



# The effects of match-ups on the consumer attitudes toward internet celebrities and their live streaming contents in the context of product endorsement

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## ABSTRACT

Streaming media platform opens new ways for celebrity endorsement. Based on the researches related to celebrity endorsement and match-up hypothesis, this study explores the influences of various matches on the consumer attitudes within the context of live streaming shopping with internet celebrities in China. Results suggest that product-source fit affects the perceived source attractiveness and trustworthiness, while product-content fit affects utilitarian and hedonic attitude toward the content. Source trustworthiness, hedonic attitude and self-product fit increased the intention to buy. This study develops and tests an integrative model of internet celebrity endorsement by investigating congruence effects on live streaming viewers.

## 1. Introduction

With increasing popularity of social media, influencers with numerous followers have recently generated advertising effects and sales. The emergence of celebrities who have achieved influence based on the use of live streaming contents, 'Wanghong 网红' in China, comes at a time when consumers search for ways to express themselves and companies require creative ways to endorse brands. These internet celebrities are content creators who have the power to affect others on social media platforms (Li, 2018). Based on the notable influence, they turn online traffic into sales through e-commerce or online advertising. The most successful ones who have monetized their huge fan bases are fashion icons posting live streaming contents about style and fashion products.

Streaming media platform opens new channel for celebrity endorsement providing promotion information or product recommendations and shaping followers' interest. Many internet celebrities attract a lot of followers with their own attractiveness as well as gain credibility with original quality contents based on opinion and analysis. They provide values for their followers by offering useful or entertaining live contents. Most of them are actual consumers who are willing to promote products they have experienced to potential consumers among their followers and companies want to incorporate these influencers into marketing strategies. As social media can provide more effective environment for celebrity-fans interaction than traditional mass media,

many consumers perceive these user-based contents as more trustworthy than traditional commercial strategies (Gong and Li, 2017).

However, content viewers assess the content and the influencers and calculate their suitability for a specific product or brand image. A good product-source match is in favor of the evaluations of the advertisement that is endorsed by even unfamiliar celebrities (McCormick, 2016). On the contrary, when fans recognize the mismatch between the endorsed product and the endorser, they are likely to consider the celebrity as a marketer who pursues commercial motives. If the internet celebrity is perceived as a marketer instead of an opinion leader as another consumer, followers might have negative attitude toward the celebrity.

Similarly, product placement studies (Shamdasani et al., 2001) attach importance to the ways products are placed in a media or the ways products fit in the context. Placements out of context are perceived negatively and may result in low levels of trust in brand claims and even in the media (Bhatnagar et al., 2004). The harmony of the match between an endorser and an endorsed product can influence the image of the endorser. The fit between an endorsed product and the media content may affect the attitude toward the content. As limited research exists, especially within the context of live streaming shopping, it is necessary to investigate the synthetic influences of fits on the related consumer attitudes.

Previous studies on celebrity endorsements indicate that attractiveness, credibility, and the celebrity-product congruence have positive impacts on consumer attitude toward the advertising, brand,

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product, as well as purchase intention (Gong and Li, 2017; Till and Busler, 2000). However, most studies were conducted within the traditional mass media context and some other form of social media context such as blog or social network service. There is very little research examining the live streaming phenomenon or new types of celebrities. Moreover, few studies offer synthetic frameworks to integrate the influences of matches related to celebrity, content, consumer and the endorsed product. To bridge the research gaps, this study focuses on live streaming by internet celebrities to investigate the impacts of these various matches on the audiences' evaluation.

The present study offers further insights regarding the reverse effects of endorsements on the endorsers as a result of a bad match. The perceived trustworthiness and attractiveness of a celebrity can be decreased when the celebrity-product fit is low (Yoo and Jin, 2015). Most internet celebrities less well-known than traditional celebrities could be more vulnerable to this kind of reverse flow. As they should put even greater emphasis on the congruence, it is necessary to investigate the reverse transfer effect in the context of live streaming endorsements by internet celebrities.

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses

### 2.1. Source characteristics and endorsement effectiveness

Wanghong became popular by presenting attractiveness via Chinese social media. They provide variety of contents and affect consumption trends based on the reliability established through continuous communication with fans. Personal characteristics or the self-presentation of unique images to attract fans form their identities and followers decode these symbolic meaning in the process of interactions (Li, 2018).

Many studies suggest that celebrity credibility has a great impact on endorsement effectiveness related to product or advertising attitudes, as well as purchase intentions (e.g. Gong and Li, 2017; Lafferty and Goldsmith, 1999). Source credibility refers to the positive characteristics of an endorser leading to consumers' acceptance of the honesty of their messages (Ohanian, 1990) containing two dimensions: source trustworthiness and expertise (Erdogan, 1999). This study focuses on source trustworthiness as a meta-analysis affirms that source trustworthiness is more powerful for attitude changes (Amos et al., 2008). Source trustworthiness means consumer's perception of endorser's honesty, believability, and integrity (Erdogan, 1999). It is particularly important when endorsed brands or products do not require an endorser's expertise. Internet celebrities do not need to be perceived as experts and continuous social media interactions provide information to evaluate the level of source trustworthiness. Highly trustworthy celebrity can produce effective attitude toward brand credibility and purchase intentions (Chung and Cho, 2017).

On the other hand, source attractiveness refers to the familiarity, like ability, and similarity of the source and affects consumer opinion, product evaluation, and persuasiveness for selling products (Joseph, 1982). Attractiveness of endorsers increased endorsement effectiveness in traditional mass media and online media (e.g., Till and Busler, 2000). Consumers tend to develop a positive stereotype of an attractive celebrity and the positive attitude toward the celebrity will be transferred to the endorsed product (Debevec and Keman, 1984; Erdogan, 1999). In other word, an attractive celebrity may increase the purchase intention of the endorsed product. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1-1.** Trustworthiness of Wanghong relates positively to the purchase intention of the endorsed product.

**H1-2.** Attractiveness of Wanghong relates positively to the purchase intention of the endorsed product.

### 2.2. Live streaming contents and consumer attitude

Prior studies on the success of many emerging online interactive media assert that one of the most important values for audiences is the content value. The more attractive content you present, the more attention and influence you achieve (Li, 2018). Internet celebrities usually create interesting contents for entertainment as well as display useful information related to products or brands. Previous research suggests that consumer decisions are influenced by both hedonic and utilitarian attitude (Voss et al., 2003). The motivations to make purchase in online shopping also include both utilitarian and hedonic dimensions (Childers et al., 2001). In a similar vein, consumer attitude toward the media content can be divided into utilitarian attitude and hedonic attitude. Utilitarian attitude reflects how useful or beneficial the content is for the consumer, whereas hedonic attitude refers to how fun or enjoyable the content is or experiential emotions that the consumer associates with the content. Understanding of how contents presented by internet celebrities affect cognitive as well as emotional attitude of consumers may allow more effective content design.

Studies on brand placement (Balasubramanian et al., 2014) indicate that viewers' attitude toward the content enhances their product attitude. Thus, utilitarian and hedonic attitude toward the content may be able to predict the purchase intention.

**H2-1.** Utilitarian attitude toward the live content relates positively to purchase intention.

**H2-2.** Hedonic attitude toward the live content positively relates to purchase intention.

### 2.3. Match between celebrity and product

Researchers have explored the importance of match between the endorser and the product (e.g. Choi and Rifon, 2012; Yoo and Jin, 2015), such as sports-related products endorsed by athletes (Kim and Na, 2007), attractiveness-related products endorsed by physically attractive celebrity (Kamins, 1990). Most of researches on match-up hypothesis predicted the impact of endorser-product match on the various measures of advertising effectiveness, such as product attitude, advertising attitude, and purchase intention (Gong and Li, 2017).

Interestingly, the negative effects of endorsements on the celebrity as a result of a bad match were also reported. The perceived trustworthiness and attractiveness of a celebrity was decreased when the celebrity-product fit was low (Yoo and Jin, 2015). When the brand is strong but the celebrity is not, this reverse flow of personality from the brand to the celebrity can occur (Roy and Moorthi, 2012). As most of internet celebrities are less well-known than traditional celebrities, they should put even greater emphasis on the match. Thus, it is necessary to investigate this underexplored reverse transfer effect in the context of product endorsements related to internet celebrities.

Internet celebrities utilize social media to shape their identities and provide meaning to products through endorsements. Their own meaning can also be created by the products they endorse (Ferris, 2007). Endorsing products that do not conform to consumer expectations may negatively affect the image of Wanghong, whereas congruence can elicit favorable responses. Thus, the present study examines the effect of endorser-product fit on the perception of source attributes.

**H3-1.** Wanghong-product fit relates positively to perceived trustworthiness of Wanghong.

**H3-2.** Wanghong-product fit relates positively to perceived attractiveness of Wanghong.

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