



# Effects of multiple endorsements and consumer–celebrity attachment on attitude and purchase intention

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines consumer–celebrity attachment within multiple endorsement situations. A  $2 \times 2$  factorial design manipulates attachment strength to the celebrity and endorsement situation while controlling for celebrity attractiveness, familiarity and match-up. Results show strong attachment to a celebrity encourages positive attitude towards the advertisement and brand regardless of the number of endorsements. A significant interaction effect is found for purchase intention, suggesting that both attachment and the number of endorsements influence likelihood of purchase. When consumers are more attached to a celebrity and view that celebrity endorsing multiple brands, this negatively impacts their purchase intention. Yet, when consumers have a weak attachment, their purchase intention is increased with multiple endorsements.

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## 1. Introduction

Celebrities are a common feature in the contemporary marketplace, often becoming the face, or image, not only of consumer products and brands, but of organisations themselves. In Australia, for example, Hugh Jackman is the face of Lipton Ice Tea, Nicole Kidman features in ads for Nintendo DS and George Clooney teams up with John Malkovich for Nespresso coffee. Brands make use of well-known and likable celebrities by leveraging the celebrities' equity (Keller, 2008). By pairing a brand with a celebrity, a brand is able to leverage unique and positive secondary brand associations from a celebrity and gain consumer awareness, transfer positive associations tied to the celebrity onto the brand, build brand image and ultimately enhance the endorsed brand's equity (Keller, 2008). Celebrity endorsements lead to higher advertisement recall rates (O'Mahony and Meenaghan, 1997/1998) and improve communication with potential customers by establishing connections between consumers and the advertised brand (Atkin and Block, 1983; Sherman, 1985). Additionally, celebrities aid in breaking down cultural barriers (Mooij, 2004), assist in repositioning brand and company images (Till and Shimp, 1998), and ultimately, improve sales of the endorsed products (Kaikati, 1987). An announcement of a celebrity endorser contract is found to positively affect stock returns, making celebrities a worthwhile investment (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995; Mathur et al., 1997).

Celebrities not only sell products and brands, they in fact exert powerful influence across all facets of popular culture and public life, influencing consumer attitudes and perceptions (Time Inc., 2006). As such, celebrities increasingly are sought as endorsers for several brands within different product categories. For example, former Miss Universe, Jennifer Hawkins, endorses a department store (Myer), lingerie (Lovable), a soft drink (Pepsi), soap (Lux) and make-up (CoverGirl). While many celebrities endorse multiple brands, overexposure is potentially detrimental (Till, 1998). Advertising professionals (Foote and Belding, 1978) suggest selecting an appropriate celebrity endorser with care, so as not to choose a celebrity tarnished by their associations with other products (Mowen and Brown, 1981). Research shows that consumers perceive celebrities who endorse brands in multiple product categories as less credible than those who only endorse one (Mowen and Brown, 1981; Tripp et al., 1994).

## 2. Multiple endorsements and consumer attachment

Much of the endorsement research focuses on what characteristics constitute an effective celebrity endorser, namely in terms of their personal attractiveness (McGuire, 1985), familiarity (Kamins, 1990; Misra and Beatty, 1990), likeability (Erdogan, 1999), credibility, believability and expertise (Ohanian, 1990). Other research examines whether the celebrity endorser's image is consistent with the image of the product, brand or organisation (Kamins, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Lynch and Schuler, 1994; Till and Busler, 1998). Another stream of research assesses the impact of celebrity endorsements for marketing purposes, including

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consumer attitude towards the brand and/or the advertisement and purchase intention (Misra and Beatty, 1990; Lynch and Schuler, 1994; Tripp et al., 1994; Till and Shimp, 1998). Recent research explores the deeper connections between consumers and celebrities. Escalas and Bettman (2009) use McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer model, whereby the symbolic meanings associated with a celebrity are transferred onto the brands the celebrity endorses, and in turn, these meanings are then transferred from the celebrity to consumers through selecting brands that communicate their self-concept, ultimately forming a self-brand connection. Thomson (2006) investigates consumer–celebrity (or human brand) connections through the varying levels of attachment consumers feel for celebrities. Although, Thomson's (2006) study identifies the existence of consumer–celebrity connections, research is yet to investigate whether these celebrity connections influence consumer attitude and purchase intention in an endorsement context.

Although the business case for celebrity endorsement may explain why multiple endorsements by a celebrity are common features in today's marketing world, too little research is devoted to examining the effectiveness of multiple brand endorsements (Mowen and Brown, 1981; Tripp et al., 1994). In addition, the impact of consumer attachment to celebrities on consumer brand evaluations is not known. As research only identifies the existence of consumer–celebrity attachment (Thomson, 2006), it is not known whether consumer attachment to a celebrity affects their attitude towards brands endorsed by that celebrity. While the implicit suggestion of the meaning transfer process (McCracken, 1989) is that a positive relationship exists between consumer attachment to a celebrity and consumer attitude towards brands endorsed by that celebrity, these relationships have not been empirically tested. The influence of attachment within the brand endorsement context is still unknown.

The purpose here is to contribute to the body of marketing research on celebrity endorsements in three areas. Firstly, the multiple endorsement situation is further examined to determine the effectiveness of multiple endorsements by a celebrity. Secondly, the present study extends the research on consumer–celebrity relationships by investigating the degree to which attachment to a celebrity impacts consumers' evaluations of endorsed brands, in terms of their advertisement and brand attitude, and purchase intention. Thirdly, the present study examines the extent to which consumer–celebrity attachment influences consumer attitude towards the advertisements, their attitude towards the brands, and their purchase intention for multiple brands endorsed by a single celebrity.

### 2.1. Celebrity characteristics: attractiveness and congruency

Empirical studies in the area of celebrity endorsement focus on how specific celebrity characteristics influence consumers' evaluations and recall of advertisements as well as the featured products and brands (McGuire, 1985; Misra and Beatty, 1990; Ohanian, 1991; Lynch and Schuler, 1994). The Source Attractiveness Model posits that the effectiveness of a message is dependent on the similarity, familiarity, liking and attractiveness of an endorser (McGuire, 1985). Experimental research demonstrates that attractive communicators are able to generate greater likeability, intent to purchase and higher recall rates for the products and brands endorsed (Kahle and Homer, 1985). Although the Source Attractiveness Model is valuable in researching celebrity endorsement effectiveness, it has received criticism (McCracken, 1989). The model proposes that if the attractiveness condition is satisfied, "any celebrity should serve as a persuasive source for any advertising message" (McCracken, 1989, p. 311). The model identifies the importance of attractiveness but fails to explain the extent to

which a celebrity must be seen to be appropriate for the brand endorsed.

The Match-Up Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990; Misra and Beatty, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Lynch and Schuler, 1994; Till and Busler, 1998) introduces the need for an appropriate fit between the celebrity and the brand being endorsed. The match-up hypothesis occurs when "highly relevant characteristics of the spokesperson are consistent with highly relevant attributes of the brand" (Misra and Beatty, 1990, p. 160). In other words, the spokesperson must be perceived as an appropriate match with the brand and product category in which the brand is located. For example, a muscular spokesperson is seen as congruent when endorsing a stamina-associated product such as Nautilus weight-lifting equipment (Lynch and Schuler, 1994). Results from experimental work show that a spokesperson is perceived as more knowledgeable, credible and persuasive when s/he matches the product and brand. Congruency results in higher brand recall (Misra and Beatty, 1990) and positive attitude towards the brand endorsed, while incongruence leads to negative brand evaluations (Kamins and Gupta, 1994).

Kamins' (1990) work investigates the match-up between the attractiveness of a celebrity and a product that is related to enhancing personal appearance. The results reveal that for a product that is attractiveness-related, such as perfume and cosmetics, an attractive celebrity outperforms an unattractive celebrity on likeability and familiarity. An attractive model also significantly enhances spokesperson credibility and attitude toward the ad when endorsing an attractiveness-enhancing product. Conversely, when an attractive model endorses an attractiveness-unrelated product, such as a computer, no significant effects are found. Till and Busler (1998) further investigate the match-up hypothesis and the importance of attractiveness contributing to the effectiveness of fit between endorser and product. Results of their study show that the combination of attractiveness and expertise results in higher attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. Overall, the research on celebrity endorsement shows that it is important to control specifically for product/brand and celebrity associations, celebrity-product/brand congruency, as well as familiarity and attractiveness of the celebrity, as these factors significantly impact consumer evaluations of the brands endorsed by celebrities.

### 2.2. Endorsement situation: single versus multiple

Limited research examines the impact of celebrities endorsing multiple products. Mowen and Brown (1981) utilise Attribution Theory (Kelley, 1967) in their study of multiple product endorsements. According to Attribution Theory, consumers view advertisements featuring celebrity endorsers and then seek "to determine the causal reasons for a celebrity endorsing a product" (Mowen and Brown 1981, p. 437). This suggests that consumers perceive celebrity endorsers as believing in the brands they endorse, rather than endorsing brands purely for monetary reasons. They find that subjects react more favourably to a branded product and evaluate a celebrity more positively when the celebrity endorses only a single product compared to when the celebrity endorses multiple products. Findings also show that advertisements are perceived more favourably and are more interesting when a celebrity endorses only one product.

Tripp et al. (1994) use the Source Credibility Model to investigate the impact of multiple product endorsements, whereby the effectiveness of a message is dependent on the perceived level of expertise (knowledge, experience and skills) and trustworthiness (honesty, integrity and believability) of an endorser (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953). An endorser who is perceived to be an expert is found to be more persuasive (Aaker and Myers,

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