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

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Received 14 December 2009; received in revised form 2 May 2011; accepted 8 June 2011
Available online 7 July 2011

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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Keywords: Celebrity endorsement; Brand attitude; Persuasive argument; Advertising; Involvement; Source congruence

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) theoried 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...
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
(versus low) involvement conditions (Kirmani & Shiv, 1998). Thus, when involvement is high, we propose that the difference in brand attitude between high and low source congruence conditions should increase as the number of celebrity endorsers increases, due to the repetition of either strong or weak arguments (Petty et al., 1983). Formally stated:

H3. Under high involvement, as the number of celebrities endorsing the brand increases, the favorability of brand attitude following exposure to ads high in source congruence increases relative to the favorability of brand attitude following ads low in source congruence.

Again, similar to the context of multiple brand endorsements, brand attitude should be influenced by peripheral cues under low involvement conditions (Kang & Herr, 2006; Petty et al., 1983). However, in the context of multiple celebrity endorsers, exposure to celebrity advertising should associate the featured brand to multiple positive attributes (Alba & Marmorstein, 1987), assuming that the source characteristics of each celebrity are positive (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Therefore, if consumers extract the frequency knowledge that exists in the context of multiple celebrity endorsers and use it as a cue during brand attitude formation, then as the number of celebrity endorsers increases, brand attitude should also increase. Finally, with the number of celebrities endorsing a single brand being easier to process and judge than the degree of source congruence contained in each ad, the former rather than the latter should influence brand attitudes under low involvement conditions. Formally stated:

H4. Under low involvement, as the number of celebrities endorsing the brand increases, the favorability of brand attitude increases regardless of the degree of source congruence.

Experiment 1: multiple brand endorsements

Experiment 1 was designed to investigate the effect of multiple brand endorsements by a single celebrity and thus to test H1 and H2.

Method

Participants and design

A total of 490 undergraduate students participated in the study in exchange for extra credit; 102 participants were eliminated for failure to pass attention checks or having knowledge of similar existing endorsements by the celebrity, leaving 388 participants for analysis. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2(number of brands endorsed: one or three) × 2(source congruence: high or low) × 2(involvement: high or low) between-subjects experimental design with two celebrity replicates.

Stimuli

Pretests determined product classes and fictitious brand names that participants found capable of taking on both rugged and sophisticated images; based on the results we selected Castolano watches, Adesta briefcases and Murati SUVs as our stimuli, resulting in three complete replicates of the design. Based upon pretests, we created the high (low) source congruence advertisements by inserting Pierce Brosnan (Vin Diesel) into ads with a sophisticated message and Vin Diesel (Pierce Brosnan) into ads with a rugged message. Thus, each brand was inserted into four different ads to create high and low source congruence versions of each ad for each celebrity replicate (see Appendix A).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned across conditions and told that they would be evaluating test advertisements involving celebrity endorsements for brands that had not yet been introduced. Following Kirmani & Shiv (1998), participants in the high involvement condition were instructed to focus on how good they thought the brands were and what types of characteristics the brands would have, while participants in the low involvement condition were instructed to focus on aspects of the ad following the procedures of Petty et al. (1983). Participants in the three brands endorsed condition saw ads for all three brands, while those in the one brand endorsed condition saw only the ad for the Castolano watch. After viewing the ad(s), participants were asked to write down any thoughts that they had about the ad(s) as well as to report their attitude toward the brand(s), the degree of perceived congruence between the celebrity endorser and the brand(s), and the source characteristics of the celebrity endorser.

Measures

Celebrity source characteristics and associations

Participants rated each celebrity on a series of 7-point scales, and we created an index score by averaging the scores of the individual items for each source characteristic. Each celebrity endorser was rated on how likable (three items, $\alpha=.83$), attractive (two items, $r=.91$), well-known (1 item), trustworthy (three items, $\alpha=.85$) and expert (1 item per brand) he was perceived to be (see Appendix B for items). We included these index scores as covariates in the subsequent analyses in order to control for any source characteristic differences between celebrity endorsers that may have influenced brand attitude. Finally, celebrity ruggedness ($\alpha=.86$) and sophistication ($\alpha=.90$) associations were measured with separate three-item indices (see Appendix B for items).

Involvement

To assess the level of involvement as reflected by issue-relevant elaboration, we followed the thought protocol method utilized by Kirmani & Shiv (1998). Two judges, who were unaware of the hypotheses, coded all recorded thoughts and resolved any discrepancies through discussion. All thoughts coded as relating to Castolano (i.e., the watch brand) or watches...
in general were considered as relevant and were treated as indicators of involvement.

Perceived source congruence

We measured perceived source congruence in two ways. First, we used the source congruence scale developed by Kimani & Shiv (1998), whereby participants rated the perceived congruence between the celebrity and Castolano (i.e., the watch brand) via three 7-point scales ($\alpha = .96$): inappropriate/appropriate, fits poorly with the brand/fits well with the brand, does not match the branch/matches the brand. Second, we used the perceived congruity index based upon thought protocols developed by Kimani & Shiv (1998). The congruity index scores consisted of the number of positive congruity thoughts (e.g., Vin Diesel is a good endorser for a rugged watch) minus the number of negative congruity thoughts (e.g., I don’t see Vin Diesel as fitting well with a sophisticated watch). Two judges, who were unaware of the hypotheses, coded all thoughts and resolved any discrepancies through discussion.

Brand attitude

Participants rated their brand attitude via two 7-point scales ($r = .72$): low quality/high quality and bad/good.

Manipulation checks

Celebrity associations

For the purpose of these evaluations, we refer to the replicates of rugged and sophisticated endorsers as celebrity type. For both the celebrity ruggedness and sophistication index, a number of brands endorsed $\times$ source congruence $\times$ involvement $\times$ celebrity type ANCOVA revealed a significant main effect of celebrity type ($F_{\text{ruggedness}}(1,367)=280.52, p < .001; F_{\text{sophistication}}(1,367)=341.42, p < .001$), where participants found Vin Diesel to be more rugged than Pierce Brosnan ($M_{\text{Diesel}}=5.98$ vs. $M_{\text{Brosnan}}=4.76$) and Pierce Brosnan to be more sophisticated than Vin Diesel ($M_{\text{Brosnan}}=5.80$ vs. $M_{\text{Diesel}}=3.54$). Thus, the manipulation of celebrity associations was successful.

Perceived source congruence

A number of brands endorsed $\times$ source congruence $\times$ involvement ANCOVA revealed a significant main effect of source congruence ($F(1,375)=31.01, p < .001$) on the three-scale source congruence index, where participants in the high (versus low) source congruence condition perceived the celebrity to have higher congruence with the Castolano brand ($M_{\text{high congruence}}=5.17$ vs. $M_{\text{low congruence}}=4.29$). The perceived source congruence thought protocol index also showed that the net number of positive source congruence thoughts was higher for participants in the high (versus low) source congruence condition ($F(1,375)=18.30, p < .001; M_{\text{high congruence}}=0.29$ vs. $M_{\text{low congruence}}=-1.09$). There were no significant main or interaction effects involving number of brands endorsed or involvement on either of these indices.

A separate manipulation check was performed for participants in the three brands endorsed condition, whereby we examined the perceived congruence between the endorser and the set of brands being endorsed since it is the totality of the repeated messages that affects brand attitude. We first constructed an index from the source congruence scales across the three brands endorsed ($\alpha = .74$, 9 items). The resulting ANCOVA analysis revealed a significant main effect of source congruence ($F(1,177)=5.71, p = .018$), whereby participants perceived the celebrity in the high (versus low) source congruence condition to have higher congruence with the three brands endorsed ($M_{\text{high congruence}}=4.53$ vs. $M_{\text{low congruence}}=4.10$). We also created a total source congruence index by subtracting the total number of negative source congruence thoughts from the total number of positive source congruence thoughts across the three brands endorsed. The results of an involvement $\times$ source congruence ANCOVA revealed a significant main effect of source congruence ($F(1,177)=4.20, p = .042$), whereby the net number of positive source congruence thoughts about the three brands endorsed was higher for participants in the high (versus low) source congruence condition ($M_{\text{high congruence}}=0.41$ vs. $M_{\text{low congruence}}=-0.27$). Thus, in sum, the manipulation of source congruence was successful.

Involvement

Results of a number of brands endorsed $\times$ source congruence $\times$ involvement ANCOVA revealed a significant main effect for involvement ($F(1,375)=17.27, p < .001$), whereby participants in the high (versus low) involvement condition had more Castolano or watch-relevant thoughts ($M_{\text{high involvement}}=1.20$ vs. $M_{\text{low involvement}}=0.89$). There were no significant effects involving number of brands endorsed or source congruence. The Murati (SUV) and Adesta (Briefcase) brands were shown to participants in the three brands endorsed condition. ANCOVA analyses on the thoughts generated by such participants showed a significantly higher number of relevant thoughts in the high (versus low) involvement condition for both Murati ($F(1,177)=25.86, p < .001; M_{\text{high involvement}}=1.62$ vs. $M_{\text{low involvement}}=1.01$) and Adesta ($F(1,177)=15.63, p < .001; M_{\text{high involvement}}=1.67$ vs. $M_{\text{low involvement}}=1.12$). There were no significant effects involving source congruence. Thus, the manipulation of involvement was successful.

Results

Are brand attitudes affected by source congruence?

We argued that under high involvement conditions, source congruence moderates the effect of number of brands endorsed on brand attitudes (H1), yet under low involvement conditions, there is no relationship between source congruence and brand attitudes (H2). Testing these hypotheses, a number of brands endorsed $\times$ source congruence $\times$ involvement ANCOVA showed a significant 3-way interaction ($F(1,375)=5.68, p = .018$). For clarity, we report the analysis by involvement condition.

For the high involvement condition, the number of brands endorsed $\times$ source congruence ANCOVA revealed a significant
For the low involvement condition, the number of brands endorsed×source congruence ANCOVA revealed no significant main or interaction effects of source congruence on brand attitude (p’s > .01). However, the analysis did reveal a significant main effect of the number of brands endorsed (F(1,375)=4.38, p = .037) such that brand attitude for Castolano was less favorable when the celebrity endorsed three brands versus one brand (Mthree=5.17 vs. Mone=5.44), which supports H2.

Discussion

The results of Experiment 1 demonstrate that under high involvement conditions, when consumers scrutinize the degree of congruence between the brand and celebrity endorser like a persuasive argument (Kirmani & Shiv, 1998), source congruence moderates the relationship between the number of brands endorsed by a celebrity and brand attitude. Specifically low (high) source congruence causes brand attitude to become more negative (directionally more positive) as the number of brands endorsed by a single celebrity increases.

In contrast, when involvement is low, source congruence does not seem to affect brand attitude. When consumers are neither elaborating on the brand nor scrutinizing the persuasive arguments in the ad, brand attitude becomes more negative as the number of brands being endorsed by the celebrity increases. Such a finding is consistent with prior research that has shown how low involvement consumers utilize peripheral cues like source characteristics during attitude formation (Petty et al., 1983). However, it is important to note that we controlled for the effects of source characteristics in our analyses, and therefore the findings suggest that the context of multiple brand endorsements provides consumers with a new peripheral cue (i.e., frequency knowledge related to the number of brands endorsed by the celebrity) to utilize during attitude formation. More will be said about this cue in the general discussion section.

In summary, the results of Experiment 1 extend the work of Kirmani & Shiv (1998) to the context of multiple brand endorsements and provide evidence that the congruence between a celebrity and the brands that he/she endorses moderates the relationship between multiple brand endorsements and brand attitude. While prior research (e.g., Mowen & Brown, 1981; Tripp et al., 1994) suggests that consumers find a brand less favorable when its celebrity endorser advertises for multiple brands, the results from Experiment 1 suggest that if a brand is highly congruent with its celebrity endorser and consumers are highly involved with the brand, then the brand may not be harmed by the fact that its celebrity endorser advertises for multiple brands.

Experiment 2: multiple celebrity endorsers

Experiment 2 was designed to investigate the effect of multiple celebrity endorsers of a single brand and thus to test H3 and H4.
Method

Participants and design

A total of 406 undergraduate students participated in the study in exchange for extra credit. Twenty-three participants were eliminated for failure to pass attention checks, leaving 383 participants for analysis. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2(number of celebrity endorsers: three or one) × 2(source congruence: high or low) × 2(involvement: high or low) between-subjects experimental design.

Stimuli and procedure

We manipulated the number of celebrity endorsers factor by having the Castolano watch brand from Experiment 1 endorsed by either one or three celebrities. Based on pretest results, we created the high source congruence advertisements by inserting celebrities associated with sophistication (ruggedness), such as Pierce Brosnan, Anthony Hopkins and Sean Connery (Vin Diesel, Stallone and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson), into separate ads stressing the sophistication (ruggedness) of the brand. For the low source congruence advertisements, we inserted each sophisticated (rugged) celebrity into a separate ad with a rugged (sophisticated) message. Thus, each celebrity was inserted into two different watch ads to create high and low congruence versions of each ad for each celebrity replicate. Participants in the one celebrity endorser condition saw ads with only Brosnan or “The Rock,” while participants in the three celebrity endorsers condition saw three ads with a different celebrity in each ad. The procedure and measures were identical to those used in Experiment 1.

Manipulation checks

Celebrity source characteristics

To control for variation in source characteristics across endorsers, we created source characteristic indices, which were used as covariates in the subsequent analyses of Experiment 2. For the one celebrity endorser condition, we used the same indices as those used in Experiment 1 (see Appendix B) For the three celebrity endorsers condition, we formed indices by taking the average of the source characteristic measures across the three celebrities (see Appendix B). Coefficient alphas for the three (one) endorser conditions were .78 (.71) for likability, .84 (.90) for attractiveness, .91 (.88) for trustworthiness, .84 (N/A) for expertise, and .64 (N/A) for being well-known.

Celebrity associations

To examine the perceived ruggedness and sophistication of the celebrities, we created two indices. For the one celebrity endorser conditions, we calculated the ruggedness (α = .80) and sophistication (α = .89) index via the method used in Experiment 1, while for the three celebrity endorser conditions, we averaged the ratings for all three endorsers and created an overall ruggedness (α = .87) and sophistication (α = .91) index. For the purpose of these evaluations, we refer to the replicates of rugged and sophisticated celebrity endorsers as celebrity type.

For both the celebrity ruggedness and sophistication index, a number of celebrity endorsers × source congruence × involvement × celebrity type ANCOVA showed a significant main effect of celebrity type (F_{ruggedness}(1,362) = 269.82, p < .001; F_{sophistication}(1,362) = 232.25, p < .001) indicating that participants found the rugged celebrity(ies) to be more rugged than the sophisticated celebrity(ies) (M_{rugged} = 5.88 vs. M_{sophistication} = 4.68) and the sophisticated celebrity(ies) to be more sophisticated than the rugged celebrity(ies) (M_{sophistication} = 5.90 vs. M_{rugged} = 4.04). Thus, the manipulation of celebrity associations was successful.

Perceived source congruence

For the one celebrity endorser condition, we calculated the index via the method used in Experiment 1 (α = .96), while for the three celebrity endorsers condition, we averaged the three source congruence items for each celebrity shown and created an overall source congruence index for Castolano (α = .90). With perceived source congruence as the dependent variable, a number of celebrity endorsers × source congruence × involvement ANCOVA revealed a significant main effect of source congruence (F(1,370) = 17.85, p < .001), which was qualified by a number of celebrity endorsers × source congruence × involvement interaction (F(1,370) = 6.24, p = .13). The results were analyzed at each level of involvement. The resulting ANCOVA analyses in both high and low involvement conditions showed only a significant main effect of source congruence (F_{highinvolvement}(1,370) = 15.50, p < .001, M_{highcongruence} = 5.21 vs. M_{lowcongruence} = 4.49), while for (F_{lowinvolvement}(1,370) = 6.823, p = .009, M_{highcongruence} = 4.90 vs. M_{lowcongruence} = 4.51), whereby participants in the high source congruence condition perceived the celebrity(ies) to have higher source congruence with Castolano than did those in the low source congruence condition, regardless of involvement. There was no significant interaction between congruence and number of endorsers in either involvement condition.

Results

Are brand attitudes affected by source congruence?

We argued that under high involvement conditions, source congruence moderates the effect of the number of celebrity endorsers on brand attitudes (H3), but that under low involvement conditions, there is no relationship between source congruence and brand attitudes (H4). To test these hypotheses, we created a brand attitude index (r = .78) via the method used in Experiment 1. The results of a number of celebrity endorsers × source congruence × involvement ANCOVA revealed a significant 3-way interaction (F(1,370) = 7.28, p = .007; see Fig. 2) on the brand attitude measure. For clarity, we report the analysis by involvement condition.

For the high involvement condition, ANCOVA revealed a significant number of celebrity endorsers × source congruence interaction (F(1,370) = 4.57, p = .033). The results indicate that as the number of celebrity endorsers increased from one to three, the difference in brand attitude for Castolano between high and low source congruence increased, which supports H3.
Low Source Congruence

for congruence led to significantly more favorable brand attitudes for celebrity endorsers. The involvement.

Fig. 2. The effect of number of celebrity endorsers by source congruence by significance (\(p<.05\)). However, the analysis did reveal a significant main effect of number of celebrity endorsers (\(F(1,370)=3.96, p=.047\)) such that brand attitudes for Castolano were more favorable when there were three celebrities as opposed to one celebrity endorsing the Castolano brand (\(M_{three}=5.64\) vs. \(M_{one}=5.26\)), which supports H4.

Discussion

Experiment 2 provides further evidence that the repetition of celebrity advertising with high versus low source congruence leads to a divergence in brand attitude under conditions of high involvement. When consumers elaborate on a brand and scrutinize the celebrity endorser as a persuasive argument in the ad, we find that source congruence moderates the effect of number of celebrity endorsers on brand attitudes, whereby the difference in brand attitude between endorsers with high and low source congruence increases as the number of celebrities endorsing the brand increases. Notably, we found no evidence that an increase in the number of celebrity endorsers with low source congruence negatively affects brand attitude. This could be a result of two conflicting effects found in the literature. Specifically, if the mere number of celebrity endorsers exerts a positive influence on brand attitudes (Mowen & Brown, 1981) but is offset by increased exposure to weak arguments in the low source congruence condition (Cacioppo & Petty, 1989), there may be a null effect of number of celebrity endorsers when source congruence is low.

As expected, source congruence does not affect brand attitude under low involvement conditions. When consumers are neither elaborating on the brand nor scrutinizing the persuasive arguments in the ad, brand attitude becomes more positive as the number of celebrity endorsers for the brand increases. Such a finding is consistent with the findings of Experiment 1 as well as prior research (e.g., Kirmani & Shiv, 1998), and since we controlled for the effects of source characteristics in Experiment 2, the findings suggest that the context of multiple celebrity endorsers provides consumers with a readily available peripheral cue (i.e., the number of celebrities endorsing the brand) to utilize during attitude formation. In summary, the findings of Experiment 2 extend the work of Kirmani & Shiv (1998) to a multiple celebrity endorsers context and show that source congruence can moderate the effects that multiple celebrity endorsers have on brand attitudes but only under high involvement conditions.

General discussion

The objective of this research was to explore how factors that are well-established in the celebrity advertising literature interact and affect consumer response to celebrity advertising when (a) a single celebrity endorses multiple brands (i.e., multiple brand endorsements) and (b) multiple celebrities endorse a single brand (i.e., multiple celebrity endorsers). In this paper, we have argued that when involvement is high, the effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement depends on the degree of congruence shared between the celebrity and brand (Kirmani & Shiv, 1998; McCracken, 1989) as well as the degree of message repetition. Across two studies, we showed that increased repetition caused by either multiple brand endorsements (Experiment 1) or multiple celebrity endorsers (Experiment 2) leads to greater divergence in brand attitudes between high and low source congruence endorsements under high (but not low) involvement conditions.

Although our manipulation checks showed that participants were aware of source congruence differences in both high and low involvement conditions, we did not find an effect of source congruence on brand attitude under low involvement conditions in either study, which is consistent with our theorizing. Such a finding suggests that source congruence was given less weight...
during the formation of brand attitude under low (versus high) involvement conditions and further suggests that consumers based their brand attitudes on some other information communicated by the ad(s) under low involvement conditions. While determining the specific underlying process for how brand attitudes are formed under low involvement conditions was not the focus of this paper, we find the pattern of results across the two studies (i.e., a negative effect of the number of brands that a celebrity endorses under low involvement conditions in Experiment 1 and a positive effect of the number of celebrities endorsing a brand under low involvement conditions in Experiment 2) to be an interesting area for future research (see discussion below).

Theoretical implications

Our results make important contributions to the celebrity endorsement literature. First, we extend Kirmani & Shiv’s (1998) ELM-based explanation of celebrity endorser effects and make important connections to earlier research that examined consumer response to multiple brand endorsements by a single celebrity (e.g., Tripp et al., 1994) and multiple celebrity endorsers for a single brand (e.g., Mowen & Brown, 1981). The results of our two studies show that source congruence and message repetition are important determinants of brand attitudes when consumers are highly involved with processing the advertising. The results are consistent with Kirmani & Shiv (1998) in that source congruence is treated as a persuasive argument to be scrutinized under high involvement conditions.

Second, our findings demonstrate that multiple brand endorsements processed under high involvement conditions can lead to the polarization of attitudes toward the brand itself, a finding that is consistent with prior attitude research (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) but had not been shown in a celebrity endorsement context. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding illustrates that consumers consider the endorsement portfolios of both the celebrity and the brand when responding to celebrity advertising. Thus, it is important to consider more than just a single celebrity paired with a single brand when predicting likely consumer response to celebrity advertising. However, this raises questions about how consumer knowledge about either of these portfolios may affect consumer response, a point that we will discuss further in the future research section.

Conversely, under low involvement conditions, the findings show that an increasing number of brands endorsed by a single celebrity has a detrimental effect (Experiment 1) while an increasing number of celebrity endorsers for a single brand has a beneficial effect (Experiment 2) on consumer response to celebrity advertising. Such results suggest that, in addition to source characteristics, consumers may utilize frequency knowledge (Alba & Marmorstein, 1987) as a peripheral cue during brand attitude formation under low involvement conditions, which is consistent with the ELM and Chaiken’s Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Previously, frequency knowledge has been identified as a “very effective peripheral route to persuasion,” (Alba & Marmorstein, 1987, p.24), but a frequency knowledge explanation has not been studied in a celebrity endorsement context.

Managerial implications

This research provides empirical support for the managerial practices of paying more for an exclusive endorser and trying to find an endorser who fits well with the brand’s positioning. However, to the extent that brand managers can determine the likely level of audience involvement, they might be able to economize somewhat. Our results indicate that under high involvement conditions, a celebrity who endorses multiple brands hurts a brand only if the celebrity fits poorly with the other brands in his or her portfolio. If managers are confident that ads will be viewed under high involvement, then the fit of other brands endorsed is more important than whether other brands are endorsed at all. Conversely, if ads are generally viewed under low involvement conditions, managers might be best served by hiring as many exclusive endorsers as possible with no particular regard to their congruence with the brand. Since a celebrity endorsing multiple brands can lead to more negative brand attitudes, finding exclusive endorsers is important. Also, using many endorsers apparently helps to showcase the brand in a good light, and repetition of the brand appears to drive brand attitude under low involvement conditions through the increased use of frequency knowledge cues.

Limitations

Several limitations exist in the current research. First, our research utilized fictitious brands, and thus how the established effects translate to a real brand is unclear. Presumably, the established findings would be similar to effects found with new brands. However, the implications for established brands are less clear. While it is possible that a well-known brand may find little benefit or detriment from celebrity endorsers, recent research (Dimofte & Yalch, 2011) has demonstrated that automatic meaning transfer (through mere association effects) can be enhanced with greater familiarity. Thus, the effects of multiple endorsers and multiple endorsements may actually be greater for familiar brands under certain conditions.

Second, the studies were conducted in a laboratory environment with undergraduate student participants. While it could be argued that many students might not find the chosen categories (expensive watch, SUV, briefcase) particularly relevant to them, random assignment should eliminate any systematic differences across conditions that could cause our results. However, we acknowledge that replicating the findings with different brands and categories might be worthwhile for future research. It seems possible that if a brand or category is particularly relevant, consumer expertise may moderate the effects, minimizing the impact of any endorsement for consumer with high expertise and amplifying it for consumers with low expertise.

Third, we chose to create conditions with one versus three ads, which creates a possible confound in our manipulation. Our intent was to examine the effects of multiple endorsements by a
single celebrity and multiple endorsers for a single brand relative to a context where there is only one celebrity endorsing one brand. We operationalized increased exposures as more brands endorsed and as more brand endorsers. It would be interesting to investigate whether a brand shown with equal exposures would fare better with multiple endorsers or a single endorser.

Finally, our research was intended to investigate the influence of a moderate amount of repetitions of the brand message. Our data cannot address what the boundary conditions would be. For example, we acknowledge that even under high involvement and high source congruence conditions, an extreme number of endorsements by the same celebrity (e.g., twenty) could lead to wear-out effects that might not differ significantly from low source congruence conditions. Conversely, wear-out effects could be caused by the sheer numbers of celebrity endorsers, though our opening Rolex example (over 20 endorsers) suggests that tolerance for new endorsers might be relatively high. Ultimately, these are questions for further research to address.

Future research

We believe that the current research sparks several areas for future research to pursue. First, brand attitude is just one dependent measure that might be examined in a context involving multiple brand endorsements or multiple celebrity endorsers; brand managers are also concerned about the degree of memorability, consideration, and purchase intention stemming from exposure to celebrity advertising. While one may predict that the pattern of consumer response to celebrity advertising will be equivalent across various measures, the contexts of multiple brand endorsements and multiple celebrity endorsers create the potential for brands and celebrities, respectively, in an endorsement portfolio to interact with one another and thus to impact the effectiveness of celebrity advertising at point of purchase. Therefore, future research might consider investigating whether an endorsement portfolio differentially affects brand attitude and other key measures. Future research could also investigate the extent to which the aspects of celebrity endorsement investigated in this paper (i.e., number of brands, involvement and congruence) influence the links between brand meaning, self-identity and goals suggested by Kirmani (2009).

Second, the ELM theoretical perspective suggests that consumers likely utilized a peripheral cue to form their brand attitudes under low involvement conditions in our studies. However since we statistically controlled for all source characteristic effects in our analyses, yet still found a significant effect, another type of peripheral cue (i.e., frequency knowledge) may have been operating. We believe that the contexts of multiple brand endorsements and multiple celebrity endorsers are unique relative to the context of a single celebrity endorsing a single brand and thus may provide consumers with a new peripheral cue, such as the number of brands endorsed/celebrity endorsers, to utilize during brand attitude formation under low involvement conditions. To explore this notion, we conducted a small post hoc study (n=67) and found evidence to suggest that consumers perceive multiple brand endorsements (multiple celebrity endorsers) as unfavorable (favorable) for the brand, which is consistent with our theorizing and with the results found under low involvement conditions in our experiments. However, it is unclear whether the process through which this frequency knowledge flows is consciously attended or if it is one of the many unexplored nonconscious consumer processes (Chartrand & Fitzsimons, 2011) that influence consumer behavior. Therefore, future research should examine whether the contexts of multiple brand endorsements and multiple celebrity endorsers provide consumers with new peripheral cues, like frequency knowledge, to deploy during brand attitude formation under low involvement conditions and the extent to (and conditions under) which these new cues are conscious or nonconscious (Chartrand & Fitzsimons, 2011). For example, future research could examine whether elaboration is a prerequisite to celebrity meaning transfer to brands in light of recent research that suggests the plausibility of unconscious meaning transfer (Galli & Gorn, 2011).

While this research has addressed the topic of multiple brand endorsements and multiple celebrity endorsers, other areas within the broader realm of celebrity advertising remain largely unexplored. In today’s society, actors and actresses are increasingly trying to undertake varied roles, and it is rare to find one with as well-defined a set of celebrity cultural meanings as James Garner, the foil for McCracken’s (1989) analysis. Additionally, multiple sources of possible contamination of an image have recently come into existence (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, tabloid magazines, tabloid TV shows, etc.), all of which make it more challenging to manage a celebrity’s cultural meaning. Does this result in confusion and fragmentation of cultural meaning in the mind of the consumer? Finally, perhaps the transfer of cultural meanings between brands and celebrities may be bidirectional. The most powerful brands in the world are spending billions of dollars to create well-defined brand images. Is it possible for celebrities to “game” the system to define or redefine themselves? For example, would a young actor like Leonardo DiCaprio be able to bolster his image of being a patriotic American by endorsing Chevy trucks instead of Ralph Lauren’s clothing line? Only further research into this interesting area can answer this with any degree of certainty.

1 Students were instructed to consider a scenario describing a brand that uses a celebrity who endorses only that brand versus that brand and two additional brands as well as a scenario describing a brand that uses one versus three celebrity endorsers. Students rated which brand was better in each scenario on a 7-point scale where “1” indicated that the brand associated with one endorsement (celebrity endorser) was better, and “7” indicated that the brand associated with multiple brand endorsement (celebrity endorsers) was better. For both scenarios, mean scores differed reliably from the scale midpoint (M_{multiple brand endorsements} = 2.70, t(66)=3.28, p<.002; M_{multiple celebrity endorsers} = 4.75, t(66)=6.20, p<.001), suggesting that consumers do in fact see multiple brand endorsements by a celebrity as unfavorable and multiple celebrity endorsers as favorable.
Appendix A. Example of the stimuli used in experiments

Appendix B. Measures of celebrity source characteristics and associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Scale endpoints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=1 Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=7 Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-known</td>
<td>(Name) is well-known.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likability</td>
<td>I dislike (name). (R)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Name) is one of my favorite celebrities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Name) is a great celebrity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>(Name) is good-looking.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Name) is attractive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>I think (name) is trustworthy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Name) is truthful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Name) is believable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>(Name) knows a lot about watches.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Name) knows a lot about SUVs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Name) knows a lot about briefcases.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruggedness</td>
<td>(Name) is:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all rugged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely rugged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all strong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely strong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all tough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely tough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophistication</td>
<td>(Name) is:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all sophisticated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely sophisticated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all refined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely refined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all charming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely charming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Name) is the name of the celebrity endorser included in the advertisement.
(R) denotes a reverse scored item.
*These questions were asked only in the three brands endorsed conditions where the corresponding product types were displayed.
References


