Consumers With Stars in Their Eyes: the Influence of Celebrity Product Placement on Brand Perceptions and Behaviors

Adriana Samper, Arizona State University, USA
Freeman Wu, Arizona State University, USA
Daniele Mathras, Northeastern University, USA
Andrea Morales, Arizona State University, USA

We examine the effectiveness of “celebrity product placement” (CPP), or the promotion of brands through celebrity usage. We find that CPP is more effective than celebrity endorsement in improving brand attitudes and purchase likelihood, an effect driven by increased celebrity trustworthiness and perceptions that the celebrity sincerely likes the brand.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1021401/volumes/v44/NA-44

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Not Your Mother’s Celebrity Endorsement: Novel Pathways of Celebrity Influence

Chairs: Lea Dunn, University of Washington, USA
JoAndrea Hoegg, University of British Columbia, Canada

Paper #1: Consumers with Stars in their Eyes: The Influence of Celebrity Product Placement on Brand Perceptions and Behaviors
Adriana Samper, Arizona State University, USA
Freeman Wu, Arizona State University, USA
Daniele Mathras, Northeastern University, USA
Andrea Morales, Arizona State University, USA

Paper #2: Social Media and Celebrity Endorsement: How Social Connections can Impact Endorsement Effectiveness
Lea Dunn, University of Washington, USA
JoAndrea Hoegg, University of British Columbia, Canada
Abhishek Borah, University of Washington, USA

Paper #3: When Celebrity Ad Placements Backfire
Claudiu Dimofte, San Diego State, USA
Negin Latifi Kasani, ESSEC Business School, France

Paper #4: Peripheral Endorsement: How Perceptual Congruence with Celebrities Can Benefit Brands
Dan Rice, Louisiana State University, USA
Andrew Kuo, Louisiana State University, USA
Rebecca Rast, Louisiana State University, USA

SESSION OVERVIEW

Celebrities are featured in 20% of all advertisements (Solomon 2009). This form of influence significantly affects brands featuring celebrities (Feldman 2007). Interestingly, close to half of the ads aired during the 2016 Super Bowl featured celebrities, presumably because research finds that celebrities have a direct influence on brand stock (Agarwal and Kamakura 1995). However, as the forms of media that consumers use evolve, so might the ways in which consumers perceive and interact with celebrities. For example, with the propagation of social media, seeing celebrities living their “real lives” is increasingly common. In addition, the proliferation of celebrity endorsements has led to increased attention to the fact that celebrities are being paid by companies and may not truly believe in the brand. These changes to the marketing environment may, in turn, have implications for the effectiveness of traditional celebrity endorsement. Given the billions of dollars spent on celebrity endorsements, the continued examination of celebrity influence and endorsement effectiveness is of keen interest to marketers.

Unlike previous endorsement research, we explore novel pathways of celebrity influence and examine how new media and placement types impact celebrity endorsement. In the first paper, Samper, Wu, Mathras and Morales consider how brands can take advantage of the increased visibility of celebrities’ real lives by examining the effect of “celebrity product placement” relative to more traditional forms of celebrity endorsement. The results reveal that celebrity product placement is more effective than celebrity endorsement in improving brand attitudes and purchase likelihood. This effect is driven by increased celebrity trustworthiness and perceptions that the celebrity sincerely likes the brand.

In the second paper, Dunn, Hoegg and Borah examine how certain forms of social media alter the nature of consumer-celebrity interactions, impacting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. This paper finds that social media platforms which feature conversational design (e.g., Twitter) imply direct celebrity-consumer communication and enhance consumers’ perceptions of their similarity to and connection with the celebrity. This connection has positive outcomes for celebrity endorsement, including decreasing reliance on product- celebrity match and increasing positive response to negative publicity.

The third paper examines another novel form of celebrity endorsement practice wherein ads featuring celebrities are placed within media content featuring the same celebrity. Dimofte finds that while this strategy has a positive effect on attention and recall, attitudes require a celebrity-product match and must appear during current media content. This effect is driven by the consumer’s motivation to process the celebrity.

Finally, the fourth paper discusses how the proliferation of celebrity endorsements raises consumers’ persuasion knowledge. Rice and Kuo explore a unique avenue through which celebrity endorsements can persuade consumers through the peripheral route - perceptual congruence (e.g., perceptual overlap with brand features).

Overall this session questions several issues with regards to the effectiveness of traditional celebrity endorsement practice in today’s marketplace and demonstrates how newer forms of media have the potential to change the nature of celebrity influence. Overall we expect this session to be of interest to researchers studying celebrity endorsement, product placement, and digital marketing.

Consumers with Stars in their Eyes: The Influence of Celebrity Product Placement on Brand Perceptions and Behaviors

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The promotion of a product or brand through candid use by celebrities, also known as “celebrity product placement,” is becoming an increasingly popular strategy to garner mass media exposure (Ashbrook 2011). For example, the success of popular brands such as UGG has been attributed to candid photos of celebrities wearing the sheepskin boots in their daily lives (Jones 2007). These photos are highly desired by consumers and entertainment news magazines alike, and if a brand is pictured being used by a celebrity, it can serve as a valuable marketing tool. Accordingly, “celebrity gifting,” or the practice of sending celebrities free products in hopes that they will be photographed using them, has grown in recent years (Blackall 2010). While researchers have documented the effects of traditional product placement in television and film (e.g., Russell 2002, Wiles and Danielova 2009), attention to celebrity product placement (CPP) in the academic literature is scant at best. In the present research, we examine the effectiveness and underlying driver of this underexplored marketing strategy compared to typical celebrity advertisements in improving brand attitudes and purchase likelihood.

Unlike celebrity endorsements, ads or traditional product placement, consumers are much less savvy to the influence of CPP. Indeed, a pretest of 124 MTurk participants confirmed that 65% felt that the products depicted in paparazzi photos were ones celebrities purchased themselves (vs. were given to them for free). This lack of awareness allows CPP to capitalize on the positive associations imbued by the celebrity to the focal product (McCracken 1989) while operating outside the realm of persuasion knowledge. Because of the ostensibly candid nature of CPP, we propose that it increases beliefs that the celebrity sincerely likes the brand being used. This notion is consistent with the correspondence bias, which states that when people observe a behavior, such as a celebrity using a product in a paparazzi photo, they are inclined to believe that the behavior
corresponds with the individual’s genuine disposition (Gilbert and Malone 1995); that is, the depicted celebrity’s true interest in the product. Because consumers imbue the products that celebrities use and like with positive meaning (McCracken 1986), CPP use should increase brand favorability and purchase intentions.

Study 1 provides initial evidence that CPP is more effective at increasing brand attitudes than a celebrity advertisement. Participants (N=190) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: celebrity advertisement versus CPP. All participants saw the same image of Ryan Gosling with a brief description of how he drinks Bucks County Coffee (the focal brand). However, the ad condition displayed the “Bucks County Coffee” logo while the CPP condition displayed the word, “Star-gazing” (implying a candid photo). Participants viewed the images, completed filler measures, and indicated how positively they viewed Bucks coffee. They also completed measures of Gosling’s perceived interest in Bucks. Results revealed that participants rated Bucks (but not other coffee brands) more favorably in the CPP (M=4.06) versus ad condition (M=3.72; p<.03). Further, participants believed Gosling was more sincerely interested in Bucks in the CPP (M=4.92) versus ad condition (M=3.83; p<.0001). A serial bootstrapping mediation analysis supported our predicted pathway whereby CPP vs. Ad → Celebrity Interest in the Brand → Brand Ratings (B=.20; 95% CI=.03, .40).

In Study 2, we replicate these findings with celebrity Jessica Alba and the ‘nau’ clothing brand. As in Study 1, CPP vs. endorsement increased brand ratings, which were driven by increases perceptions that Alba sincerely liked the brand. The same mediation pathway was significant.

In Study 3, we investigate a boundary conditions. Specifically, we manipulate trustworthiness to mitigate this effect. We reasoned that if participants did not trust the celebrity, then the celebrity’s sincerity of interest would no longer be predictive of brand interest. Participants (N=150) were randomly assigned to a 2 (image type: CPP vs. ad) x 2 (trustworthiness: low vs. high) between-subjects design. Participants first read a short magazine article. In the low trustworthiness conditions, this article stated that Alba’s own ‘Honest’ natural goods line (an unrelated brand) involved questionable business practices. In the high trustworthiness condition, the article described the noble goals behind Alba’s ‘Honest’ brand. In an ostensibly unrelated study, participants were presented with a CPP or ad image of Jessica Alba wearing ‘nau’ clothing. After completing filler questions, participants rated how positively they viewed the ‘nau’ brand along with 9 other filler brands. A 2 x 2 ANOVA revealed a significant image type x trustworthiness interaction for nau (p=.01) but not for the other brands. Whereas in the high trustworthiness condition, CPP (M=4.83) increased evaluations of nau relative to the ad (M=4.22; p=.01), in the low trustworthiness condition, there was no such difference (p>.75), revealing that suppressing perceived trustworthiness can attenuate the benefits of CPP.

In Study 4, we further explore our underlying process by manipulating our mediator, the perceived sincerity of the celebrity’s interest in the brand, with a new celebrity and product. Participants (N=246) were randomly assigned to a 2 (image type: ad vs. CPP) x 2 (sincerity of interest manipulation: article vs. control) between-subjects study. To manipulate sincerity of interest, half of the participants read a magazine article describing how celebrity paparazzi shots, though seemingly candid, are typically staged. The other half did not read an article. Next, all participants viewed either an ad or CPP image with Jennifer Lawrence wearing MiH jeans, a new luxury brand. Participants rated their likelihood of making a purchase from MiH along with 9 other filler brands. A 2 x 2 ANOVA on purchase likelihood revealed a significant image type x sincerity of interest interaction for MiH jeans (F(1, 242) = 4.36, p < .04) but for not the other brands. Whereas participants in the control condition indicated greater intentions to purchase from MiH in the CPP (M=2.70) versus ad condition (M=1.86; p=.001), no such difference emerged for those who were led to believe celebrity interest was insincere (p>.60).

In sum, four studies reveal that celebrity product placement is indeed more effective than traditional advertisements and mediated by perceived celebrity interest in the brand.

Social Media and Celebrity Endorsement: How Social Connections can Impact Endorsement Effectiveness

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Celebrity endorsement has been employed as a marketing strategy for over 150 years and makes up 20-25% of all advertisements (Feldman 2007; Shimp 2000). Advertisements containing celebrity endorsers are rated more favorably and garner higher purchase intention than non-celebrities endorsers (Atkin and Block 1983). The shift in marketing communications through social media for both firms and celebrities warrants renewed investigation into how celebrity endorsement impacts consumer decision making. In regards to celebrity endorsement, social media has effectively changed the way in which consumers relate to celebrities. Traditionally, celebrities were at arm’s length from the public – elegant and glamorous, but mysterious and unknown. Gone are the strictly scripted interactions with consumers. Social media such as Twitter allows celebrities to communicate directly with their fans. This research examines how this shift in communication has implications for the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements.

Endorsement research has generally found that celebrity endorsement is an effective promotions strategy, as celebrities make advertisements more believable and enhance message recall (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995). Several criteria have been identified as contributing to the effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement, including the attractiveness and likeability of the celebrity, the extent to which consumers believe the celebrity genuinely likes the product, the perceived fit between the celebrity and the product (Atkin and Block 1983; Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990; Kamins and Gupta 1994). This paper argues that another important factor to be considered is the perceived similarity between the celebrity and the consumer. We propose a two-step process whereby consumers who feel connected to the celebrity will feel more similar and subsequently find the ad more effective.

This research demonstrates that microblogging social media sites like Twitter enhance perceived dialogue (a form of interaction) between consumers and celebrities and thus, may enhance the social connectedness that consumers feel. Social connection can be created through direct or indirect interaction with another and can increase liking for the individuals within a group and enhance perceived similarity among group members (Forsyth 1999). Thus, we predict this social connectedness should lead to perceived similarity to the celebrity. Perceived similarity can increase liking and susceptibility to persuasive consumer appeals (Jiang, Hoegg, Dahl and Chattopadhyay 2010). Thus, this perceived similarity should lead to more effective celebrity endorsements. Specifically, we hypothesize that this perceived similarity reduces the “product fit” problem of celebrity endorsement, whereby there must be a fit between the celebrity and endorsed product in order for consumers to believe the veracity of the endorsement. In addition, we show that perceived similarity buffers both a celebrity and endorsed brand against negative publicity.

In Study 1a, we show that following a celebrity on a microblogging site causes consumers to feel more similar to the celebrity than following them on a standard social network. We manipulated whether participants read a scenario about an article about a celebrity’s social
media usage. The participants read that the celebrity’s favorite social media platform was either Twitter (microblogging) or Facebook (social networking) and that they either followed the celebrity or did not. Results showed that participants that followed the celebrity on Twitter felt more connected and more similar to the celebrity than those that followed the celebrity on Facebook or did not follow the celebrity on Twitter. In addition, we found that social connectedness mediated the relationship between social media usage and similarity.

In Study 1b, we use a 2(Social Media: Twitter v. Facebook) x 2(Person: Celebrity v. Publicist) between-subjects design and show that this increase in social connection and similarity through Twitter usage only occurs when the celebrity (not a publicist) runs the social media account. In addition, results show that within each media type, those participants who show higher degrees of connectedness feel more perceived similarity to the celebrity. Together, studies 1a and 1b demonstrate that microblogging sites appear to bolster perceptions of similarity through perceived social connectedness.

In Study 2, we extend this social media impact on perceived similarity paradigm by showing a positive impact on celebrity endorsement. To test this, we created actual celebrity endorsement ads for celebrities that were either known to use Twitter (Neil Patrick Harris and Kim Kardashian) or not use Twitter (Paul Rudd and Megan Fox). These ads either featured an endorsement for a product that matched the celebrity (high product fit) or did not match the celebrity (low product fit). Results found that for non-Twitter celebrities, there was a traditional positive effect of product fit on brand attitudes. However, when the ads featured Twitter celebrities, there was no difference in brand attitude for high or low product fit advertisements. As in studies 1a and 1b, the Twitter celebrities were seen as more similar to the participants than the non-Twitter celebrities. Finally, we found that participants rated the low fit product as a significantly better fit for Twitter celebrities than non-Twitter celebrities. Study 2 shows that not only does social media engagement lead to higher perceptions of similarity, but that these perceptions can reduce the necessity of product fit in subsequent celebrity endorsements.

In Study 4, we show that not only does increased perceived similarity enhance endorsed-product evaluation regardless of fit, but they also buffer brand evaluations against negative celebrity information.

The primary goal of this research was to demonstrate how the unique aspects of microblogging sites versus social networking sites can influence the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. Little research thus far has looked into the impact of social media sites on traditional marketing efforts. Our research provides one of the first empirical investigations of how different forms of social media maintain distinct communication purposes for consumers. We show that nuanced differences in the sites impact the perceptions of connectedness that consumers have toward celebrities, which subsequently alters feelings of similarity between consumers and celebrities. These feelings enhance the persuasiveness of celebrity endorsements. The current research contributes to this body of work by revealing how celebrities can be perceived as more similar to consumers—through feelings of social connection—effectively resulting in an additive influence of attractiveness and similarity on endorsement.

**When Celebrity Ad Placements Backfire**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Firms often employ “attention-getting devices” (Broniarczyk and Gershoff 2003) such as a practice referred to as “context-sensitive advertising.” In a particular instantiation of this technique, ads are being created to feature celebrities that are also being featured in the surrounding media context (e.g., TV show, magazine article, website content, etc.).

The intuition behind using celebrities in advertising was captured by early consumer research. McCracken (1989) argued that in this case a meaning transfer process occurs from the celebrity onto the promoted product, while subsequent work by Kamins (1990) suggested that a certain degree of congruity between celebrity and the product is necessary for this transfer to be successful. Presumably placing such ads within editorial content that features the same celebrities (e.g., sitcom actors, football players) would only bolster these effects through enhanced fluency, although consumer research has not addressed the issue directly. Furthermore, prior research has shown that the impact of the mere announcement of a brand celebrity endorsement on stock returns is positive, suggesting that the use of celebrities in advertising is viewed as a worthwhile investment by the financial markets (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995).

This work assesses this positive perception of celebrity advertising and cautions that the indiscriminate use of celebrities in ads can in fact have deleterious effects on brand equity. In particular, it looks at celebrity ads that are placed within media content that features the same celebrities (e.g., a Papa John’s pizza ad featuring quarterback Payton Manning during a Denver Broncos football game in which Manning plays). The research also attempts to explain the mechanism that underlies the presumed positive effects of such ads, as two potential explanations appear credible: consumers may pay more attention to ads featuring the same celebrity as the preceding media content due to either the enhanced fluency they experience (i.e., an ability-to-allocate-attentional-resources account) or the superior motivation they have (i.e., a willingness-to-allocate-attentional-resources account). Finally, this work looks at the temporal fit between the celebrity’s dual roles (i.e., ad plus live football game vs. old sitcom episode rerun) to argue that a temporal mismatch can produce negative consumer brand attitudes.

In Study 1, participants (373 students from a business school’s marketing subject pool) were exposed to a recent magazine article about Hollywood that referenced the actress Eva Longoria, which was then followed by three print ads, including (in the second position) the focal one for the Starbucks coffee brand. In the treatment condition, the ad featured Eva Longoria enjoying a cup of coffee. The control condition involved a similar ad featuring actress Penelope Cruz (the two celebrities were equally familiar to our sample and the ads were judged comparably across a variety of dimensions; both actresses were seen as a good fit for the brand). Contrasts on the main attitudinal measure found that that ad wherein the celebrity was the same as in the contextual material was evaluated significantly more favorably than the celebrity ad lacking this match (on a 7-point scale, $M_{no-match} = 4.14$, $M_{match} = 4.49$, $t(371) = 2.63, p < .01$).

To assess mediational effects, the related SPSS macros provided by Preacher and Hayes (2004) were employed. All of the criteria for mediation were established (including a significant Sobel test: $z = 3.48, p < .001$), providing evidence that motivation to process completely mediates the effect of celebrity fit on attitudes. A non-parametric bootstrap estimate of the indirect effect was estimated to lie between 0.0253 and 0.1879 with 99% confidence, suggesting that the indirect effect was significantly different from zero. Importantly, similar analyses for the ease of processing variable found no evidence of mediation.

A holdout sample from the same population was exposed to a version of the study wherein the treatment condition involved the actress Sofia Vergara (pretests found that she was seen as a relatively less appropriate brand spokesperson). This lack of fit produced the expected drop in consumer attitudes: $M_{no-match} = 4.05$ vs. $M_{match} = 3.53$; $t(371)$
As the use of celebrity endorsements becomes more prevalent in advertising, the level of consumer persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright 1994) of the tactic increases. This increased knowledge could lead to mitigation of the benefits of the practice as consumers adjust for this knowledge in their responses. This mitigation may be particularly in the central route to persuasion where consumers evaluate the degree of congruence as the strength of a persuasive argument and think extensively about the connection (Petry & Cacioppo, 1986; Kirmani & Shiv, 1998), which could make the persuasive appeal more obvious. The risk of losing the benefit is even greater in light of recent findings that negative associations with the celebrity are often more likely than positive associations to transfer to brands (Campbell & Warren 2012). Thus, as consumers scrutinize the endorsements, those with weak congruence or negative associations may lead to less favorable brand evaluations.

Notably, prior research has typically described source congruence as a conceptual construct, based on factors such as the overlap between a celebrity meaning and the brand (McCracken 1989) or the expertise of the endorser in relation to the product category (Ohanian 1990). Conversely, the current research investigates whether celebrities with no conceptual overlap with a brand may still be of benefit to the brand through an overlap of perceptual factors (e.g., phonetic similarity between the celebrity and the endorsed brand), even in the absence of conventional endorsements. We define this term as perceptual congruence, and we explore the mere association effect (Dimoff & Yalch, 2011) and the fit-as-fluency effect (Kuo & Rice, 2015) with experimental designs as competing pathways through which perceptual congruence may influence brand assessments.

Experiment 1 (N = 197) tests whether a brand could benefit from perceptual congruence with a celebrity. We created four conditions to which participants were randomly assigned by manipulating the presence or absence of an article on a celebrity’s charity work prior to ad exposure as one factor and the perceptual congruence of the brand as a second factor (by changing a sporting good’s brand name from one that was phonetically similar to the celebrity featured in the article to one that was dissimilar). Brand attitude toward the sporting good (which was identical except for the brand in all conditions) was the critical dependent variable. ANOVA revealed a significant article presence x brand name interaction (F(1,193) = 3.94, p < .05). Planned contrasts demonstrate that there was no difference in brand evaluations due to presence or absence of the celebrity article when the brand was phonetically dissimilar (p > .7). However, when the article featuring the celebrity was present, the perceptually congruent brand was rated significantly more favorably by respondents than when the article was not shown (F(1,193) = 5.58, p = .019, M = 5.63 vs. M = 5.04). Further analyses revealed mediation effects of perceptual congruence.

Experiment 2 (N = 141) offers additional evidence of the effects of perceptual congruence by introducing a new category, motor oil. The experiment also explores two mechanisms through which perceptual congruence could act on brand attitude, a fit-as-fluency (Kuo and Rice, 2015) type effect due to previous exposure to a phonetically similar celebrity name, or a mere association (Lee & Labroo, 2004; Dimofte & Yalch 2011) effect caused by positive associations transferring from the perceptually related (but conceptually incongruent) celebrity by adding negative and neutral article valence conditions to the design and removing the no article conditions of experiment 1. ANOVA results revealed a significant valence x brand interaction (F(2,135) = 3.32, p = .04). Replicating the results of the first study, there was no significant effect of valence within the brand with no perceptual congruence (p > .6), but the perceptually related brand attitude was significantly more favorable for the positive ce-

Peripheral Endorsement: How Perceptual Congruence with Celebrities Can Benefit Brands

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Celebrity endorsements have been shown to benefit brands in multiple ways, including improved brand attitude (Kahle & Hom-
lebrity article valence ($M = 6.15$) than either the neutral ($M = 5.45$) or negative ($M = 5.56$) article conditions ($p’s < .03$).

If brand attitude was solely influenced by the perceptual fluency of the brand name, the data would show a main effect of brand such that the perceptually congruent brand was always favored across valences. However, the results are more consistent with a mere association mechanism, where the data show an interaction in which the positive article about the celebrity led to (1) significantly more favorable brand attitude than the negative and neutral articles for the perceptually congruent brand of motor oil, and (2) no difference among article conditions for the brand of motor oil with no perceptual congruence.

REFERENCES


