there are potential hazards. Individuals can change, and endorsement relations can sour. In a sense, celebrity endorsement strategy can be a two-edged sword, which makes selecting a celebrity endorser from innumerable alternatives in the presence of potential pitfalls very challenging. In order to ease this challenge, this paper explores the celebrity endorsement literature.

### Historical Development

The use of celebrities in marcoms is not a recent phenomenon (Kaikati 1987). Celebrities have been endorsing products since the late nineteenth century. Such an example from the early days of utilisation involves Queen Victoria in association with Cadbury's Cocoa (Sherman 1985). The emergence of cinema was to extend the scope of endorsement as an advertising technique, even though its present day popularity owes much to the growth of commercial radio in the 1930s and to commercial television in the 1950s (McDonough 1995). In those days, supply of 'stars' (i.e. potential endorsers) was limited (Kaikati 1987), as it was viewed askance that 'stars' should invest their prestige on the flickering cathode ray tube as mere 'brand presenters'. For this reason, advertisers were restricted in their search for 'stars' that were exactly right due to their lack of availability. From the late 1970's, supply of 'stars' has increased as a result of the deflowering of most 'virgin' celebrities who had previously refused to cloud their image with endorsements (Thompson 1978). Notably, as the number of film and television roles has expanded, any perceived shame in commercial exploitation has faded, which, in turn, allows advertisers greater choice in the celebrity selection process.

Estimates about utilising celebrity endorsers in marketing communication activities have risen markedly (see Figure-1). In 1979, celebrity endorsers' use in commercials was estimated as one in every six advertisements (Howard 1979). By 1988, estimates were one in five (Motavalli 1988). Shimp (1997) claimed that around 25% of all US-based commercials utilise celebrities.



**Figure-1: Estimates of Utilising Celebrity Endorsers in All Commercials**

From a UK perspective, a report in *Marketing* (February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1996) indicated that advertising which used celebrities was 'a key to gaining national headlines' in 1995. In terms of monetary value of celebrity endorsements, Lane (1996) estimated that US companies paid more than \$1 billion to athletes, *not all celebrity endorsers*, for endorsement deals and licensing rights in 1996. It seems safe to argue that utilising celebrities within commercials has reached such a level that it can be accepted as a fairly common marcom strategy.

This paper regards celebrity utilisation in marcom activities as consisting of the following activities: *spokesperson* (Michael Jordan and Nike Sports Wear), *actor* (Richard Wilson and Flora), *endorsement* (Gary Lineker and Walkers Crisps), and, *testimonial* (David Ginola and L'oreal Elvive). McCracken's (1989) definition of a celebrity endorser, "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement (marcoms)," is useful, because when celebrities are depicted in marcoms, they bring their own culturally related meanings thereto, irrespective of the required promotional role.

### Celebrity versus Non-Celebrity Endorsers

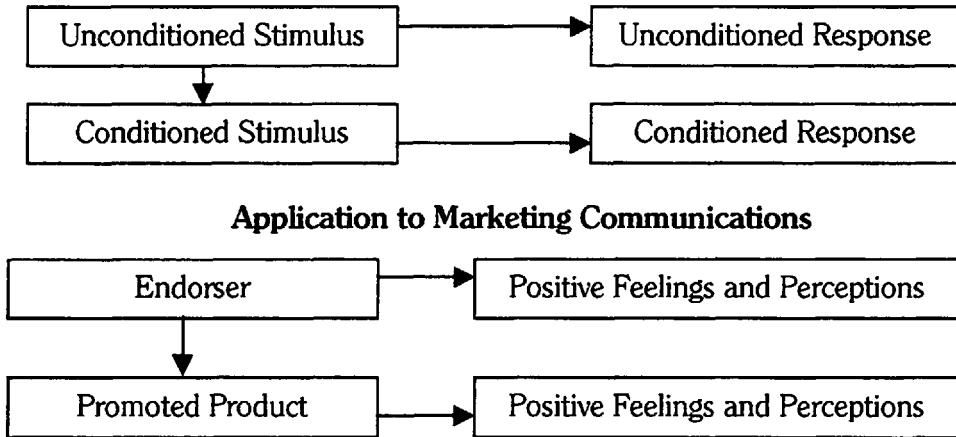
Companies have a great controlling power over created spokespersons since they develop these characters. They can build characters which are congruent with their brands and target audiences, and ensure that these characters are endorsing only one particular product (Tom, et al. 1992). On the other hand, in the case of celebrity endorsers, companies have limited control over the celebrity's persona as they have created their public persona over the years. Indeed, Tom et al.'s (1992) results proved that created endorsers were more effective in creating a link to the product than celebrity endorsers. They attributed these results for single utilisation of created endorsers with the brand over a long time period and their specific persona representing the brand characteristics. The authors based their findings on the classical conditioning paradigm.

According to this paradigm, in marcoms context (see Figure-2), consumers learn the association between an unconditional stimulus (endorser) and a conditional stimulus (product) through repeated exposure. The association is much stronger with original material (created spokesperson) than with popular material since the popular material (celebrity endorser) is not just linked to a promoted product, but with many other things.

In other words, the linkage is strong in created spokespersons, as it is unique, whereas the linkage is weak in the case of celebrity endorsers because of other associations.

Mehta (1994) also found that there were no statistically significant differences in attitudes towards advertising, brand and intentions to purchase endorsed brand between celebrity and non-celebrity endorsement situations, but differences were found in cognitive responses generated by receivers. In the non-celebrity conditions, receivers focused more on the brand and its features

whereas in the celebrity condition receivers concentrated on the celebrity in advertising. On the contrary, Atkin and Block (1983) and Petty, et al. (1983) found that celebrity endorsers produced more positive attitudes towards advertising and greater purchase intentions than a non-celebrity endorser.



Source: Adapted from Tom et al. 1992.

**Figure-2: Classical Conditioning Paradigm in Marketing Communications Context**

In order to assess the economic worth of celebrity endorsers, Agrawal and Kamakura (1995) and Mathur, Mathur and Rangan (1997) conducted two interesting studies. The authors tried to assess the impact of celebrity endorsement contracts on the expected profitability of a firm(s) by using Event Study Methodology, which is used in order to identify the valuation effects of marketing decisions (Mathur, et al. 1997). Both study findings emphasised the effectiveness of use of celebrity endorsers.

Even though Michael Jackson turned out to be a disaster for Pepsi Co., it had acquired 8% increase in sales in 1984, the first year of its contract with Mr. Jackson (Gabor et al. 1987) in a industry where a 1% rise in sales is equivalent to millions of dollars. Although Pepsi Co. had many bad experiences with its celebrity endorsers (e.g. Michael Jackson – alleged child molestation, Madonna - her album called Like a Prayer), it still uses celebrity endorsers (e.g. the Spice Girls). Indeed, *Advertising Age International* (Aug. 29, 1997) reports that Pepsi Co.'s management attributed its 2% global market share increase to the British pop group 'Spice Girls'.

In the light of academic findings and company reports, it is safe to argue that celebrity endorsers are more effective than non-celebrity endorsers in generating all desirable outcomes (attitudes towards advertising, and endorsed brand, intentions to purchase, and in fact actual sales) when companies utilise

celebrities whose public persona match with the products and target audiences and who have not endorsed products previously.

### Pros and Cons of Celebrity Endorsement Strategy

Although the potential benefits of utilising celebrity endorsers are significant, so are the costs and risks. This section of the paper will first explore advantages of the celebrity endorsement strategy, and then potential hazards. Table-1 depicts potential advantages and hazards of celebrity endorsement strategy as well as providing some preventive tactics.

**Table 1. Pros and Cons of Celebrity Endorsement Strategy**

Potential Advantages	Potential Hazards	Preventive Tactics
Increased attention	Overshadow the brand	Pre-testing and careful planning
Image polishing	Public controversy	Buying insurance and putting provision clauses in contracts
Brand introduction	Image change and overexposure	Explaining what is their role and putting clause to restrict endorsements for other brands
Brand repositioning	Image change and loss of public recognition	Examining what life-cycle stage the celebrity is in and how long this stage is likely to continue
Underpin global campaigns	Expensive	Selecting celebrities who are appropriate for global target audience, not because they are 'hot' in all market audiences.

Increasing competition for consumer consciousness and new product proliferation have encouraged marketers to use attention-creating media stars to assist product marketing. Moreover, recent technological innovations such as remote control television, video control systems, and cable and satellite diffusion have served to increase consumer power over programmed advertisements (Croft, Dean and Kitchen 1996). This increased control or power makes advertising more challenging. Usage of celebrity endorsement strategy may ease this threat by helping create and maintain consumer attention to advertisements. Celebrities also help advertisements *stand out* from surrounding clutter, therefore improving communicative ability by cutting through excess noise in a communication process (Sherman 1985). If a company image has been tarnished, hiring a popular celebrity is one potential solution.

At times a celebrity is chosen and a new product designed around the person since this strategy can pay huge dividends by giving products instant personality and appeal (Dickenson 1996). Some of the initial positioning strategies for

products fail to draw expected interest from consumers. Companies can hire celebrities who have necessary meanings to establish new positioning for existing products.

Some of the most difficult aspects of global marketing to grasp are host countries' cultural 'roadblocks' such as time, space, language, relationships, power, risk, masculinity, femininity and many others (Mooij 1994; Hofstede 1984). Celebrity endorsements are a powerful device by which to enter foreign markets. Celebrities with world-wide popularity can help companies break through many such roadblocks. Pizza Hut International increased its global market share by utilising global celebrities such as supermodels Cindy Crawford and Linda Evangelista, and Baywatch star Pamela Anderson.

Despite the preceding potential benefits, there are still many potential hazards in utilising celebrities as part of a marcoms campaign. Benefits of using celebrities can reverse markedly if they, for example, suddenly change image, drop in popularity, get into a situation of moral turpitude, lose credibility by over-endorsing, or overshadow endorsed products (Cooper 1984; Kaikati 1987). It has been found that negative information about a celebrity endorser not only influences consumers' perception of the celebrity, but also the endorsed product (Klebbba and Unger 1982; Till and Shimp 1995).

While a celebrity can effectively draw attention to an advertisement, his or her impact on other variables-brand awareness, recall of copy points and message arguments, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions-must also be considered (Belch and Belch 1995). A common concern is that consumers will focus their attention on the celebrity and fail to notice the brand being promoted (Rossiter and Percy 1987). As Cooper (1984) puts it, "the product, not the celebrity, must be the star."

Embarrassment has occurred for some companies when their spokesperson or celebrity has become embroiled in controversy (Hertz Corporation and O.J. Simpson). Celebrities may disappear out of the media flashlights before the end of a contractual term as was the case in Schick Inc.'s relation with Mark Spitz, winner of seven Olympic gold medals (Ziegel 1983). It is not usual for celebrities to alter their image, but when this occurs it can spell failure for a campaign.

Another important issue is that of celebrity greed and subsequent overexposure when a celebrity becomes an endorser for many diverse products (e.g. the Spice Girls in 1997). If a celebrity's image ties in with many brands, impact and identity with each product may lessen since the relationship between the celebrity and a particular brand is not distinctive (Mowen and Brown 1981). This can not only compromise the value of the celebrity in the eyes of star's fans (Graham 1989), but also can make consumers overtly aware of the true nature of endorsement which has less to do with brand/product attributes, and more to do with generous compensation for the celebrity, leading consumers to overt cynicism about their motives (Cooper 1984; Tripp, et al. 1994)). Because of these facts, companies and celebrities alike must be careful not to kill the goose that may potentially lay golden eggs in case they become rotten.

As can be inferred from this quick overview, selecting celebrity endorsers is not an easy task. Many scholars have attempted to construct models to aid in selecting celebrity endorsers. Carl I. Hovland and his associates presented one of the earliest models in 1953. Following his initial Source Credibility Model, three additional models are cited: the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire 1985), the Product Match-Up Hypothesis (Forkan 1980; Kamins 1989, 1990), and the Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken 1989). The following section explains these models.

### **Models on Celebrity Endorsement Strategy**

The Source Credibility Model and Source Attractiveness Model are categorised under the generic name of Source Models since these two models basically inform and reflect research of the Social Influence Theory/Source Effect Theory which argues that various characteristics of a perceived communication source may have a beneficial effect on message receptivity (Kelman 1961; Meenaghan 1995). These two models have been applied to the celebrity endorsement process although they were originally developed for the study of communication.

#### ***The Source Credibility Model***

This model contends that the effectiveness of a message depends on perceived level of *expertise* and *trustworthiness* in an endorser (Dholakia and Sternthal 1977; Hovland, et al. 1953; Hovland and Weiss 1951; Ohanian 1991; Solomon 1996). Information from a credible source (e.g. celebrity) can influence beliefs, opinions, attitudes and/or behaviour through a process called *internalisation*, which occurs when receivers accept a source influence in terms of their personal attitude and value structures.

*Trustworthiness* refers to the honesty, integrity and believability of an endorser. It depends on target audience perceptions. Advertisers capitalise on the value of trustworthiness by selecting endorsers who are widely regarded as honest, believable, and dependable (Shimp 1997). Smith (1973) argues that consumers view untrustworthy celebrity endorsers, regardless of their other qualities, as questionable message sources. Friedman, et al. (1978) reasoned that trustworthiness is the major determinant of source credibility and then tried to discover which source attributes are correlated with trust. Their findings showed that likeability was the most important attribute of trust. As a result of their findings, authors urged advertisers to select personalities who are well liked when a trustworthy celebrity is desired to endorse brands. On the other hand, Ohanian (1991) found that trustworthiness of a celebrity was not significantly related to customers' intentions to buy an endorsed brand.

Desphande and Stayman (1994) confirmed the hypothesis that endorser's ethnic status would affect endorser trustworthiness and as a result brand attitudes. These interactions occur because people trust individuals who are similar to them. One managerial implication of their findings is that when



targeting particular ethnic groups (e.g. Africans, Europeans, and Asians), ethnic background should be carefully evaluated.

*Expertise* is defined as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions. It refers to the knowledge, experience or skills possessed by an endorser. It does not really matter whether an endorser is an expert; all that matters is how the target audience (Hovland, et al. 1953; Ohanian 1991) perceives the endorser. Expert sources influence perceptions of the product's quality. A source/celebrity that is more expert has been found to be more persuasive (Aaker and Myers 1987) and to generate more intentions to buy the brand (Ohanian 1991). On the other hand, Speck, Schumann and Thompson (1988) found that expert celebrities produced higher recall of product information than non-expert celebrities; but, the difference was not statistically significant.

A possible exception to the belief that *the more credible a source is, the more persuasive the source is likely to be*, has been pointed out by Karlins and Abelson (1970) in terms of the cognitive response theory which claims that a message recipient's initial opinion is an important determinant of influence. This theory advocates that if individuals have a positive predisposition toward the message issue, a source who lacks credibility can be more persuasive than a high credibility source, since those favouring the advocacy will feel a greater need to ensure that a position with which they agree is being adequately represented (Aaker and Myers 1987). On the other hand, if individuals have a negative disposition, a high credibility source is more persuasive than a less credible source since the highly credible source is thought to inhibit individuals' own thought activation and facilitate acceptance of message thoughts. The cognitive response theory has been reinforced through two empirical studies (Harmon and Coney 1982; Sternthal, et al. 1978).

Findings in source credibility studies are equivocal. What factors construct source credibility and what factors are more important than others in certain situations is still ambivalent. As source credibility research regards the celebrity endorsement process as uni-dimensional, it is unable to provide a well-grounded explanation of important factors. Although source credibility is an important factor for advertisers in selecting endorsers, since credibility has been proved to have a significant and direct effect on attitudes and behavioural intentions, it is not the only factor that should be considered in selecting celebrity endorsers.

### *Measuring Source Credibility*

Quite naturally, it is reasonable to think that a source's credibility is totally subjective, but research shows that in spite of individual preferences, a high degree of agreement exists among individuals (Berscheid, et al. 1971). Truth-of-Consensus method is used in order to assess a source's credibility and attractiveness. The method is based on the premise that individual's judgements of attractiveness and credibility are naturally subjective, but these judgements are shaped through Gestalt principles of person perception rather than single characteristics (Patzner 1983). If a statistically significant number of individuals

rate an endorser as low or high in attractiveness or credibility, then, the endorser is interpreted to represent the rated level of attractiveness or credibility, at least for research purposes.

After extensive literature review and statistical tests, Ohanian (1990) constructed a tri-component celebrity endorser credibility scale presented in Table-2.

**Table 2. Source Credibility Scale**

Attractiveness	Trustworthiness	Expertise
Attractive-Unattractive	Trustworthy-Untrustworthy	Expert-Not Expert
Classy-Not Classy	Dependable-Undependable	Experienced-Inexperienced
Beautiful-Ugly	Honest-Dishonest	Knowledgeable-
Elegant-Plain	Reliable-Unreliable	Unknowledgeable
Sexy-Not Sexy	Sincere-Insincere	Qualified-Unqualified
		Skilled-Unskilled

This scale assumes that credibility - and consequently the effectiveness - of celebrity endorsers is bound with given characteristic dimensions, but it is argued that the celebrity world consists of much more than just attractive and credible individuals (McCracken 1989).

### ***The Source Attractiveness Model***

Advertisers have chosen celebrity endorsers on the basis of their attractiveness to gain from dual effects of celebrity status and physical appeal (Singer 1983). In order to discern the importance of attractiveness, one only has to watch television or look at print advertisements. Most advertisements portray attractive people. Consumers tend to form positive stereotypes about such people and, in addition, research has shown physically attractive communicators are more successful at changing beliefs (Baker and Churchill 1977; Chaiken 1979; Debevec and Kernan 1984) and generating purchase intentions (Friedman et al. 1976; Petroschius and Crocker 1989; Petty and Cacioppo 1980) than their unattractive counterparts.

It is contended that the effectiveness of a message depends on *similarity*, *familiarity* and *liking* for an endorser (McGuire 1985). *Similarity* is defined as a supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver of the message, *familiarity* as knowledge of the source through exposure, and *likability* as affection for the source as a result of the source's physical appearance and behaviour. Attractiveness does not mean simply physical attractiveness, but includes any number of virtuous characteristics that consumers might perceive in a celebrity endorser: for example, intellectual skills, personality properties, lifestyles, or athletic prowess.

A generalised application to advertising has been suggested that 'physical attractiveness' of a communicator determines the effectiveness of persuasive

communication through a process called *identification* which is assumed to occur when information from an attractive source is accepted as a result of desire to identify with such endorsers (Cohen and Golden 1972).

Petty and Cacioppo (1980) manipulated attractiveness of endorsers of a shampoo advertisement in order to test the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) for comprehending effectiveness of advertising message types. The ELM perspective, which argues that persuasion under high and low involvement conditions varies. For instance, the quality of arguments contained in a message has a greater impact on persuasion under high involvement conditions, whereas under low involvement conditions peripheral cues - source attractiveness, credibility - have greater impact on persuasion (Petty, Cacioppo and Goldman 1981). Contrary to Petty and Cacioppo's (1980) expectations, endorser attractiveness was equally important under both high and low involvement conditions. The authors argued that in addition to serving as a peripheral cue, the physical appearance of endorsers (especially their hair) might have served as a persuasive visual testimony for product effectiveness under low involvement conditions. Under high involvement conditions, the physical attractiveness of endorsers may have served as a persuasive product-related cue.

In 1983, Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann replicated the earlier study (1980), but they employed an experimental peripheral cue that could not be constructed as a product-relevant cue; Edge disposable razors. Findings revealed an interaction between involvement level and endorser type. Under low-involvement conditions, the endorser type had a significant impact on attitudes towards the product though no impact was found on behavioural intentions. Regarding recall and recognition measures, findings indicated that exposure to celebrity endorsers increased recall of the product category under low-involvement conditions, but it did not affect recall measures under high involvement. The endorser type manipulation revealed that celebrities had marginally significant impact on brand name recall over typical citizens. Use of celebrity endorsers reduced brand name recognition under low-involvement conditions but not under high involvement. Petty, et al. (1983) reasoned that this rather awkward finding occurred as people are more interested in the product category under high involvement situations and may be more motivated to assess what the brand, rather than the personalities, are offering.

Kahle and Homer (1985) manipulated celebrity physical attractiveness, and likability, and then measured attitude and purchase intentions on the same product; Edge razors. Findings showed that participants exposed to an attractive celebrity liked the product more than participants exposed to an unattractive celebrity. The same interaction was not statistically significant for likeable endorsers. Recall for the brand was greater both in attractive and likeable celebrity conditions. Surprisingly, unlikable celebrities performed better on recognition measures than likeable and attractive celebrities. Findings also indicated that an attractive celebrity created more purchase intentions than an unattractive celebrity, but controversially an unlikable celebrity produced more intentions to buy the product than a likeable celebrity.

Caballero, et al. (1989) and Till and Busler's (1998) studies present evidence that positive feelings towards advertising and products do not necessarily translate into actual behaviour or purchase intentions. A possible reason for the lack of celebrity endorsers effect on intentions to purchase is that celebrity endorsement seems to work on the cognitive and affective components of attitudes rather than the behavioural components (Baker and Churchill 1977; Fireworker and Friedman 1977).

In researching gender interactions between endorsers and target audiences, Debevec and Kernan (1984) found that attractive female models generated more enhanced attitudes than attractive male models accross both genders, but particularly among males. Inversely, Caballero, et al. (1989) found that males showed greater intentions to buy from male endorsers and females hold greater intentions to purchase from female endorsers. Baker and Churchill (1977) found a rather unexpected interaction amongst female models, product type and intentions to purchase products among male subjects. When the product endorsed was coffee, an unattractive female model created more intentions to buy the product than her attractive counterpart among male subjects whereas when it was perfume/aftershave, male subjects reacted more positively to an attractive female model. On the other hand, Petroschius and Crocker (1989) found that spokesperson gender had no impact on attitudes towards advertisements and no major impact on intentions to buy products. It is apparent that academic findings regarding gender or cross gender interactions between endorsers and target audiences are mixed and unable to provide any direction to practitioners.

Patzer (1985) asserted that "physical attractiveness is an informational cue; involves effects that are subtle, pervasive, and inescapable; produces a definite pattern of verifiable differences; and transcends culture in its effects." Patzer criticises the use of average looking endorsers and also the reasoning behind this strategy - likes attract - which states that consumers react positively to communicators who look like them. Even if, Patzer argues, the "likes attract" hypothesis is correct, people usually inflate their own attractiveness so that attractive endorsers should be more effective than average looking counterparts.

A well known quotation from Aristotle (Ohanian 1991), *'Beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction,'* is suitable in this context for the sake of appreciating the effectiveness of attractiveness since most Western societies place a high premium on physical attractiveness. People tend to assume that people who are good looking are smarter, more 'with it' and so on. This is termed the *'halo effect'*, which occurs when people who rank high on one dimension are assumed to excel on other dimensions as well. This effect can be explained in terms of *'consistency theory'*, which states that people are more comfortable when all of their judgements about a person go together (Solomon 1996).

In sum, there is no doubt that attractive celebrity endorsers enhance attitudes towards advertising and brands, but whether they are able to create purchase intentions is ambiguous since the majority of studies found that attractive

celebrity endorsers are not able to initiate behavioural intent, while other studies found that celebrities are able to create purchase intentions. Two ways to increase behavioural intentions to endorsed products may be to choose attractive celebrities whose images match product image with target audiences and/or to deliver messages in a two-sided format where an endorser states both negative and positive attributes of a brand. Of course, the importance of negative claims should be underplayed.

### *Performer Q Ratings*

The Q (quotient) rating reflects a celebrity's popularity among those who recognise the celebrity (Solomon 1996). Marketing Evaluations Inc., a US based firm, calculates roughly 1500 well-known figures' familiarity and likability among consumers every year. The firm sends questionnaires to a demographically representative national panel of the US population. According to Shimp (1997) individuals are asked to answer two simple questions in these surveys: (1) Have you heard of this person? (2) If you have, do you rate him/her; poor, fair, good, very good or one of your favourites? A celebrity's Q rating is calculated by dividing the percentage of the total sample rating the celebrity as 'one of their favourites' by the percentage of sample who know the celebrity (Shimp 1997). A celebrity may not be widely recognised, but still could attain a high Q rating, as individuals who do recognise them may also like her/him. Inversely, a celebrity may be widely recognised, but could have low Q rating since respondents may not like them. Basically, the Q rating of a celebrity answers the question of popularity among those familiar with him/her. For example, if the Spice Girls were known by 94 percent of people surveyed and 47 percent mentioned them as one of their favourites, their Q rating, expressed without decimal points, would be 50 ( $47 / 94 = 0.50$ ).

Rossiter and Percy (1987) argue that knowing a celebrity's Q rating may not only be beneficial in cases where particular audiences are targeted, but it may also enable companies to save on the cost of hiring a big celebrity name who might not be popular among target audiences, such as Michael Jackson for the 60+ male target audience. Q ratings of celebrities could be an initial filtering layer in selecting celebrity endorsers.

### *The Product Match-Up Hypothesis*

The Product Match-up Hypothesis maintains that messages conveyed by celebrity image and the product message should be congruent for effective advertising (Forkan 1980; Kamins 1990). The determinant of the match between celebrity and brand depends on the degree of perceived 'fit' between brand (brand name, attributes) and celebrity image (Misra and Beatty 1990). Advertising a product via a celebrity who has a relatively high product congruent image leads to greater advertiser and celebrity believability relative to an advertisement with a less congruent product/spokesperson image (Levy 1959; Kamins and Gupta 1994; Kotler 1997).

According to Kahle and Homer (1985), the Match-up Hypothesis of celebrity endorser selection fits well with Social Adaptation Theory. According to this theory, the adaptive significance of information will determine its impact. Similarly, Kamins (1990) argues that an attractive model's inclusion in an advertisement may in some consumer minds intrinsically prompt the idea that use of a brand endorsed by a celebrity will enhance attractiveness as it did for the celebrity, hence, provide adaptive information.

In order to emphasise the importance of proper match-up, Watkins (1989) quoted a senior vice president of a leading beverage company in which the vice president states that celebrities are an unnecessary risk unless they are very logically related to products. Another practitioner quoted by Bertrand (1992) argued that if there is a combination of an appropriate tie-in between the company's product and the celebrity's persona, reputation or the line of work the celebrity is in, then advertisers can get both things, the fame and the tie-in, working for them. Studies report that consumers also expect congruity between celebrity endorsers' perceived images and products they endorse (Callcoat and Phillips 1996; Ohanian 1991; O'Mahony and Meenaghan 1997). Thus, it can be concluded that all parties - practitioners, and consumers - involved in the process expect some degree of match between celebrities and brands.

Alternatively, the absence of connection between celebrity endorsers and products endorsed may lead consumers to the belief that the celebrity has been bought, i.e. handsomely paid to endorse the product or service. Evans (1988) claimed that the use of celebrities, if celebrities do not have a distinct and specific relationship to the product they are endorsing, tends to produce, what he called, the 'vampire effect' which occurs when the audience remembers the celebrity, but not the product or service. According to Evans (1988) "celebrities suck the life-blood of the product dry" when a distinct and specific relationship does not exist between the product and the celebrity.

The emphasis of product match-up research has been on the proper match between a celebrity and a product based on celebrity physical attractiveness. Specifically, the match-up hypothesis predicts that attractive celebrities are more effective when endorsing products used to enhance one's attractiveness (Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990). Findings also suggest that characteristics of a celebrity interact positively with the nature of the product endorsed (Friedman and Friedman 1979; Kamins 1990; Lynch and Schuler 1994). Unexpectedly, Kamins and Gupta (1994) found that the match-up between a celebrity endorser and the brand endorsed also enhanced the celebrity endorser's believability and attractiveness. The authors reasoned that this effect occurred because of the celebrity endorser's familiarity since it is believed to interact with identification and internalisation processes of social influence. Two other studies (Ohanian 1991; Till and Busler 1998) revealed that special attention should be made to employ celebrities who have direct connection with their endorsed product and who are perceived to be experts by the target audiences.

Friedman and Friedman (1978) and Atkin and Block (1983) reasoned that the type of endorser may interact with the type of product endorsed and found

that celebrity endorsers are appropriate where product purchases involve high social and psychological risk. Consistently, Packard (1957) suggested that celebrity endorsement strategy is effective in selling products, and services as status symbols since celebrities are individuals of indisputably high status and in endorsements, such individuals invite consumers to join them in enjoying products. On the other hand, Callcoat and Phillips (1996) reported that consumers are generally influenced by spokespersons if products are inexpensive, low-involving and few differences are perceived among available brands. Inversely, Kamins (1989) and Kamins, et al. (1989) found that celebrity endorsers in a two-sided context were able to generate desired effects on such high financial and performance risk products/services as management consultation and computers. These seemingly paradoxical findings lead to the conclusion that advertising is a powerful mechanism of meaning transfer such that virtually any product can be made to take any meaning (McCracken's 1987; O'Mahony and Meenaghan 1997).

DeSarbo and Harshman (1985) argue that neither the source - credibility and attractiveness - nor the match-up research is adequate in providing a heuristic for appropriate celebrity endorser selection. The authors state three problems related to these models;

- they do not provide measures to cope with multidimensionality of source effects.
- these approaches ignore overtone-meaning-interactions between a celebrity and the product endorsed.
- there is a lack of quantified empirical basis for purposed dimensions.

As a result, it is clear that Source Effect Models and the Match-up Hypothesis fail to explain important factors about celebrity endorsement. Because of the limitations in the relevant dimensions, the real world applicability of the Match-up Hypothesis is also limited since, being unable to identify and measure which dimensions are valid for a particular product, it is almost impossible to develop the needed match-up between a product and a celebrity. Although the Match-up Hypothesis recovers some of the pitfalls of Source Effectiveness Models, such as any celebrity who is attractive, credible and/or likeable could sell any product, it still disregards impacts of a celebrity endorser's cultural meanings in endorsements. In considering contrary findings and opinions, it becomes clear that the Match-up Hypothesis may have to extend beyond attractiveness and credibility towards a consideration and matching of the entire image of the celebrity with the endorsed brand and the target audience.

### ***The Meaning Transfer Models***

Celebrity endorsers bring their own symbolic meanings to the endorsement process. The cultural meanings residing in a celebrity go beyond the person and are passed on to the products (McCracken 1989; Brierley 1995). The number and variety of meanings contained in celebrities are extensive. Distinctions of

status, class, gender and age as well as personality and lifestyle types, are represented in the pool of celebrities who present a varied and subtle palette of meaning potentially at the disposal of the marketing system.

According to Fowles (1996), advertisers' rationale for hiring celebrities to endorse products is that people consume images of celebrities and advertisers hope that people will also consume products associated with celebrities. Similarly, Fortini-Campbell (1992) argues that products, just like people, have personalities and claims that people consume brands with personality characteristics like their own or ones they aspire to possess - in celebrities, friends or family members.

Celebrity endorsements are special examples of a more general process of meaning transfer (McCracken 1989). In this process, there is a conventional path for the movement of cultural meaning in consumer societies. This process involves three stages; the formation of celebrity image, transfer of meaning from celebrity to product, and finally from product to consumers. According to McCracken (1988), meaning begins as something resident in the culturally constituted world, in the physical and social world constituted by categories and principles of the prevailing culture.

Hirschman (1980) argues that symbolic meanings are created and introduced into the consuming sector by a production process. This production process involves many participants. For example, societal introduction of a new apparel symbol would include the designer, manufacturer, and retail store buyer. Playing tangential roles in the assignment would be the fashion trade media, the mass media, advertising agencies, and retail sales personnel among others. Similarly, McCracken (1986) argues that advertising is one of the ways to move meanings from culture, to consumers, to goods. This movement is accomplished by the efforts of promotional agencies.

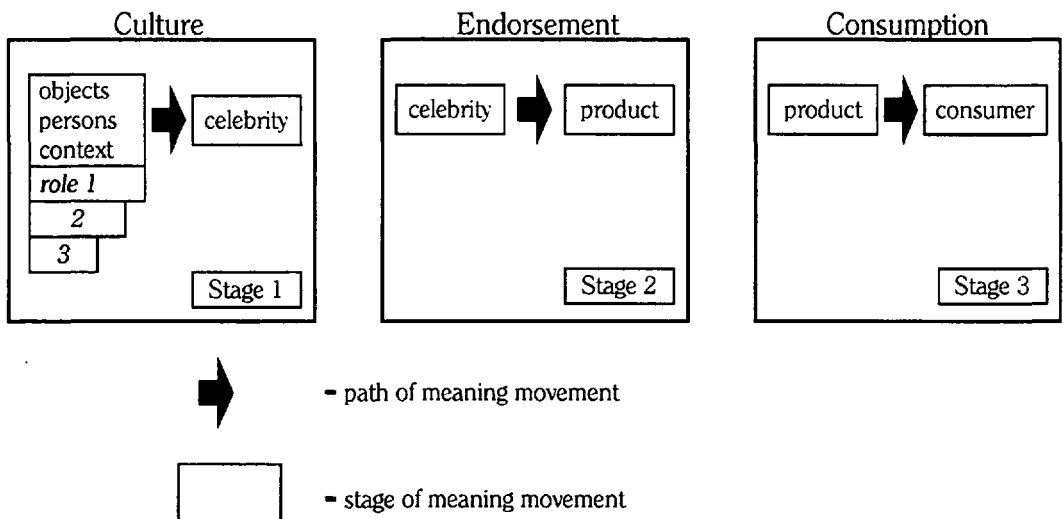
Advertising works as a method of meaning by bringing consumer needs and the representation of the culturally constituted world together within the frame of a particular advertisement. In conjunction with McCracken's (1986) argument, Domzal and Kernan (1992) claim that advertising is an integral part of social systems, whose function is to communicate the culturally constructed meaning of products to consumers. According to the authors, consumers learn meanings by interpreting product definitions, which in this case are implicit in promotional content.

The second stage of meaning movement - from celebrity to product - shapes the product's personality (Tom, et al. 1992). The consumer, who must glimpse in a moment of recognition an essential similarity between the elements and the product in the advertisement, performs transferring meanings from celebrities to products. Once meanings have been moved into goods, they must also be moved into consumers. Levy (1959) argued that consumers are able to recognise symbolic properties of products and transfer them into meanings for themselves. Similarly, McCracken (1989) claims that the movement of meanings from consumer goods to the individual consumer is accomplished through the efforts of consumers who must take possession of these meanings and put them



to work in the construction of their self-image. In other words, meaning movement from goods to consumer is achieved through rituals. Ritual is a kind of social action devoted to manipulation of cultural meaning for purposes of collective and individual communication and categorisation. Ritual is an opportunity to affirm, evoke, assign or revise conventional symbols of cultural order (Mick 1986). McCracken (1986) argues that four types of ritual are used to move cultural meaning from goods to consumers; exchange rituals, possession rituals, grooming rituals, and divestment rituals.

Figure 3 illustrates McCracken's model of meaning movement from celebrities to consumers. In stage 1, endorsement gives the ad access to a special category of person. It makes available individuals charged with detailed and powerful meanings. Celebrities, in this regard, are very different from anonymous models. Celebrities have particular configurations of meanings that are drawn from the roles they assume in television, film, military, athletic or other careers. They own these meanings because they have created them on the public stage by dint of intense and repeated performance. In stage 2, an advertising agency first must determine the symbolic properties sought for the product and then must choose a celebrity who approximates or represents the proper symbolic properties. Once a celebrity is chosen, an advertising campaign must identify and deliver these meanings to the product. The ad must be designed to suggest essential similarity between the celebrity and the product so that the consumer can take the second step of meaning transfer.



Source: McCracken 1989

**Figure 3. Meaning Movement and the Endorsement Process**

In stage 3, celebrities play a role in the final stage of meaning transfer because they have created the self. They have done it publicly, in the first stage, out of bits and pieces of every role in their careers. The well-constructed self-image

makes the celebrities a kind of exemplary, inspirational figure to consumers. Levy (1959) argued that people aim to enhance their sense of self and behave in ways that are consistent with their image or their inspirational models. Similarly, Batra, et al. (1996) argue that people regard their belongings as part of themselves and acquire or reinforce their identities (self) through goods they buy and what these goods symbolically represent. In other words, consumers are themselves constantly moving symbolic properties out of consumer goods into their lives to construct aspects of self-image. It is not surprising that consumers admire celebrities who have accomplished construction of self-image well. In a sense, consumers are trying to perform their own stage one construction of the self-image out of meanings supplied by previous and present roles and potential meanings accessible to them (McCracken 1989).

There is no necessary or motivated relationship between meanings and products/brands as McCracken (1987) notes. Consumer goods, charged with cultural significance, serve as dramatic props and meaning sources. They provide ideas of gender, class, age, or lifestyle to individuals. McCracken (1987) acknowledges that certain products lend themselves to particular meanings (e.g. chocolates and social sentiments), but he argues that advertising is such a powerful mechanism of meaning transfer that virtually any product can be made to take any meanings.

McCracken's (1989) model of meaning transfer may at first seem a merely theoretical concept, but its replicability to real life was demonstrated by two studies by Langmeyer and Walker (1991a, 1991b). They (1991a) used a response elicitation (tell us what you think) format, with a celebrity endorser - Cher, a celebrity endorsed product - Scandinavian Health Spas, and a non-endorsed product - bath towels, as stimuli to identify the meaning in the celebrity endorsed brand and the endorser and to document the transfer of meaning from endorser to product. Results demonstrated that Cher possessed symbolic meanings (e.g. sexy, attractive, healthy, independent) and indicated that Cher's meanings were transferred to the Scandinavian Health Spas. Language used to describe associations between Cher and Scandinavian Health Span was consistent. Furthermore, findings showed that bath towels (unendorsed product) also had symbolic meanings which were diffuse and undifferentiated (e.g. soft, gentle, clean, comfortable). Langmeyer and Walker (1991b) further explored meanings communicated by celebrity endorsers - Madonna and Christie Brinkley, and by products - bath towels (an unendorsed commodity product), VCRs (an unendorsed technical product with high information needs), and blue jeans (an endorsed high-image product). Additionally, authors contemplated the impact of combining celebrities with products. Study results revealed that Madonna and Christie Brinkley are perceived differently by subjects (101 undergraduate students) and when celebrities combined with products, these perceived differences affected meanings perceived in products. Before being endorsed by celebrities, products had sole product category images, but when endorsed by celebrities, they took on the images of each celebrity. Langmeyer and Walker's findings empirically support the argument originally put forward by McCracken

(1989) that celebrities embody various meanings and these meanings are passed on to products with endorsements.

In conclusion, as McCracken (1989) suggested, advertisers should explore the symbolism that encompasses a celebrity to determine whether these meanings are desirable for brands since the effectiveness of the endorser depends, in part, on the meanings he or she brings to the endorsement process. Which meanings are chosen for the product will depend on the participants (e.g. client, account executive, research group, and creative team).

## Conclusion

This paper has identified factors from the academic literature which may have managerial importance for selecting celebrity endorsers. Notably, effectiveness of celebrity endorsers is found to be moderated by several factors in the literature; celebrity attractiveness and credibility, product-celebrity match, message and product type, level of involvement, number of endorsements by celebrities, target receiver characteristics, and overall meanings (e.g. personality, values, standards) attached to celebrities. Besides these factors, economic visibility of endorsers, regulative issues, compatibility with overall marketing strategy, and potential risks must be simultaneously also considered.

In sum, celebrity endorsement strategy can be an effective competitive weapon in mature and saturated markets in order to differentiate products from competitors' since there is a heavy advertising clutter and almost no room for actual product differentiation in markets, as long as the 'right' celebrity is found. Findings in the literature are mixed and inconsistent regarding the 'right' celebrity. Is the 'right' celebrity someone who is attractive, credible, dynamic, or sociable? Or, is it a combination of all these characteristics? In light of the growing utilisation and the large sums of money spent on celebrity endorsement, answers are needed to help determine formulae which potentially maximise effectiveness of celebrity endorsers. Even though scholars have tried to provide criteria for practitioners on which to base their choices of celebrity endorsers, there is little agreement on what dimension or dimensions are legitimate. There is furthermore a paucity of understanding as to how practitioners make celebrity endorser selection decisions. Thus, it is evident that further research with companies (either clients or senior agency personnel) is needed in order to determine how practitioners select celebrity endorsers.

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