Celebrity Endorsements and Advertising Effectiveness: the Importance of Value Congruence

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The match-up hypothesis suggests that there should be a good fit between the celebrity and the product; however, it is not clear what constitutes a good fit. This study suggests that because values are higher-order constructs that can affect other consumer-related constructs, it is important to consider them. Specifically, it is hypothesized that when there is congruence between celebrities’ values (as perceived by consumers), product values, and consumer values, consumers will have more favorable attitudes toward the brand and they will have higher intentions to buy the brand. Indeed, the results show that even a single ad based on value congruence is capable of affecting advertising effectiveness.

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First, individuals may largely disregard positive fantasies about the future and instead dwell on a negative reality that blocks a desired future. In this case, individuals experience no need or direction in which to act. Therefore, their expectations about achieving the fantasy do not heavily influence goal formation or strength.

Second, individuals can think about positive fantasies without considering current situations that may impede their fantasy-realization. As a result, they experience no need to act (i.e., overcome impediments), and therefore their expectations about achieving the fantasy do not heavily influence goal formation or strength.

Third, individuals may contrast a positive fantasy with a negative reality that blocks the potential realization of that fantasy. In doing so, the desired future becomes something that is to be attained, and the negative reality becomes something that must be altered. In this case, a necessity to act is produced. If individuals' expectations for attaining the fantasy are high (low), then a goal will (will not) be formed.

Prior FRT research has investigated pre-existing expectations for fantasy realization (Oettingen et al. 2001). In the current research, expectations for fantasy realization were manipulated by presenting participants an advertisement in which strong arguments made electronic products seem easily attainable or weak arguments made electronic products seem less attainable. That is, we took advantage of the idea that strong, persuasive arguments are those that communicate a highly desired (or undesired) outcome is likely (expected) if one adopts what is advocated within the message (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Based on FRT, we reasoned that participants who mentally contrast product fantasies and negative realities should consider the expectations within arguments, and form stronger goals to, and more favorable attitudes toward, purchasing an electronics product when doing so is supported by strong versus weak arguments. Further, argument strength will not affect the positive- or negative-only conditions. In the present experiment, goals strength was operationalized as expectations, plans, motivation, and attitudes regarding purchasing a fantasy electronic product.

To test our hypotheses, undergraduate participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 3 (Mindset Type: Positive Fantasy vs. Negative Reality vs. Mental Contrast) X 2 (Advertisement Quality: Strong vs. Weak) factorial design. Following Oettingen et al. (2001), participants first listed 4 positive fantasies about owning a desired electronics product and 4 negative realities standing in the way of that fantasy. Participants were then induced to either consider only positive fantasies about buying a desired electronics product, dwell on negative realities that stand in the way of buying the product, or mentally contrasting both. Participants were then presented with an advertisement that offered either excellent incentives (strong arguments) or lackluster incentives (weak arguments) for buying the electronic product from an advertised store. We then administered a questionnaire measuring participants’ expectations, plans, motivation, and attitudes regarding purchasing a fantasy electronic product.

For all dependent measures, planned comparison confirmed significant differences between participants who received the strong versus weak advertisement, but only for the mental-contrast conditions. Therefore, for ease of presentation, the fantasy and negative-reality conditions were combined and compared to the mental-contrast condition. As predicted, participants in the mental contrast condition who received a strong versus weak advertisement demonstrated more positive attitudes, higher expectations, and stronger motivation and plans (goals) about buying a fantasy electronics product. Further, participants in the positive-fantasy only and negative-reality only conditions did not differ on these measures, regardless of which persuasive advertisement they received.

These results demonstrate that Fantasy Realization Theory can be used to predict consumer attitudes, expectations, and motivations. Specifically, by prompting consumers to contrast their present reality against a positive consumer fantasy, marketing managers can more successfully create positive consumer attitudes, expectations, and motivations by presenting strong arguments for purchasing a product.

We predict that individuals in the mental-contrast conditions will generate more positive thoughts in response to the strong versus weak advertisement, whereas individuals in the other conditions will not. This idea follows from FRT which suggests that only individuals who mentally contrast reality and fantasy consult their expectations (in this case provided by advertisement arguments) to determine goal commitment. Further, as is commonly observed in persuasion research (Petty and Wegener 1998), these thoughts should mediate the relationship between mental set and ultimate consumer attitudes. We also predict that only individuals in the mental-contrast conditions will indicate in their thought listings more plans and reports of intentions to purchase a fantasy product after reading strong versus weak advertisements. Importantly, this would provide evidence that individuals in this condition spontaneously devise plans and intentions in response to expectations, an effect not yet observed but consistent with FRT.

Selected References
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A number of companies use celebrities in advertisements to promote different kinds of products. Indeed, millions of dollars are spent on celebrity contracts each year by assuming that the benefits of using celebrities will exceed the costs. Given the popularity and importance
of celebrity endorsements, the impact of celebrity endorsements on advertising effectiveness has been studied extensively over the last 30 years. Source variables, i.e., credibility (which includes expertise and trustworthiness) and attractiveness (which includes familiarity, similarity, and likeability), have been used by many researchers to understand the impact of celebrity endorsements. However, the underlying mechanisms used to explain the impact of these source variables on the relationship between celebrity endorsement and advertising effectiveness fail to converge.

One of the theories used frequently by researchers to explain the impact of celebrity endorsements is the match-up hypothesis. It suggests that there should be a good fit between the celebrity and the product; however, it is not clear what constitutes a good fit. Some researchers have focused on the attractiveness dimension and suggested that attractive celebrities will be more effective if they are used to promote attractiveness-related products, such as razors (e.g., Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990). Other researchers focused on the expertise, or product relatedness, dimension. They claimed that when there is congruency between the product type and the celebrity (as in the case of a sports athlete promoting sports shoes), advertising effectiveness will be enhanced (e.g., Till and Busler 2000). The congruency between celebrities and consumers has also been studied. For instance, Boyd and Shank (2004) showed that when there is a fit between the celebrity and consumer in terms of gender, consumers perceive the celebrity as more trustworthy, regardless of the product type endorsed by the celebrity.

The purpose of this study is to introduce another dimension for the match-up hypothesis: values. Because values are higher-order constructs that can affect other consumer-related constructs, such as consumer attitudes and behaviors, it is important to consider them when examining the impacts of celebrity-product congruence on advertising effectiveness. In other words, the congruency between consumers’ perceptions of celebrities’ values and product values might play an important role in determining the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. Specifically, it is posited in this study that when there is a high level of value congruence between celebrities and products, advertisements will be more effective. The fit between celebrities and consumers is also important. As suggested by similarity studies (e.g., Feick and Higie 1992), the values of celebrities should be similar to the values of target consumers for effective celebrity endorsement.

To test the effects of congruency between celebrity’s values, product values, and consumer values on advertising effectiveness, an experiment was designed. Several pilot tests were conducted to determine the value that would be used in the experimental ad (an internal value: a sense of accomplishment, cf. Homer and Kahle 1988), select the celebrity that was perceived as endorsing that value (Michael Jordan, M=8.19/9.00), and choose product categories that were perceived as high (congruent: fitness machine, M=5.39/9.00) or low (incongruent: beer, M=2.98/9.00) on that value. In other words, based on pilot tests, it was decided that fitness machine was congruent with Michael Jordan and beer was incongruent with Michael Jordan in terms of “a sense of accomplishment” value.

A 2 (product value: congruent vs. incongruent) X 3 (consumer values: internal vs. external vs. fun/excitement) between-subjects design was used to examine the impact of value congruence on two key dependent variables: attitude toward brand, and purchase intention. Based on Homer and Kahle’s suggestion, consumer values were categorized into three dimensions. Internal values reflect the belief that people can fulfill their values by themselves and include self-fulfilling, a sense of accomplishment, and self-respect. External values reflect the belief that people are dependent on others to fulfill their values and include being well-respected, sense of belonging, security, and warm relationships with others. The last dimension includes fun and enjoyment and excitement values and can be fulfilled either internally or externally. Two magazine ads were designed to manipulate the congruence between the celebrity and product categories. In one ad, Michael Jordan was endorsing a treadmill, and in the other ad, he was endorsing beer. Participants first (N=98 college students) were exposed to one of these experimental ads and several real magazine ads. Then, they completed the measures for consumer values (i.e., List of Values, cf. Kahle 1996), attitude toward brand, purchase intention, celebrity characteristics (e.g., likeability, attractiveness, expertise, and familiarity), and manipulation check.

A MANCOVA was conducted on two dependent variables (i.e., attitude toward brand and purchase intention) by using product congruence and consumer values as independent variables, and celebrity characteristics and attitude toward ad as covariates. With the use of Wilks’ criterion, the combined DVs were significantly related to one of the covariates, namely attitude toward ad (F (2, 89)=8.815, p<.001). After adjusting for this covariate, product value congruence had a significant main effect on the combined DVs (F (2, 89)=10.05, p<.001), consumer values had a marginal effect on the combined DVs (F (4, 178)=2.152, p<.076), and the interaction between product value congruence and consumer values had a marginal effect on the combined DVs (F (4, 178)=2.053, p<.092). Univariate analysis revealed that product value congruence and consumer values had significant main effects on attitude toward brand but not on purchase intention. Moreover, planned t-tests showed that attitude toward brand was more favorable when participants were exposed to a congruent experimental ad (i.e., when the product value was congruent with the celebrity’s value; M=5.69) than when participants were exposed to an incongruent ad (M=4.59, t=4.513, p<.001). Attitude toward brand was also more favorable for participants who endorsed internal values (M=5.42) than for participants who endorsed external values (M=4.69, t=2.118, p<.038). Univariate analysis also showed that the interaction between product value congruence and consumer values had significant effects on both DVs. Further analyses indicated that when the product value was congruent with the celebrity’s value, consumers with external values had more favorable attitudes toward the brand (M=6.41) than consumers with internal values (M=4.93, t=-3.145, p<.005) and consumers with fun/excitement values (M=5.48, t=2.620, p<.015). Similarly, when the product value was congruent with the celebrity’s value, consumers with external values had higher intentions to buy the brand (M=4.59) than consumers with internal values (M=2.52, t=-3.288, p<.005) and consumers with fun/excitement values (M=3.34, t=1.767, p<.087).

The present research shows that even a single ad based on value congruence is capable of affecting attitude toward brand and purchase intention. Specifically, this study provides evidence that the congruence between celebrity values and product values has positive impacts on key DVs. Interestingly, more favorable results were obtained when consumers’ values were incongruent with the celebrity values and product values. This finding supports the idea that moderate incongruity might be more persuasive through creating some curiosity (e.g., Lee and Thorson 2008).

Overall, this study provides some insights that value congruence adds to the variance explained in advertising effectiveness, beyond and above attractiveness and expertise dimensions of the match-up hypothesis. Moreover, considering consumer values will help researchers and practitioners to measure the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements more reliably.
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References

Self-Brand Attraction: An Interpersonal Attraction Approach to Brand Relationships
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Are brand-consumer relationships the same as interpersonal relationships? For almost a decade, brands have been theorized as parasocial entities with which consumers can form personal attachments (Aaker 1997; Fournier 1998). But what is the nature of this relationship? Further, can the interpersonal metaphor truly be extended to the person-brand context? If brands do have personalities, is it enough to simply like the “person”? Or, might a feeling of reciprocated affection from the brand itself also play a role, as human interpersonal attraction theory might predict?

In this research, we build from previous research in marketing that has accounted for brand-consumer connections as relationships (Fournier 1998) and theorized that brands have personalities (Aaker 1997). Specifically, we take both of these ideas seriously by using the interpersonal attraction paradigm from relationship research (Byrne 1961) to better understand brand relationships and to predict self-brand attraction better than competing theorizations (e.g., Keller 1993). Our findings show that felt similarity toward the brand and its associations is necessary, but does not sufficiently account for consumers’ opinions toward, connections with, and felt closeness to brands (i.e., the brand relationship). We further specify Fournier’s insight by showing that relationships aren’t simply about felt kinship with brands; they’re dyadic in the sense that one must also consider the reciprocal liking of the brand for the person.

Thus, in accordance with Byrne’s theory of interpersonal attraction (Byrne 1971), we predicted participants would convey a closer relationship to the brand the more similar they felt they were to the brand. Also in accordance with Byrne’s findings, we predicted the brand’s attitude toward the participant would play a role. Specifically, we predicted that the positive relationship between self-brand similarity and brand relationship closeness would only hold when participants felt that the brand did not like them more than they liked the brand. This prediction stems from research in the reciprocity literature, which suggests that excessive liking can convey unselectivity and even desperation (Eastwick, Finkel, Mochon, and Ariely 2007). To test these predictions, we adapted Byrne’s interpersonal attraction paradigm to a consumer-brand setting. Whereas Byrne manipulated self-other similarity by varying the extent to which the parties expressed like attitudes toward a variety of topics, we assessed self-brand similarity by measuring these attitudes. Furthermore, whereas Byrne manipulated others’ attitudes toward the self by supplying contrived responses to an interpersonal judgment scale, we measured both participants’ liking for the target brand and the felt reciprocal liking of the brand for the participant. The details of our survey methodology are described below.

In the first part of the survey, participants were asked to indicate their attitudes toward several topics (e.g., musical tastes; Byrne 1971). After several unrelated filler tasks, participants then took part in the second part of the survey which assessed their relationship with Chevrolet, an automotive brand we anticipated would elicit varied similarity and feeling reciprocation assessments. First, we asked participants to imagine Chevrolet as a person (Aaker 1997) and to write a brief description of that person. Next, they were asked to project the brand’s attitudes toward the same topics assessed earlier. Self-brand attitude discrepancies that fell within one standard deviation were considered similar attitudes, the sum of which comprised our self-brand similarity index. We then elicited participants’ liking for the brand as a person and the felt reciprocal liking of the brand for the participant (Byrne 1961, 1971). The difference between these ratings was used as our measure of self-brand reciprocation, with higher scores representing over-reciprocation by the participant and lower scores representing over-reciprocity by the brand. Finally, we assessed participants’ connection with the brand (Moore and Homer 2008), self-brand overlap (Aron, Aron, and Smollan 1992), and their overall opinion of the brand (four 7-point semantic differentials)—dependent measures selected to capture brand relationship closeness.

Regression analyses were conducted in which each of the dependent measures was regressed on self-brand similarity, self-brand reciprocation, and the product of the two. Results revealed the predicted main effect of similarity. For all three measures of brand relationship closeness, participants expressed a stronger connection to, a greater overlap with, and a more favorable opinion of Chevrolet when they felt they shared attitudes with the brand. Results also revealed the predicted interaction between self-brand similarity and feeling