

The Negative Impact of Low Likability Celebrity Endorsers on Brand Advertising Effects

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ABSTRACT

The use of celebrity endorsers has been practiced for a few decades and it aimed at increasing message persuasiveness. Recently, researchers have done several empirical studies regarding the dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness of celebrity endorsers. However, less study regarding with the dimension of likability has been undertaken, particularly the negative impact of low likability celebrity endorsers. Thus, the objective of this research is to explore the different negative effects of using low likability celebrity endorser on the desirable brand and new brand, and the moderating effects by different brand attributes.

A 2 (celebrity: low likability/no endorser) \times 2 (desirable of brand: desirable/new) \times 2 (brand attributes: hedonic vs. utilitarian) between-subject experimental design and a mixed within subject design of products (coffee and watch) were used. The results indicate that a low likability celebrity endorser (LLCE) has negative effect on the desirable and new brands. The dilution effect of desirable brand by the LLCE endorser is greater than that of endorsing a new brand. For a desirable hedonic brand, its dilution effect by the LLCE is higher than that of desirable utilitarian brand. However, for a new hedonic brand, its dilution effect is less than that of new utilitarian brand. This means that company may pay more attention to the selection of celebrity endorsers. Otherwise, they may face the dual injuries (paying endorser fee for celebrity and still diluting brand equity) if the advertising choosing wrong celebrity.

Keywords: celebrity endorsement, brand dilution, brand attribute,

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1800s, the use of celebrity endorsers has been practiced and it aimed at increasing message persuasiveness. In the mid-1990s, it was estimated that as much as 20 percent of American network television advertisement promoted products with celebrity endorsers (Miciak and Shanklin 1994). Advertisers intend to use celebrity endorsements to positively impact consumer attitudes towards an advertisement and the associated brand, consumers' purchase intention, as well as other measures of effectiveness (Kaikati 1987; Ohanian 1991; Tripp et al. 1994; Goldsmith et al. 2000; Erdogan et al. 2001). Substantial researches suggest that celebrity endorsement may materially improve financial returns for companies (Farrell *et al.* 2000; Erdogan *et al.* 2001). The importance of celebrity endorsers, however, does not lie in increasing revenue for the firms, but in how these celebrities add value to a company, the brand or the product (Amos, Holmes and Strutton 2008).

Previous research implies that celebrities add value through the process of meaning transfer (McCracken 1989). The meaning transfer model proposed that celebrities develop a persona through the roles either they play in society or in the media. Celebrities endorse a product with cultural meanings developed around the celebrities. Therefore, when a consumer identifies with a celebrity and purchases the endorsed product, the consumer is actually claiming some of the transferred meaning for his/her life (McCracken 1989). Besides, Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953) think that the influential effect of message deliver derives from two factors: the persuasiveness of message itself (product or service) and the persuasiveness of the source of message (endorsers). Researchers consider that source effect consists of two models: the source credibility model referring to the effectiveness of a message from perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness in an endorser (Hovland et al. 1953) and the source attractiveness model referring to the effectiveness of a message from similarity, familiarity and

likability for an endorser (McGuire 1985).

More recently, researchers have done several empirical studies and addressed that these two models emphasize particularly on the dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness. Numerous researchers have confirmed that the source-credibility of endorser can affect consumer attitude toward the ad as well as purchase intentions (Ohanian 1991; Desphande and Stayman 1994; Lafferty & Goldsmith 1999; Goldsmith and Newell 2000). Research has also shown that physically attractive communicators are more successful at changing attitudes (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. However, to our knowledge, few studies regarding with the dimension of likability has been undertaken. Thus, we intend to examine the impact of the likability of celebrity endorser on consumer attitude toward a brand.

Much has been said about how a highly likable celebrity endorser is able to strengthen a brand. But the research is less lack of concerning about the potential problems and risks on the brand if the advertisings pick a low likable celebrity endorser. For example, in 2003 Chanel invited a Taiwanese singer, CoCo Lee, to be their product endorser exclusively for Asian region; however, this movement caused a huge rejection from the regular customers of Chanel. Those consumers think the image of CoCo Lee is not suitable for Chanel. Afterward those consumers claimed that if Chanel kept using CoCo Lee as their brand endorsers, they would refuse to purchase their product (Epochtimes 2001). Therefore, when the celebrities have controversial status, or some of the consumer they don't like them anymore, will they hurt the brands? Will this negative impact be different between desirable brand and new brand? On the other hand, we would like to examine the moderating effects by different brand attribute-utilitarian and hedonic brands if advertisers misuse a low likability of endorser.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

As to the celebrity endorsers in this study, we define them as the same as Friedman and Friedman's definition, which are renowned figures to the public, whose achievement field might not have relation to the endorsed product. They appeal consumers by their attractiveness and likability to elicit consumers' attitude change on the endorsed products, such as Brad Pete (actor) endorsing TOYOTA Altis, A-Mei (singer) endorsing Taiwan Beer.

Theoretical Development of Celebrity Endorsement

Theory behind the celebrity endorsers has attracted a considerable amount of academic and practitioner interest. In the early 1950s, Hovland and his associates developed the Source Credibility Model. Following the initial Source Credibility Model, two additional models have been proposed, including the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire 1968) and the Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken 1989). These models explain how celebrity attractiveness, credibility, and cultural meaning transfer to the product and brand image, therefore, influencing consumer buying intention.

The Source Attractiveness Model contends that the effectiveness of a message depends on the similarity, familiarity, and likability of an endorser (McGuire 1968). Similarity is defined as a supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver of the message, familiarity as receivers' perceived knowledge of the source through exposure, and likability as receivers' perceived level of affection for the source as a result of the source's physical appearance and behavior (Erdogan 1999). Physical attractiveness has been an important topic of research in social science (Berscheid and Walster 1974)—including attitude change research. Most studies have shown that a physically attractive source facilitates attitude change (Baker and Gilbert 1977; Caballero and Price 1984; Chaiken 1979; Horai et al.

1974; Joseph 1982; Kulka and Kessler 1978; Mills and Aronson 1965; Mills and Harvey 1972; Petty and Cacioppo 1980; Simon, Berkowitz and Moyer 1970). But not all research has found that physical attractiveness increases attitude change (Kahle and Homer 1985).

The Source Attractiveness Model explains that the source adds value to the product because the sources are well received by the general public. Their attractive physical features enhance the products appeal as well as increase the recall and recognition of a product; as a result, it persuades consumers to purchase the product and/or service. Physical attractiveness of a celebrity may often be central in attitude-change process (Kahle and Homer 1985). Physical attractiveness may affect attitude change at several different places in the attitude-change process. Sometimes an attractive model may exude sensuality to charm readers into an advertisement, effectively increasing the ad's involvement by transforming it into a source of information about that intended topic and thus having a catalytic effect information processing (Dienstbier 1978; Valins 1966). Kamin's (1990) findings also indicate that physically attractive (versus unattractive) celebrities are best matched with attractiveness-relevant (versus irrelevant) products. Similarly, Baker and Churchill (1977) find that when the product is related to romance (e.g., perfume), men had higher purchase intentions when the female model was attractive; however, when the product was unrelated to romance (e.g., coffee), male subjects indicated greater purchase intentions if the model was less attractive.

Moreover, not only can the highly attractive model increase attitude change, normal attractive model can also make effective influence. Bower and Landreth (2001) distinct attractive models into highly attractive models (HAMs) and normal attractive models (NAMs) and their study shows that NAMs may be perceived as more trustworthy than HAMs because of consumers' perceived similarity between themselves and the NAMs. Deshpande and Stayman (1994) demonstrate that perceptions of

source trustworthiness can be enhanced by the identification and similarity with a source. If a woman perceives herself to be physically more similar to a NAM, a greater perceived attitudinal similarity between the receiver and the source may drive the receiver to like the source more (O'Keefe 1990; see also Berscheid 1985; Byrne 1969). A greater liking for the source may influence source trustworthiness positively (e.g., O'Keefe 1990; Simons, Berkowitz, and Moyer 1970), which may in turn influence the consumer to like and trust the source more.

The Match-up Hypothesis

The match-up hypothesis basically examined the differential impact of different types of endorsers on the endorsed brand or product. It provided a theoretical framework to link the relationship between the endorser-brand fit and endorser credibility. The framework explained how the image of an endorser links to the image of a brand and influenced consumers' attitude toward the ad as well as brand (Koernig & Boyd 2009). The match-up hypothesis suggested that the more fit between the endorser and the endorsed brand/product, the more effective the endorsement will be. Most of previous empirical studies of match-up hypothesis mainly focused on the physical attractiveness of the endorser (Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990). Kamins (1990) examined the match-up hypothesis by using an attractive endorser and an unattractive endorser on a luxury car (which is used to gain attractiveness) and a computer (which is not used to enhance attractiveness) to conduct an experimental study. The study showed that the use of a physically attractive celebrity endorser rather than a physically unattractive one was more effective in enhancing the credibility of the endorser and attitude toward the ad when the endorsed product is used to enhance one's attractiveness.

Hypotheses

Heider (1958) considered that consumers' attitude change toward the ad would affect their attitude toward the product in the ad; meanwhile, their previous attitude toward product would also affect their attitude toward the advertisement. Mowen (1980) extended Heider's Balance Model (1958) and use endorser, consumer and product to explain the triadic relationships in advertising. The most significant enhancement effect occurs when consumers have positive and favorable evaluation on endorser; moreover, the endorser and the product have strong unit relation. Due to the consistency of attitude toward the triad elements, it will enhance consumers' attitude toward the product. On the other hand, advertising and marketing researchers have directed considerable attention to attitude toward the ad as an affective construct and had mediating influence on attitude toward the brand (e.g., Lutz, MacKenzie and Belch 1983; MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986; Mitchell and Olson 1981; Shimp 1981). Clow, James and Stanely (2008) examined the relationships between a consumers' attitude toward the ad and as well as brand and the result indicated that attitude towards the ad had a significant direct impact on attitude towards the brand. Therefore, it is obvious that a high likability celebrity endorser (HLCE) will have an enhancement on a brand. However, what will happen if the likability of celebrity endorser becomes lower? When consumer has a desirable attitude toward the brand, the unlikable endorser will provide not only unattractive source but also improper link between the endorsing brand and the endorser. Based on Source Attractiveness Model and match-up theory (Kamins, 1990), the low likability celebrity endorsers (LLCE) will reduce the attractiveness and cause some negative impact transferring to the endorsing brand. We expect that this dilution effect will happen to both of desirable brand and new brand. But for the desirable brand, we think the negative impact will be higher by the LLCE due to its higher brand equity. Therefore, we predicted that a LLCE will have dilution effect on a desirable brand

and new brand. And the negative effect on the desirable brand will be higher than the effect on new brand.

H1: When a LLCE endorses brand, it will dilute consumers' attitude toward the ad and the brand.

H2: When a LLCE endorses a desirable brand, the dilution effect will be greater than that of endorsing a new brand.

Moderating effect by brand attribute

Brand attributes were defined as descriptive features that characterized a product or service (Keller 2008). From a marketing communications perspective, brand attributes have a significant role since they can have two important influences on brand choice (Romaniuk 2003). Firstly, brand attribute could be retrieval cues for consumers to be able to identify options for purchase (Nedungadi 1990). According to an associative network-type theory of memory (e.g. Anderson and Bower, 1979) where brands and attributes are linked together, stimulation of an attribute is considered to lead to the possible activation of perceptions linked to that attribute (e.g. Collins and Loftus, 1975). The second role of attributes is to offer sources for evaluation between various evoked options because brands may be chosen based on what is the best value for money, the best quality or some interaction of multiple attributes (e.g. Biehal and Chakravarti 1986).

Some researchers also used hedonic and utilitarian attribute for service types in testing the effects of advertising variables (Day and Stafford 1997). The hedonic service is considered to be more personal, fun, experiential, pleasurable (Ahtola 1985; Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994) and value expressive (Johar and Sirgy 1991); involvement levels would likely be higher compared to a utilitarian

service (Shavitt 1992). A restaurant is a good example of hedonic service which focuses more on experiential, fun and pleasurable attribute. In contrast, utilitarian services are related to rational task performance, tangible performance characteristics, and functionality (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998) such as banks which are related to value and specific benefits.

In this study, in addition to examine the effect of the likability of celebrity endorser on consumer responses toward ad and brand, we also intend to investigate the moderating role of brand attributes. We add two brand attributes (hedonic brand versus utilitarian brand) to examine whether endorser has different adverse impact between hedonic brand and utilitarian brand on consumer attitude change toward a brand. Most of previous studies used hedonic and utilitarian attribute to categorize the product type such as the effects of type of good—hedonic versus utilitarian—on choice behavior (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000). Some researchers also applied hedonic and utilitarian attribute to service types in testing the effects of advertising variables (Day and Stafford 1997). In this study, we intended to employ the hedonic and utilitarian attribute to differentiate which brand focused more on the functional-related attribute and which brand emphasized more on the pleasant-related attribute. Friedman and Friedman (1979) examined product type by endorser effect and suggested that a celebrity endorser may not do as well for a utilitarian product such as a vacuum cleaner which was rated high in financial, performance and physical risks and low in social and psychosocial risks; however, a celebrity endorsers performed well for a hedonic product such as costume jewelry which was rated high in psychological and social risks and low in financial, performance and physical risks.

Based on ELM model, we content that a high likability of celebrity endorsers will have greater enhancing effect on hedonic brand as compared to utilitarian brand. The celebrity endorser has always been treated as peripheral route if they do not include some professional endorsement. On the other hand,

hedonic brand is more subjective and personal side than its utilitarian counterpart and results more emotional reward in terms of pleasure and excitement. Consumers purchase hedonic brand for some potential entertainment or emotional worth; increased arousal, perceived symbolization and fantasy fulfillment all may be indicated to a hedonic brand. Therefore, the hedonic brand vs. utilitarian brand is easier being built by the celebrity endorser using peripheral route. Similarly, the hedonic brands will be hurt seriously by the LLCE, because they carry more hedonic equity on its brand association. For utilitarian brand, its utilitarian equity components will not be diluted easily by the LLCE. This is for the well established brands, particular for desirable brands. Therefore, for a desirable hedonic brand, its dilution effect by the LLCE will be higher than that of desirable utilitarian brand.

However, for a new brand, the situation may be different. The dilution effect on the new hedonic brand by the LLCE will be less than the new utilitarian brand, because its brand image is new to the consumer and its equity level is still low. They don't have much hedonic equity linking with celebrity endorser and can be diluted. But for utilitarian brand, its utilitarian equity is more specific. If consumer doesn't like the celebrity endorser, they may lose their trust to the brand and more related to its specific utilitarian attributes. Consequently, we predict that for a new hedonic brand, its dilution effect by the LLCE will be less than that of new utilitarian brand. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H3: For a desirable hedonic brand, its dilution effect by the LLCE will be higher than that of desirable utilitarian brand.

H4: For a new hedonic brand, its dilution effect by the LLCE will be less than that of new utilitarian brand.

Method

Pretest: The objective is to select the Utilitarian/ Hedonic brands and Celebrity Endorsers. For the brand selection, we chose six famous brands of coffee and watch respectively as our experimental brand since the target subject group is highly familiar with coffee and watch. A pretest asked participants ($n = 33$) to rate desirability/ undesirability of six coffee brands and six watch brands, favorability/ unfavorability of fourteen celebrities and to differentiate the hedonic and utilitarian brand among the coffee brands and watch brands. The measures of utilitarian and hedonic and the scale items were developed by Ang and Lim (2006) and Batra and Ahtola (1990) including functional/not functional, effective/ineffective, pleasant/unpleasant, and enjoyable/unenjoyable. For the desirability of brands was simply measure with an item liking/disliking with a seven-point semantic differential format. Finally, we measured the favorability of celebrity endorsers by asking “I like [celebrity] very much and participant also responded on 7-points Likert scales from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Based on the results of the pretest, CASIO and SWATCH, WINCAFE and LA GAUCHE DE LA SEINE coffee were chosen as the desirable brands and represented utilitarian/ hedonic brands respectively. The Chinese famous singers Lollipop and HEY GIRL were chosen as unfavorable celebrity endorsers for utilitarian/ hedonic brands respectively as they received low rank. For the new brand, we decided to use virtual brand, which were named neutrally as DK COFFEE and ZED WATCH.

Dependent measures: Adopted from Baker and Churchill (1977), five items about attitude toward ad with a seven-point semantic differential format including unappealing/appealing, dull/interesting, confusing/clear, unbelievable/believable, and unfavorable/favorable were measured (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.933$). Brand attitude was measured using another five 7-point semantic differential scales with following items: unfavorable/favorable, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, unappealing/appealing, poor

quality/good quality, negative /positive (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.968$). All measures were averaged to represent attitude toward the ad and overall brand attitude.

Experimental Design: A 2 (likability of celebrity: low likability/ no endorser) \times 2 (desirable of brand: desirable/new) \times 2 (brand attributes: hedonic vs. utilitarian) between-subject experimental design and a mixed within subject design of products (coffee and watch) were used. For experiment group, participants were shown two print ads with desirable utilitarian brand and new hedonic brand, or new utilitarian brand and desirable hedonic brand. Order bias effect was controlled properly. In control group, participants were given one coffee brand and watch brand (desirable coffee and new watch or new coffee and desirable watch) with print ads without celebrity endorser and asked their attitude toward the ad as well as brand attitude. Each print ad had an identical design layout, with a headline and slogan, followed by an illustration, and brand name and a small picture of the product.

Procedure: Before answering the question, participants were asked to see the scenario description and the advertisement. In the first part, we put the high desirability of brand with a favorable or unfavorable celebrity endorser. For the scenario description, we described that "In 2009, [brand] particularly invite [celebrity] as their brand endorser in order to increase the sales volume. Through the great popularity of [celebrity], [brand] hope they can enhance consumers' attitude toward the brand." The print ad was illustrated with a desirable brand, a headline or slogan, a small picture of the product and the brand name. A total 341 participants were recruited from a national university in central Taiwan and were allocated randomly to the experimental groups.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Dilution effect on desirable brand and new brand

The results showed that when a low likability of celebrity endorser (LLCE) endorses a desirable brand, the attitude toward the ad is significantly weakened compared to the attitude toward the ad without an endorser (3.0441 vs. 4.8826, $p=.000$). As to consumers' attitude toward the brand, the result also indicated that the negative effect by the LLCE happened significantly (3.1724 vs. 5.0954, $p=.000$). On the other hand, as for a new brand, the dilution effect by the LLCE also existed on the attitude toward the ad (2.9605 vs. 3.3638, $p=.015$) and brand attitude (2.9433 vs. 3.3502, $p=.021$). This confirms that the LLCE will have negative effect on existing desirable brands and also dilute the new brands. Thus, H1 is supported.

The result indicates that when a LLCE endorses a desirable brand, consumers' attitude toward the ad, compared to the attitude toward the ad without an endorser, decreases 1.8385 (4.8826-3.0441). However, when a LLCE endorses a new brand, compared to without an endorser, consumers' attitude toward the ad reduced only 0.4032 (3.3638-2.9605). On the other hand, the same situation happened on the attitude toward the brand. The negative effect on the desirable brand by the LLCE was 1.9230 (5.0954-3.1724), which was significantly higher than the effect on the new brand 0.4069 (3.3502-2.9433). Therefore, the dilution effect a LLCE endorsing a desirable brand is greater than endorsing a new brand. This finding is in support of H2.

Dilution effect difference between desirable and new brand

		NE (I)	LLCE (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	F	P-Value
Aad	Desirable Brand	4.8826	3.0441	-1.8385	72.421	0.000
	New Brand	3.3638	2.9605	-0.4032		
Ab	Desirable Brand	5.0954	3.1724	-1.9232	84.158	0.000
	New Brand	3.3502	2.9433	-0.4069		

Notes: NE= No Endorser

LLCE= Low Likability of Celebrity Endorser

Utilitarian and Hedonic brand

Next, the different dilution effect of a LLCE between utilitarian brand and hedonic brand will be examined for both existing desirable brand and new brand. The results indicate that when a LLCE endorsed a desirable hedonic brand, consumers' attitude toward the ad decreased 2.1648, significantly ($p=.006$) higher than that of utilitarian brand (declining 1.5170). As to attitude toward the brand, the dilution effect by the LLCE endorsed a desirable hedonic brand was 2.1534, which was slightly significant higher than the effect on the utilitarian brand 1.7095 ($p=0.095$). However, the result is different for new brand. When endorsing a new hedonic brand by the LLCE, the dilution effect on the attitude toward the ad was 0.1870, which was slightly significant lower than that of utilitarian brand 0.5897 ($p=0.082$). But the result showed significant dilution effect on the attitude toward the brand. The

negative effect on the hedonic brand was -0.1013, significantly lower than the effect on the utilitarian brand -0.6857($p=.006$). This is consistent with our hypothesis reasoning. Thus, H3 and H4 were supported.

		<i>utilitarian brand</i>	<i>hedonic brand</i>	F	P-Value
Desirable brand	Aad	↓1.5170	↓2.1648	7.805	0.006
	Abd	↓1.7095	↓2.1534	2.819	0.095
New brand	Aad	↓0.5897	↓0.1870	3.058	0.082
	Abd	↓0.6857	↓0.1013	7.915	0.006

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The results indicated that a low likability celebrity endorser (LLCE) had adverse effect on the desirable and new brands. Specifically, when a LLCE endorses a desirable brand, the evaluation of the attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand will become negative, which is higher than the effects on the new brand. These imply that the company needs to pay higher cost for the desirable brand for the misuse of the LLCE. On the other hand, the LLCE will also jeopardize the new brand vs. no endorser advertising. This means that company may face the dual injuries (paying endorser fee for celebrity and still diluting brand equity) if the advertising choosing wrong celebrity.

On the other hand, the results also showed that the dilution effect by the LLCE were different between utilitarian and hedonic brands. Specifically, for a desirable hedonic brand, its dilution effect by the LLCE was higher than that of desirable utilitarian brand. However, for a new hedonic brand, its

dilution effect was less than that of new utilitarian brand. This may related to the role of celebrity endorsers, which carry more hedonic components. When consumer does not like the celebrity endorser, then that would be linked to dilute the hedonic brand equity as well.

Therefore, for desirable brand, using a celebrity endorser is highly risky. however, if the celebrity endorser is misused, the adverse effect will also be substantial and the evaluation of the undesirable brand might get worse. Therefore, we suggest that before using a celebrity endorser, carrying out a survey to find out what kind of endorser the target customers would favor is significant since high likability of endorse for the consumers can create a favorable resonance for the brand.

In sum, this study intends to stress the importance of choosing an adaptive celebrity endorser who is desirable for the target customers. We mentioned that sometimes advertisers would have blind spot to think that the hottest celebrities or people who currently make front-page daily news are the people everyone would fond of. However, those Mr./ Ms. Popularity might not be favorable for the target customers. Therefore, in order to choosing an adaptive endorser, carrying out the research is very significant.

This study was conducted to understand the younger generation's evaluation toward the effect of celebrity endorsers; however, this current study has several limitations. First, the sample size of this study is not substantial; thus, generalizing the results to other contexts should be cautious. If possible, for future study, a larger sample size is suggested to provide broader and more in-depth results from the young consumers' view. Moreover, although the study is mainly focus on students about the effect of endorsement advertising, little is known about how subjects of different ages respond to celebrity endorsers. In a study examining reactions to an advertisement about the benefits of concrete road

surfaces, Soley and Reid (1983) found that students reacted differently than adults. It is possible that adults might have different perceptions for the endorsement advertising; thus, for future study, a wide range of age for subjects is suggested to achieve a more thorough result.

Reference upon request