

THE IMPACT OF CELEBRITY SPOKESPERSONS' PERCEIVED IMAGE ON CONSUMERS' INTENTION TO PURCHASE



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The use of celebrities as spokespeople for companies continues to be a popular method of advertising (*Time*, 1989; *Wall Street Journal*, 1987). By some accounts, more than 10 percent of television advertising involves celebrity spokespeople (Sherman, 1985); and given the popularity of this practice, celebrities are managing to negotiate larger sums of money for endorsing various products and services (*Business Week*, 1987; *Wall Street Journal*, 1989). Some of the better-known celebrity spokespeople include Michael Jackson for Pepsi Cola, O. J. Simpson for Hertz, and Ed McMahon for Alpo dog food.

The reason behind the popularity of celebrity advertising is the advertisers' belief that messages delivered by well-known personalities achieve a high degree of attention and recall for some consumers. While the idea is intuitively appealing, it is strengthened by an appropriate connection between the celebrity and the product endorsed or by the celebrity's personification of some aspect of the product. For example, O. J. Simpson is considered a good spokesman for communicating the speedy service provided by Hertz because he is known for his speed. Similarly, an ex-drug addict who warns high-school students about the dangers of using illegal drugs is more effective than a school teacher because the ex-addict's experience with drugs increases his credibility.

The research on source credibility has shown that in most situations a highly credible source is more effective than a less credible source (Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholika, 1978). Highly credible sources also have been found to produce more positive attitude changes toward the position advocated and to induce more behavioral changes than have less credible sources (Craig and McCann, 1978; Woodside and Davenport, 1974). But what factors underlie source credibility? Is an effective and credible source someone who is well-known, attractive, trustworthy, expert, or even a combination of some or all of these traits? Should a credible source be an individual who is dynamic, qualified, authoritative, or safe? The literature identifies three dimensions as components of source credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Baker and Churchill, 1977; Giffin, 1967; Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953; Joseph, 1982; Kahle and Homer, 1985; Maddux and Rogers, 1980; Mills and Harvey, 1972).

Expertise, as defined by Hovland and his associates, is "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953). It is the knowledge that the communicator seems to possess to support the claims made in the advertisements. Thus, for example, athletes, doctors, and lawyers should be appropriate endorsers of products and services related

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to their respective professions.

Trustworthiness refers to the consumer's confidence in the source for providing information in an objective and honest manner. Most of us would consider a good friend trustworthy on most matters. On the other hand, while sales personnel often have more knowledge on a particular subject than does an inexperienced friend, many consumers doubt salespeople's trustworthiness because of the potential conflict of interest.

Through the increasing use of celebrities as endorsers of products, services, and social causes, attractiveness has become an important dimension of source credibility (Patzer, 1985). To discern the importance of physical attractiveness, one has only to watch television or to look at print advertisements. Most television and print ads use physically attractive people. Consumers tend to form positive stereotypes about such people, and, in addition, research has shown that physically attractive communicators are more successful in changing beliefs than are unattractive communicators (Chaiken, 1979; Dion and Berscheid, 1972). Quoting Aristotle, "Beauty is greater recommendation than any letter of introduction."

Recent research evidence suggests that the three dimensions of source credibility can make independent contributions to source effectiveness (Weiner and Mowen, 1985). For example, a spokesperson can be perceived as an expert and still be untrustworthy (e.g., a salesperson), or a spokesperson lacking expertise

can be perceived as highly trustworthy (e.g., a minister giving financial advice). Similarly, a physically attractive spokesperson might be neither an expert nor trustworthy. In any given case, a communicator's influence on his audience will depend upon some combination of these three dimensions, and this resultant value can be referred to as the perceived "credibility" of the communicator.

Typically, the concept of source credibility has been treated as a unidimensional construct in advertising. Often when reference is made to a credible celebrity spokesperson, no distinction is made among the expertise, trustworthiness, or attractiveness of the spokesperson. Actually, the most widely used method for celebrity selection, the "Q" (fare quotient) ratings, measures only the celebrity's marketable popularity and recognizability (Slinker, 1984). Given the risks associated with the selection of an inappropriate celebrity and the large sums of money involved in this type of advertising, it is important for the advertising manager to develop a systematic approach to celebrity-spokesperson selection. To this end, the present research focuses on the following research questions dealing with the use of celebrity spokespeople in advertising: What is the impact of a celebrity's attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness on a respondent's intention to purchase a product? Does this impact vary, depending on the intended use of the product (self-consumption versus gift-giving)? And finally, do male and female respondents evaluate celebrity spokespeople differently?

Method

To develop a list of celebrities to be included in this research, the author gave a panel of 40

graduate students 3 minutes to list all the celebrity names they could remember. The celebrity names were later ranked based on the frequency of mention, categorized by gender, and classified whether they had ever participated in a paid commercial. It was decided to include at least four celebrities (two male and two female) to provide some generalizability to the findings of this research. The most frequently mentioned names for each gender, among those who had previously endorsed a product, were John McEnroe and Linda Evans. Celebrities most often mentioned, who had not been involved in advertisements, were Tom Selleck and Madonna. (Data for this study were collected prior to the announcement of Madonna's involvement with Pepsi commercials.)

Using a similar approach, another group of 38 college students was asked to indicate the most appropriate products that these celebrities could endorse. The results suggested that Linda Evans would be suitable for promoting a line of women's cosmetics or a perfume. Tom Selleck was perceived as appropriate for promoting men's cologne. The sample indicated tennis rackets and other sporting equipments as items that John McEnroe should promote. Finally, for Madonna, the sample indicated that she should promote such items as designer jeans and other modern clothing.

Based on these results, the author compiled a list of products commonly used and purchased by a wide cross section of the population. Thus, the final product/celebrity list included Linda Evans promoting a new perfume, Madonna a new line of designer jeans, John McEnroe a line of tennis rackets, and Tom Selleck a new brand of men's cologne.

From this information, four questionnaires (one for each celebrity) were developed, each of which contained three parts. Upon selection of respondents, each respondent would be given one questionnaire. The first section asked respondents to indicate whether or not they were familiar with a particular celebrity and could identify the person as being associated with a show or a specific profession. Additionally, respondents were asked to supply some standard demographic information. At this stage, if a respondent were to fail to recognize the celebrity, she or he would be removed from the study. The second section of the questionnaire contained a 15-item source credibility scale. This scale measures each of the three dimensions of source credibility and has been shown to have high reliability and validity (Ohanian, 1990). The last section of the questionnaire included several items that measured respondents' likelihood to *inquire about*, *consider purchasing*, and *actually purchase* for personal use the product endorsed by the particular celebrity. Inquiry, consideration, and purchase represent increasing levels of commitment toward the product. These dependent variables are commonly used to measure the effectiveness of source credibility in advertising research (Baker and Churchill, 1977; Kahle and Homer, 1985; Rubin, Mager, and Friedman, 1982). Respondents would also be asked to indicate the likelihood that they would *inquire about*, *consider purchasing*, or *actually purchase* the product as a gift. Because of their conspicuous nature, gift-purchases, compared to purchases for self, are often perceived as being more important and more involving (Belk, 1982; Clarke and Belk, 1978; Kassarian, 1981).

Although convenience and

judgment were factors in recruiting participants for this study, an effort was made to obtain a balanced and heterogeneous sample. Questionnaires were handed out to three groups of individuals: one systematically selected from residential neighborhoods, a second from the membership of several churches, and a third from a student population of graduate and undergraduate students. Ninety-seven members of the sample were selected through a systematic area-sampling technique (Churchill, 1987). All census tracts in a southern city were selected, and within each tract a number of blocks were randomly chosen for sampling. For each block the interviewer was instructed to randomly select a house and then to interview every other household until the quota for that block was filled. The second group (246 subjects) was selected by contacting three church groups and soliciting their members' participation. Arrangements were made to make a contribution to the church in exchange for each participant whom the church recruited. The last group comprised 217 undergraduate and graduate students. The data for the study were collected over a two-month period.

Trained assistants monitored each data-collection round and read all directions from a prepared script. After the instructions were read, the respondents were asked to complete the first part of the questionnaire, which included the source familiarity and demographic questions. Upon the completion of this phase, the assistant collected the instrument and determined which subjects were to continue the next two phases. In the second phase the respondents completed the source credibility scale for one of the four celebrities. The final phase included the

collection of the intention-to-purchase measures. To eliminate response bias, two rotation patterns were used in the presentation of the source credibility scale items and the dependent measures. Each respondent had an equal chance of receiving a questionnaire dealing with any one of the four celebrities. The 578 respondents ranged in age from 18 to 73, with a mean of 47. The sample included 52 percent male and 48 percent female respondents. Five hundred forty-two respondents were included in the final sample. The attrition rate was due to respondents' unfamiliarity with celebrities or to excessive missing data.

Analysis and Results

To determine if perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness dimensions were equally reliable for different celebrities and genders, Cronbach's alpha was computed for both male and female respondents for each celebrity. Cronbach's alpha is a widely used measure for assessing the reliability of psychometrically developed scales (Cronbach and Snow, 1977). The range of coefficient alpha is between 0 and 1, where 0 would indicate a completely unreliable test. For the present study both male and female respondents had reliable response patterns. The total sample for each subscale (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) and celebrity (Linda Evans, Madonna, John McEnroe, and Tom Selleck) had a reliability coefficient of 0.82 or higher.

To determine the impact of respondents' age and gender on the evaluation of celebrities' attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, and ability to promote the sale of a product, four separate analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) models were devel-

Table 1
Analysis of Covariance Results for the Effects of Respondents' Age and Gender on Celebrities' Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Intention-to-Purchase Measures

Dependent measure	F-ratio	Significance of F
<i>Attractiveness</i>		
Age	1.365	.243
Gender	0.704	.402
Celebrity	149.273	<.001
Celebrity × gender	2.012	.121
<i>Trustworthiness</i>		
Age	0.005	.946
Gender	0.364	.547
Celebrity	108.194	<.001
Celebrity × gender	0.462	.497
<i>Expertise</i>		
Age	0.687	.398
Gender	2.272	.114
Celebrity	403.424	<.001
Celebrity × gender	1.654	.198
<i>Intention to Purchase</i>		
Age	0.588	.444
Gender	0.766	.382
Celebrity	40.084	<.001
Celebrity × gender	1.831	.140

oped. Initially, items that included the attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise constructs were summed to produce individual subscales. Additionally, *inquire about*, *consider*, and *actual purchase* intention items were summed to operationalize the intention-to-purchase scale. These scales for each celebrity were used as dependent variable in a 4 × 2 Analysis of Covariance design. The model included age as a covariate, with the celebrities (four levels) and the gender of respondents (two levels) as the main effect factors. The analysis of covariance model provides the appropriate test to simultaneously measure the effect of respondents' age and gender on

the dependent measures described earlier. The results of the analysis of covariance models are presented in Table 1. Figure 1 is a graphical display of the means for each of the four analyses. As can be seen from Table 1, for all analyses there were no main effects due to a respondent's gender or to the age covariate. In other words, a respondent's age and gender had no significant impact on the evaluations of the celebrity's attractiveness, trustworthiness, or expertise or on the likelihood to purchase a product promoted by the celebrity. Celebrities were, however, perceived as being significantly different from each other with respect to their attractiveness,

trustworthiness, and expertise and with respect to respondents' intention to purchase. For example, John McEnroe was perceived to be least attractive and trustworthy but possessed a high level of perceived expertise with sporting equipment. On the other hand, Linda Evans was perceived as highly attractive and trustworthy but had an average level of perceived expertise with perfume.

For the last stage of the analysis, a LISREL model was specified to determine the impact of each dimension of source credibility on intention to purchase. Using the notation suggested by Joreskog and Sorbom (1988), the LISREL model was defined as follows:

$$\eta = \Gamma\xi + \zeta$$

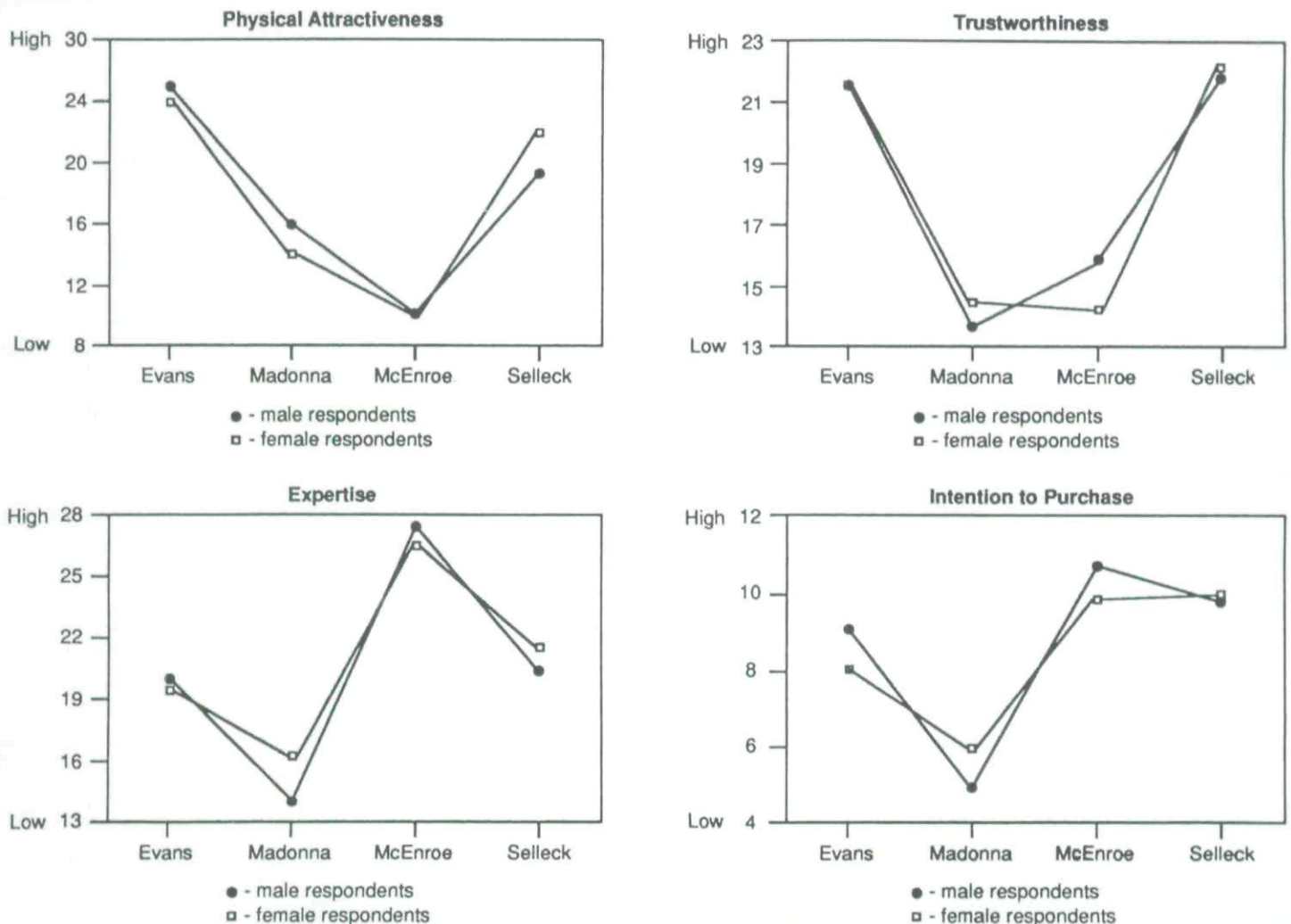
where:

- η is a (1 × 1) column vector of intention-to-purchase construct derived from the dependent variables γ (*consider*, *inquire about*, and *actually purchase*)
- Γ is a (1 × 3) coefficient matrix relating the independent constructs (trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness) to the intention-to-purchase construct
- ξ is a (3 × 1) column vector of source-credibility constructs derived from the independent variables (x), and
- ζ is a (1 × 1) column vector of the error in the structural equations

Figure 2 presents the diagram of the LISREL model for our present analysis. As can be seen, five independent variables define each of the three source-credibility constructs, and three dependent variables (*inquire*, *consider*, and *actually purchase*) define the intention-to-purchase construct. Finally, γ_{11} , γ_{12} , γ_{13} , measures the impact of each of the

Figure 1

Mean Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Intention to Purchase Scores for Each Celebrity by Respondent Gender



source-credibility constructs on intention to purchase. LISREL methodology is a more powerful analytical tool than the traditional regression or path analysis models. It allows for measurement errors in the independent variables, the dependent variables, and the dependent construct. In addition it allows for intercorrelations among the independent constructs (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) and simultaneously measures their impact on the dependent (intention-to-purchase) construct.

For the present study eight such models were tested. Of these, four illustrate gift-giving situations and four personal-consumption situations. Table 2 presents the results for these models. As can be seen, in each case the physical attractiveness and trustworthiness of a celebrity is not significantly related to the intention to purchase a product for either personal use or gift-giving. However, in every instance, the respondents' evaluation of the celebrities' perceived expertise with the product was significantly related to respon-

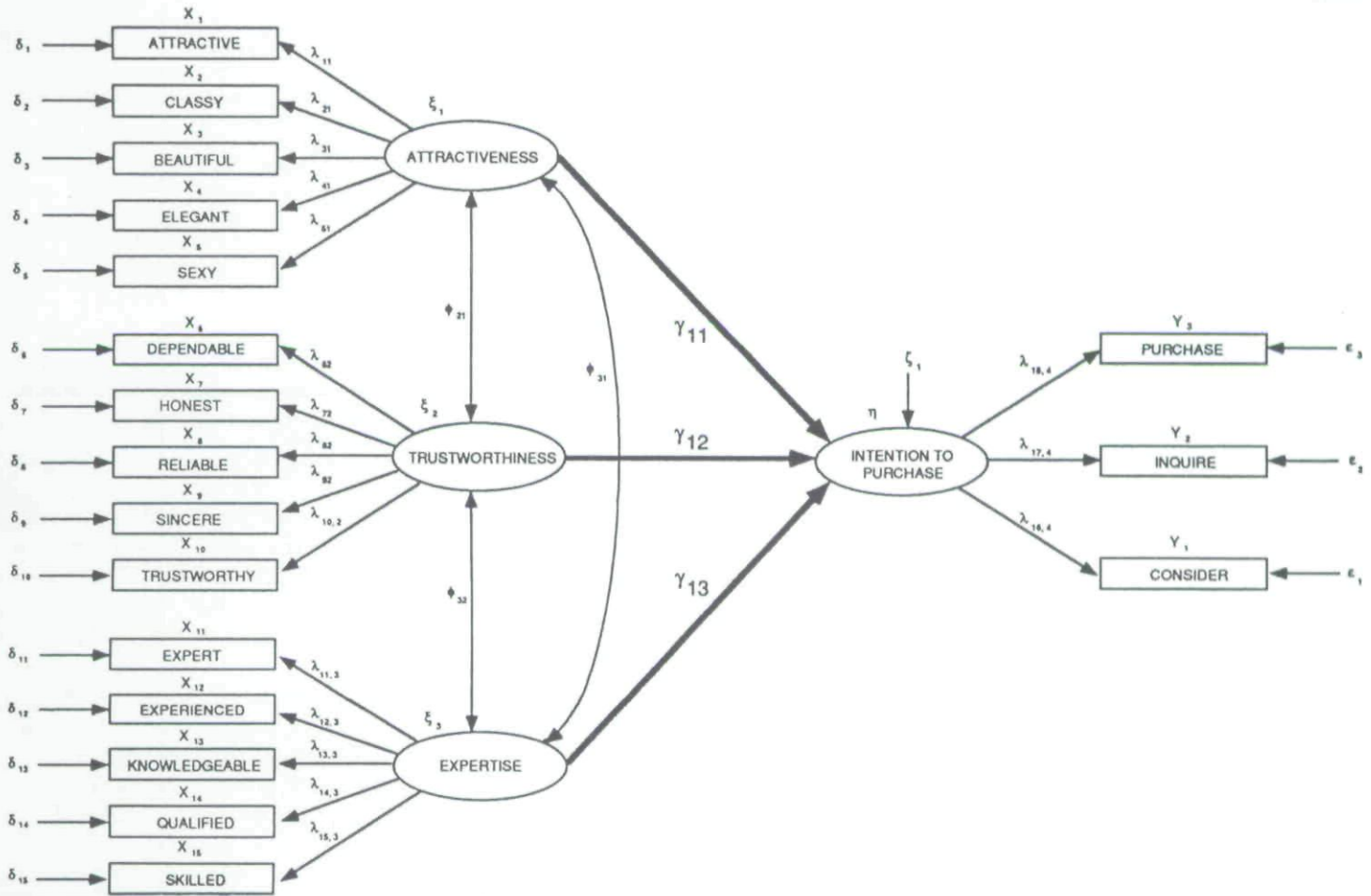
dents' intention to purchase the product for both personal use and gift-giving.

Discussion

The present study relates the three dimensions of source credibility to respondents' intention to purchase. With these four celebrities, the results indicate that in each case respondents evaluated the celebrities to be significantly different from each other with respect to their attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise and with regard to the intention-to-purchase measure. However,

Figure 2

The Relationship of Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise Constructs to Intention to Purchase



gender and age of respondents had no significant effect on their intention to purchase or on how they evaluated the attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise of the four celebrities.

When modeling the impact of each dimension of source credibility on intention to purchase, the attractiveness and trustworthiness of the celebrity had an insignificant impact on respondents' intentions to purchase the products endorsed by each of the four celebrities. Only the perceived expertise of the celebrities was a significant factor explaining the respondents' intentions to purchase. The results were consistent, whether the

product was to be purchased for personal use or for gift-giving.

The following results suggest some important considerations for the advertising practitioner. For celebrities tested in the present study, the purchase situation did not produce a differential impact on intention to purchase. For both personal-use and gift-giving situations, celebrity endorsement had a similar impact on respondents' reported intention to purchase the product. It is possible that the products used were low-involvement products, and as such, the gift-giving situation was not perceived as being more involving than was the personal usage oc-

casion. Future research should investigate the use of celebrity spokespersons with products of varying levels of involvement.

An encouraging finding of this study is the notion that both male and female respondents across different age categories have similar perceptions of what comprises expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of a celebrity. Thus, regardless of subject gender and age, these constructs can be measured with equal precision. This is probably due to the reliable and valid nature of the measurement instrument, which should encourage its greater usage in studies dealing with celebrity selection.

Finally, while attractiveness and trustworthiness are important factors in persuasive communication research, they seem to have a minimal impact in the present source credibility study. These findings can be partially explained by the fact that in advertisements most celebrities are attractive, and as such, respondents have a mind set in which attractiveness is not a determinant factor in their brand-selection decisions. Further, with the widespread use of celebrities and athletes in paid commercials, the audience does not associate a high level of trustworthiness with individuals who get paid handsomely to promote a product. Therefore, trustworthiness of the source is not an important determinant of respondents' likelihood to purchase the product. The fact that the perceived expertise of the source was consistently related to respondents' intention to purchase the product emphasizes the importance of using expert celebrity spokespersons in image advertising. This finding can explain the popularity of using the chief executive officers (CEOs) of companies to endorse their products. There is some evidence to suggest that CEOs are perceived to be more expert and likely to use the product endorsed (Poindexter, 1983).

Thus, the advertising practitioner should recognize that, while the use of a well-known personality can create initial interest and attention for an advertisement, such an endorsement will not necessarily result in atti-

Only the perceived expertise of the celebrities was a significant factor explaining the respondents' intentions to purchase.

Table 2
LISREL Coefficients for the Impact of Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise on Intention to Purchase

Celebrity	Personal use*			Gift-giving		
	A	T	E	A	T	E
Linda Evans (Perfume)	.297	-.124	.466**	.178	.054	.444**
Madonna (Blue jeans)	.215	-.177	.711**	.224	.001	.560**
John McEnroe (Tennis rackets)	.061	.147	.394**	.214	-.034	.451**
Tom Selleck (Men's cologne)	.045	.146	.461**	.173	.148	.574**

* Includes data only for the appropriate gender. A = Attractiveness, T = Trustworthiness, E = Expertise.

** $p < 0.01$

tude changes toward that product. Some companies are beginning to realize that the indiscriminate use of athletes and other celebrities is not going to result in increased use of or favorable attitude toward their products (King, 1989). For celebrity spokespersons to be truly effective, they should be knowledgeable, experienced, and qualified to talk about the product. Attempts should be made to employ celebrity spokespersons who have direct connections with their endorsed products and who are perceived to be experts by the target respondents.

Limitations of the Study

The present study has a number of limitations; the recognition of these should help refine future research efforts. With regard to the generalizability, the findings of this study are limited to the celebrities and product endorsements tested in this research. Future research with other celebrities and products or services can shed light to the generalizability of these findings. While the sample for the present study was derived from several

different sources, it still does not adhere to the strict conditions of the probability sampling, and as such, generalizations to other populations should be made with caution.

The order of presenting adjectives to evaluate celebrities and to measure their role on respondents' intentions to purchase products for personal use and gift-giving was rotated among respondents to minimize the con-

. . . trustworthiness of the source is not an important determinant of respondents' likelihood to purchase the product.

foundings of spokesperson conditions. However, there remains the possibility that response bias might affect the evaluation of celebrity spokespersons' effectiveness. Ideally, there should be a longer delay between celebrity evaluation and collection of intention-to-purchase data to minimize the response carryover effects.

Despite the above limitations,

the research findings clearly demonstrate the role of celebrity spokespersons' perceived expertise on respondents' intention to purchase a product. Given the popularity of using celebrity spokespersons in advertising, the issue of celebrity spokesperson credibility should receive more attention from both advertising practitioners and researchers. ■

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