

Multiple endorsers and multiple endorsements: The influence of message repetition, source congruence and involvement on brand attitudes

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Abstract

This paper investigates the effects of source congruence on brand attitudes in two situations: multiple brand endorsements by one celebrity and multiple celebrity endorsers of one brand. Under low involvement conditions, brand attitudes become more negative as a celebrity endorses multiple brands and more favorable with multiple endorsers. In high involvement conditions, strong source congruence overrides the negative effect of multiple brands, and the positive effect of multiple endorsers is found only with strong congruence. We interpret these results as suggestive of a frequency knowledge cue that dominates under low involvement but is non-diagnostic in high involvement scenarios.

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The use of celebrity endorsements in advertising is on the rise (Money, Shimp, & Sakano, 2006; White, 2004). Moreover, it is common today for a single brand to use multiple celebrity endorsers in its advertisements to identify with more potential customers. *Rolex*, for example, uses “seven tennis pros, 24 golfers, four equestrians, three yachtsmen, one skier, two race car drivers, and a polo player,” to endorse its brand (Binkley, 2007). Surprisingly little research has examined whether using multiple celebrity endorsers to advertise a single brand (hereafter multiple celebrity endorsers) is an effective strategy, relative to using a single celebrity to endorse the brand.

It is also customary for a single celebrity to endorse multiple brands (hereafter multiple brand endorsements). For example, in 2009, Peyton Manning endorsed eight brands: *Mastercard*, *Nerf*, *Oreo*, *Wheaties*, *Reebok*, *Gatorade*, *Sony* and *DirecTV* (Albergotti, 2009). The industry practice of requiring exclusivity clauses and paying premiums for “exclusive” endorsers (ReedSmith, 2006) suggests that an exclusive endorser might be

more beneficial to a brand than an endorser who is already tied to multiple brands. However, very little research has investigated the potential diminution of an endorser’s effectiveness as the number of brands endorsed increases (for exceptions see Mowen & Brown, 1981; Tripp, Jensen, & Carlson, 1994).

In the consumer psychology literature, the context of a single celebrity endorsing a single brand has been studied most often; from that research, we know that source characteristics, specifically the familiarity, likability, expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of the celebrity endorser, positively affect consumer response to celebrity advertising (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Ohanian, 1991; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Additionally, the degree of “match-up” or congruence between a brand and a celebrity in regard to source characteristics also affects consumer response to celebrity advertising (Forkan, 1980; Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 1983; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). McCracken (1989) theorized that source congruence could include cultural meanings of the celebrity; subsequent work by Kirmani & Shiv (1998) showed that “the degree of match between accessible endorser associations and attributes associated with the brand” (p. 26) (i.e., source congruence) does indeed affect

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consumer response to celebrity advertising. Finally, research on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has established that consumer involvement moderates the effect of source characteristics and congruence on consumer response to celebrity advertising (Kang & Herr, 2006; Kirmani & Shiv, 1998; Petty et al., 1983). However, as noted above, all of these findings have been established in a context where a single celebrity is endorsing a single brand. Thus, the present research extends the literature by examining how consumers respond to celebrity advertising in two key contexts: (1) multiple brand endorsements and (2) multiple celebrity endorsers.

To preview our key results, in Experiment 1 we find that, under low involvement conditions, consumers' brand attitudes become more negative as a celebrity endorses multiple brands. However, in high involvement conditions, this effect is contingent on the degree of congruence between the celebrity and the endorsed brands. Strong congruence overrides the negative effect of multiple brands. In Experiment 2, under low involvement we observe a simple "more is better" effect, as brand attitudes become more favorable with multiple endorsers. However, under high involvement, the positive effect of multiple endorsers is found only when the congruence between the brand and the endorsers is high. We interpret this pattern of results as suggestive of a frequency knowledge cue that is dominant under low involvement but is non-diagnostic when high involvement consumers consider the congruence between brand and endorser.

Conceptual framework

One of the most widely recognized models used to describe how consumers respond to persuasive advertising is the ELM (Petty et al., 1983; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which posits two routes through which an advertisement can influence consumers: a high involvement, *central* route and a lower involvement, *peripheral* route. Prior research has shown that celebrity advertising can persuade consumers via either route. For example, Kirmani & Shiv (1998) demonstrated that under high involvement conditions the degree of source congruence can be conceptualized as the strength of a persuasive argument and that the effectiveness of celebrity advertising increases directly with source congruence; however, under low involvement conditions, the effectiveness of celebrity advertising is driven by peripheral cues in the ad, such as the attractiveness or likability of the celebrity endorser, rather than the persuasive strength of the arguments contained in the ad (Kang & Herr, 2006; Petty et al., 1983).

Extending these findings to the focus of the current paper, we conceptualize the contexts of both multiple brand endorsements and multiple celebrity endorsers as different forms of persuasive message repetition, which we define as the repeated use of a celebrity endorser in the context of multiple brand endorsements and the repeated endorsement of a brand in the context of multiple celebrity endorsers. With prior research showing that increased message exposures lead to larger attitude differences between strong and weak message conditions under moderate levels of repetition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1989), we propose that source congruence, repetition, and involvement interact to

affect consumer response to celebrity advertising, specifically in regard to brand attitude.

First, consider the effect of multiple brand endorsements by the same celebrity on attitudes toward a focal brand. Under high involvement conditions, consumers are known to process source congruence in an advertisement as a persuasive argument (Kirmani & Shiv, 1998). Past research (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) has also shown that when an attitude object is described by strong versus weak arguments, repetition causes increased differences in attitude. Based upon those findings, we posit that the difference in focal brand attitude between high and low source congruence conditions should increase as the number of exposures to the celebrity endorsing other brands increases (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), due to the repetition of either a strong or weak argument. This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1. *Under high involvement, as the number of brands endorsed by a single celebrity increases, the favorability of focal brand attitude following exposure to ads high in source congruence increases relative to the favorability of focal brand attitude following ads low in source congruence.*

Conversely, under low involvement conditions, peripheral cues—not argument strength—affect brand attitude (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Due to the nature of the multiple brand endorsements context, we propose that in addition to source characteristics, consumers may utilize frequency knowledge or "the mere number of positive and negative attributes associated with a brand" (Alba & Marmorstein, 1987, p. 14) as a cue during brand attitude formation. Since consumers act as "cognitive misers" under low involvement conditions (Burnkrant, 1976), they may simply count the number of brands being endorsed by the celebrity and use this frequency knowledge (Alba & Marmorstein, 1987) as a cue to form their brand attitudes. Mowen & Brown (1981) found that consumers had a negative reaction to a celebrity who endorsed multiple brands, which suggests that brand attitudes should become more negative as the number of brand endorsements increases. In a related study, Tripp et al. (1994, Study 2) found that consumers did not spontaneously make higher-order inferences about multiple endorsements, even when they were aware of them. This suggests that a low-involvement cue such as frequency knowledge may be at work: multiple brand endorsements result in an increasing number of negative associations to the brand, even in the absence of specific inferences about the motivations of the brand or endorser. Furthermore, since the degree of source congruence in an ad is likely effortful for consumers to judge, it should not influence brand attitude under low involvement conditions. Formally stated:

H2. *Under low involvement, as the number of brands endorsed by a single endorser increases, the favorability of focal brand attitude decreases regardless of the level of source congruence.*

Next, consider the context of multiple celebrity endorsers, where consumers are being exposed to both brand and message repetition. Similar to the context of multiple brand endorsements, source congruence is more likely to be scrutinized under high

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