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Published online: 09 Apr 2010.

To cite this article: Gianluigi Guido, Alessandro M. Peluso & Valentina Moffa (2011) Beardedness in advertising: Effects on endorsers' credibility and purchase intention, Journal of Marketing Communications, 17:01, 37-49, DOI: 10.1080/13527260903157383

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13527260903157383

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Beardedness in advertising: Effects on endorsers’ credibility and purchase intention

Gianluigi Guido\textsuperscript{a,b*}, Alessandro M. Peluso\textsuperscript{a,b} and Valentina Moffa\textsuperscript{a}

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This research analyses the effects of endorsers’ beardedness (i.e., the state of being bearded) on their perceived credibility and consumers’ purchase intention for various categories of products. According to Ohanian (1990), credibility is a construct with three sub-dimensions: attractiveness, the degree to which the source’s physical appearance and/or its perceived personality is appealing; expertise, the extent to which the communicator is perceived as a source of valid assertions; and trustworthiness, the degree of confidence aroused in perceivers. Recent research has demonstrated the possibility of associating the three sub-dimensions of credibility with different categories of products, depending on whether these latter ones possess specific characteristics that are congruent with one or another sub-dimension. In line with this approach, results show that bearded endorsers are perceived to be more credible and to have a positive influence on purchase intention, but these effects occur only in relation to specific kinds of advertised products. Theoretical and operational implications for communication strategies are discussed.

\textbf{Keywords:} advertising; beardedness; credibility dimensions; endorsers; purchase intention

In social psychology, it has for some time now been demonstrated that physical appearance and facial features in particular (such as size of the eyes, width of the forehead, thickness of the lips, the shape of the face, the shape and size of the nose) are consciously or unconsciously used in interpersonal relationships to infer the personality traits of the person with whom one is interacting (e.g., Berry and Landry 1997; Masip, Garrido, and Herrero 2004; Zebrowitz 1998). The role of somatic features in interpersonal perception has also been stressed in the field of advertising (Guido 1995; Guido and Peluso 2004, 2006), where relationships between the interested parties – consumers on the one hand, and endorsers on the other – are typically unidirectional, short-lasting, and relatively low involving for consumers. Consumers receiving messages via print ads or TV commercials tend to judge their source’s credibility – that is, the degree to which it is perceived as believable – on the basis of peripheral elements, such as physical characteristics and appearance. Consolidated models in the fields of attitude change and persuasion, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken 1980), suggest this to be
especially true in moderate to low involving situations and when the source of messages is represented by endorsers who are not celebrities in some field, but unknown actors ( impersonators ), as in the case of this study. The use of unknown actors as endorsers has received much less attention in advertising research than celebrity endorsement, although firms often prefer using common impersonators rather than celebrities in their ad campaigns to avoid risks related to wrong associations with promoted brands (Till and Shimp 1998).

This study analyses the role of beardedness – that is, the use of bearded endorsers – in determining consumer perception of endorsers’ credibility in relation to different product categories. The next section will describe the source’s perceived credibility construct and its potential relationship with beardedness in advertising contexts. The second section will illustrate research objectives and the related hypotheses that will be empirically tested. The third section will describe the methodology, while the fourth section will present results. The fifth section will conclude the article with a discussion of both theoretical and marketing implications of the study.

Background

Endorsers’ perceived credibility

Advertising research has broadly shown that the persuasiveness of endorsers employed in ad campaigns is a positive function of their credibility levels as perceived by message recipients. Ohanian (1990) defined endorsers’ perceived credibility as the degree to which they are considered believable and developed a multi-dimensional explanatory model, which received extensive validation worldwide (Pornpitakpan 2003). Ohanian’s (1990) model describes perceived credibility as a construct consisting of three main sub-dimensions: (1) attractiveness, which relates to the physical appearance and/or the perceived personality of the source; (2) expertise, which is the extent to which the communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions about the advertised object; and (3) trustworthiness, which is the degree of confidence in the source’s intent to communicate valid assertions.

Despite this unified view, studies in advertising research have often addressed each of these three perceived credibility dimensions separately (see Amos, Holmes, and Strutton 2008; Erdogan 1999, for reviews). As regards the attractiveness dimension, Kamins (1990) provided evidence for a so-called match-up hypothesis suggesting that the persuasive power of attractive endorsers increases when they are paired with products that emphasize this credibility component. Till and Busler (2000) extended the validity of this hypothesis to the expertise dimension, while Guido and Peluso (2004, 2006) provided in two recent studies a further generalization of this hypothesis by including the trustworthiness dimension. These two authors in particular suggested the possibility of establishing an association between each of the three credibility sub-dimensions and specific advertised products. More specifically, they found that each of the three sub-dimensions of a source’s perceived credibility – i.e., attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness – is prominent only for certain product categories and, in particular, for those products that are characterized by the prevalence of specific elements – i.e., aesthetic, efficacy, and reliability product attributes, respectively – which are congruent with that sub-dimension. They therefore pinpointed three product categories, each of them related to a specific component of the credibility construct: (1) attractiveness-products, that is, those whose evaluation is predominantly based on their aesthetic characteristics (for example, fashion products); (2) expertise-products, those whose evaluation is based on their performances’
efficacy in resolving specific problems (for example, hygiene or pharmaceutical products); and finally (3) trustworthiness-products, those whose evaluation is based on both the reliability of their performances and their duration (for example, hi-tech products). Based on this finding, consumers’ evaluations of endorsers’ credibility are likely to be primarily driven by one or another sub-dimension of the overall construct depending on the type of product advertised. This therefore implies that the use of endorsers with the same physical characteristics may have a different impact on their perceived credibility and consumers’ purchase intention across these three product categories.

**Beardedness as a communication tool**

Apart from physical appearance and body lineaments, even secondary facial features like a beard can play an important role in advertising contexts. Endorsers’ beardedness, that is, the presence of a beard on endorsers’ faces, as far as it increases their perceived credibility, could prompt consumers to purchase, especially when particular endorsers’ personality attributes need to be transferred to the advertised product. Indeed, the psychological research on beardedness has provided contrasting results concerning its effects of the perceived image of bearded men. During the ’60s and ’70s, some studies (Feinman and Gill 1977; Freedman 1969; Kenny and Fletcher 1973; Pancer and Meindl 1978) demonstrated how men with this physical characteristic could be perceived as more intelligent, sincere, generous, extroverted, virile, strong and mature, but at the same time also less attractive, than those without beard. The capacity of a beard to communicate positive personality qualities (such as experience, dominance, virility, strength and maturity) and to compromise, at the same time, the perceived attractiveness of its owners has also been demonstrated in more recent research (Addison 1989; Conti and Conti 2004; Shannon and Stark 2003), though some of the meanings traditionally ascribed to the possession of a beard may have been modified over time (Corson 1980). This may be due to changes in cultural stereotypes, that is, the cognitive structures shared by members of the social group of reference (Terry and Krantz 1993). Although there are some exceptions (Reed and Blunk 1990), it seems that beardedness increases the perceived levels of expertise and trustworthiness, while reducing the perceived level of attractiveness in those who possess this physical feature. In various studies in the field of social psychology (Muscarella and Cunningham 1996; Wogalter and Hosie 1991), it has been shown that individuals with a beard are on average perceived to be older than people of the same age without and, through a halo effect (see De Souza, Baião, and Otta 2003), also more competent and trustworthy (see also Hellström and Tekle 1994; Terry and Krantz 1993). These findings have never been confirmed in advertising research, where the role of beardedness in determining endorsers’ perceived credibility and consumers’ purchase intention is still unexplored.

This study seeks to show, for the first time in the field of marketing communications, that endorsers’ beardedness can differently impact on both their perceived credibility and consumers’ purchase intention, depending on advertised product categories (attractiveness-products, expertise-products, and trustworthiness-products).

**Research objectives and hypotheses**

This study aims to achieve two specific objectives. The first objective is to verify whether and for which product categories endorsers’ beardedness increases their perceived credibility. According to the match-up hypothesis (Kamins 1990) and its generalization to all sub-dimensions of credibility (Guido and Peluso 2004, 2006; Till and
Busler 2000), it seems possible to predict that endorsers’ beardedness can elicit specific characteristics that are closely related to expertise and/or trustworthiness and consistent with the advertised products. For attractiveness-products, on the other hand, endorsers’ beardedness does not necessarily increase their perceived level of credibility, due to a lack of consistency between these products and qualities usually perceived in bearded men. To be empirically tested, this research objective was translated into the following hypothesis:

H1: Endorsers with a beard are perceived as more credible than those without only when products to advertise are expertise-products or trustworthiness-products.

The higher level of credibility elicited by bearded endorsers, compared with shaven ones, in the advertising of expertise-products or trustworthiness-products could be consciously or unconsciously used by consumers to infer the quality of the product and the convenience of its potential purchase. This effect would not occur for attractiveness-products for which the incongruence between the image of bearded endorsers (for example, that of competent and reliable individuals) and that of advertised products (based on aesthetic elements stressing attractiveness) could inhibit the role of the source’s perceived credibility in consumers’ inferential processes and, therefore, its effect on the purchase intention. The second objective of this study is to verify whether the higher level of credibility elicited by bearded endorsers, compared with shaven ones, positively influences consumers’ purchase intention. To be empirically tested, this research objective was translated into the following hypothesis:

H2: For expertise-products and trustworthiness-products, the credibility elicited by bearded endorsers positively impacts on consumers’ purchase intention.

Method

In order to test the research hypotheses, an experimental study was carried out in an Italian context by using three branded products that were shown to be representative of the three product categories, each of them associated with a specific credibility sub-dimension (namely, attractiveness-products, expertise-products, trustworthiness-products). Experimental subjects were recruited among a population of undergraduate university students, while the tested branded products were chosen by means of a focus group among those ones which were most frequently consumed by the population of reference.

A focus group was conducted with 12 voluntary undergraduate university students (average age = 18–27 years; 50% M/F), to select the branded products to be used as experimental stimuli in the main study. After an initial briefing in which the reasons for the discussion were explained to participants, they were asked to indicate one or more kinds of easy-to-purchase products that could be representative of each of the three investigated categories. By taking into account the most frequent responses, it was possible to select underwear for attractiveness-products, toothpastes for expertise-products, and mobile phones for trustworthiness-products. Participants were then asked to indicate one or more brands for each selected kind of product. Always on the basis of the most frequent responses provided by participants, it was possible to identify three brands which were easy to purchase in the Italian consumer market: Intimissimi for underwear (attractiveness-products), Mentadent for toothpastes (expertise-products), and Nokia for mobile phones (trustworthiness-products).

A manipulation check was therefore carried out on a sample of 120 voluntary undergraduate university students (average age = 18–27 years; 39% M and 61% F), to test the ability of the three selected branded products to elicit the three credibility
sub-dimensions in consumers’ minds. Subjects were randomly assigned to the three branded product conditions and were asked to evaluate the relative weight of each sub-dimension on their overall credibility judgements. Ohanian’s (1990) seven-point semantic differential scale, consisting of 15 items, was used to measure the perceived credibility of the information source (in this case, the product itself) and its three sub-dimensions. Results were obtained from the comparison in pairs of the average scores of each of the three credibility sub-dimensions measured for each of the three products. They showed that Intimissimi underwear effectively resulted to be representative of attractiveness-products by obtaining the highest score in the corresponding credibility sub-dimension (the post-hoc test of the Least Significant Difference was significant at the .001 level). Mentadent toothpastes resulted to be representative of expertise-products by obtaining the highest score in the corresponding sub-dimension (p < .001). Nokia mobile phones resulted to be representative of trustworthiness-products by obtaining the highest score in the related credibility sub-dimension (p ≤ .002).

A further preliminary study was carried out on another sample of 150 voluntary undergraduate university students (average age = 18–27 years; 41% M and 61% F) to test whether the three selected branded products elicit different levels of involvement in consumers. Participants were homogeneously assigned to the three branded product conditions and asked to rate their involvement level with the product on Zaichkowsky’s (1994) 10-item seven-point scale. Results from a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) suggested that the three branded products were comparable in terms of personal involvement, thereby confirming their validity to be used as experimental stimuli in the main study. The three branded products were found to be associated with moderate to low levels of the construct (average scores ≤ 4) and the related differences were shown to be not significant (p > .05).

The main study was conducted on a broad sample of 426 voluntary undergraduate university students (average age = 18–27 years; 32.2% M and 67.8% F), who were homogeneously assigned to the three categories represented by the three branded products selected in the preliminary phase of the study. Experimental subjects were presented with a mock-up ad showing one of two endorsers with an identical physiognomy, except for a beard (the photos used in the experiment depicted the same subject with and without a beard). In particular, a standard style of beard was used as experimental treatment, that is, to say, a neat beard of a medium length (Figure 1).

Three sub-samples of 142 subjects each were defined for the three products and, for each sub-sample, half of the participants (71 subjects) were assigned an ad stimulus with a bearded endorser, while the other half were assigned the same ad stimulus that presented the same endorser, but without a beard, according to a three-by-two between-groups experimental design. The three ad stimuli, related to the three branded products, in their double version (an endorser with a beard and the same endorser without a beard), were developed in the mock-up ad according to a typical format used in print advertising. This format presented an element related to the endorser (i.e., his photo) and three elements related to the advertised product (i.e., the brand name, its logo, and a photo of the product) (see Speck, Schumann, and Thompson 1988). Each ad stimulus was enclosed in a close-ended questionnaire containing: (1) Ohanian’s (1990) 15-item semantic differential scale, to measure the endorsers’ perceived credibility and its sub-dimensions; (2) Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) two-item rating scale, to interactively assess consumers’ purchase intention, with one item measuring the strength of the intention to buy the product, and the other measuring the subjective probability that the purchase behaviour will be effectively
performed within a well-specified period of time (in this case, three to six months); and finally (3) two socio-demographic questions (gender and age).

**Results**

A reliability analysis on credibility data and a check for gender effects were performed before testing research hypotheses. Results showed that Ohanian’s (1990) scale as a whole is a reliable measure of endorsers’ perceived credibility for each product category (Cronbach’s $\alpha$ coefficients $\geq .89$). They also showed that the three credibility sub-scales are reliable measures of attractiveness (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .84$), expertise (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .87$) and trustworthiness (Cronbach’s $\alpha \geq .70$), respectively. Moreover, results from a difference analysis showed that respondents’ gender has no significant effect on endorsers’ perceived credibility, its sub-dimensions, and purchase intention ($ps > .05$). Yet they showed that gender does not moderate the effect of beardedness on endorsers’ perceived credibility and purchase intention, as no significant beardedness-by-gender interaction effect was found ($ps > .10$). This finding allows one to maintain that gender has no role in the model and does not affect relationships among independent and dependent variables.

A three-by-two (three product categories: attractiveness-products, expertise-products, and trustworthiness-products; and two endorsers’ physiognomies: with and without a beard) factorial ANOVA was carried out on perceived credibility data, to test the first research hypothesis, according to which endorsers’ beardedness increases their perceived credibility only for expertise-products and trustworthiness-products. Results showed the existence of a main effect of product category on the perceived credibility of endorsers ($F(2,420) = 5.26, p < .01$), as well as the existence of a main effect of the endorsers’ physiognomy on their perceived credibility ($F(1,420) = 10.20, p < .01$). Moreover, results showed the existence of an interaction effect of the two factor-variables (product category and endorsers’ physiognomy) on the endorsers’ perceived credibility ($F(2,420) = 3.88, p < .05$) (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics, Table 2 for results of the factorial ANOVA, and Figure 2 for the profile plot).
Secondly, three independent-sample t-tests were carried out on data concerning each sub-sample associated with a specific product condition ($n = 142$), to test the existence of significant differences between endorsers with and without a beard in their perceived credibility level. The obtained results showed that bearded endorsers were perceived as more credible than shaven ones for both Mentadent toothpastes (representative of expertise-products) and Nokia mobile phones (representative of trustworthiness-products) ($M_{With a Beard} = 62.27, M_{Without a Beard} = 55.17, t(140) = 3.49, p < .001$; Nokia mobile phones: $M_{With a Beard} = 63.82, M_{Without a Beard} = 57.20, t(140) = 3.05, p < .01$). For Intimissimi underwear (representative of attractiveness-products), on the other hand, no significant difference was found between the credibility levels elicited by these two endorsers’ physiognomies ($M_{With a Beard} = 54.82, M_{Without a Beard} = 55.80, t(140) = -.37, p > .05$). Hypothesis H1 was, therefore, verified.

To test the second research hypothesis, according to which the perceived credibility of bearded endorsers stimulates consumers’ purchase intention only for expertise-products and for trustworthiness-products, six different regression analyses were conducted on collected data (cf. Sharma, Durand, and Gur-Arie 1981). In particular, these regression analyses were carried out on datasets corresponding to the six experimental conditions obtained from crossing the three product categories (attractiveness-products, expertise-products, and trustworthiness-products) by the two endorsers’ physiognomies (with and without a beard). In each regression analysis, the endorsers’ perceived credibility was considered as the independent variable and consumers’ purchase intention as the dependant variable. The results showed that fit-statistics ($R^2$ and Adj. $R^2$ coefficients) are not always acceptable (see Table 3).

In particular, the theoretical model showed a poor fit to the real data ($R^2 = .02/.05$ and Adj. $R^2 = .01/.03$) for Mentadent toothpastes (representative of expertise-products) and Nokia mobile phones (representative of trustworthiness-products) when both are

Table 1. Endorsers’ perceived credibility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product category</th>
<th>With a beard</th>
<th>Without a beard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimissimi underwear (At-P)</td>
<td>54.82</td>
<td>55.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentadent toothpastes (Ex-P)</td>
<td>62.27</td>
<td>55.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nokia mobile phones (Tr-P)</td>
<td>63.82</td>
<td>57.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each sample was randomly assigned an endorser either with or without a beard. At-P = Attractiveness-products ($n = 142$); Ex-P = Expertise-products ($n = 142$); Tr-P = Trustworthiness-products ($n = 142$).

Table 2. Factorial ANOVA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of variability</th>
<th>Deviation</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product category (A)</td>
<td>1979.84</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>989.92</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsers’ physiognomy (B)</td>
<td>1918.35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1918.35</td>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction: A × B</td>
<td>1460.64</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>730.32</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>78969.61</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>188.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1526222.0</td>
<td>426</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected total</td>
<td>84328.44</td>
<td>425</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $n = 426$. Dependent variable: Endorser’s perceived credibility.
associated with endorsers without a beard, as well as for Intimissimi underwear (representative of attractiveness-products), when this latter is associated with endorsers with a beard. This is consistent with the second research hypothesis (H2) and implies that the endorsers’ credibility as perceived by consumers under these specific experimental conditions cannot be considered an explanatory variable of their purchase intention. The fit of the model to the actual data can be considered acceptable ($R^2 < .23/.28$ and Adj. $R^2 < .22/.27$) for Mentadent toothpastes and Nokia mobile phones when both are associated with endorsers with a beard, as well as for Intimissimi underwear, when this latter is associated with endorsers without a beard. This implies that the endorsers’ credibility as perceived by consumers under these experimental conditions is an explanatory variable of their purchase intention. In particular, endorsers’ perceived credibility was found to positively influence consumers’ purchase intention (Mentadent toothpastes and endorsers with a beard: $\beta = .49, p < .001$; Nokia mobile phones and endorsers with a beard: $\beta = .48, p < .001$; Intimissimi underwear and endorsers without a beard: $\beta = .52, p < .001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis H2.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The obtained results allowed us to verify both the hypotheses and to meet the two research objectives. First of all, they showed that endorsers’ beardedness increases their credibility levels as perceived by consumers, but this effect occurs only for certain kinds of advertised products. In particular, endorsers with a beard were perceived to be more credible than those without when they were associated with expertise-products or trustworthiness-products. On the other hand, no significant difference in their perceived credibility was found between the two endorsers’ physiognomies (with and without a beard) when they were associated with attractiveness-products. The ability of this physical attribute to work in association with the product category to influence consumers’ perception can be explained through a congruency that would occur at a cognitive level between the stored...
Table 3. Influence of credibility on purchase intention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Intimissimi underwear (At-P)</th>
<th>Mentadent toothpastes (Ex-P)</th>
<th>Nokia mobile phones (Tr-P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With a beard ( (n = 71) )</td>
<td>Without a beard ( (n = 71) )</td>
<td>With a beard ( (n = 71) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>( 3.20 )</td>
<td>( -4.26 )</td>
<td>( -16.50 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \beta )</td>
<td>( .10 )</td>
<td>( .15 )</td>
<td>( .43 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>( .52^* )</td>
<td>( .52^* )</td>
<td>( .49^* )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>( .02 )</td>
<td>( .28 )</td>
<td>( .24 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. ( R^2 )</td>
<td>( .01 )</td>
<td>( .27 )</td>
<td>( .23 )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dependent variable: Purchase intention. \( ^* = p < .001 \). At-P = Attractiveness-products; Ex-P = Expertise-products; Tr-P = Trustworthiness-products.
stereotype of a ‘bearded man’ and the image of the branded product advertised. As stressed in literature (e.g., De Souza, Baião, and Otta 2003), individuals showing this physical attribute are perceived as more mature, expert, and reliable than others. This reasoning implies that the use of bearded endorsers to advertise those products that, due to their characteristics, should elicit both the expertise and trustworthiness sub-dimensions in consumers’ minds leads to a mental consistency in perceivers that induces them to consider these endorsers relatively more credible (see also Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Flynn 2005; Siemens et al. 2008). The use of bearded endorsers for those products that, due to their aesthetic features, should elicit attractiveness in consumers’ minds does not lead to the same consistency, because the possession of this physical attribute by endorsers does not necessarily make them more attractive (cf. Wogalter and Hosie 1991) and more credible in the eyes of consumers. On the contrary, the use of shaven endorsers seems more appropriate to advertise attractiveness-products, both because they tend to be perceived in this ad context as more credible than bearded ones and because their perceived credibility has a persuasive effect on consumers. As shown in the second part of the study, this effect emerged for both expertise-products and trustworthiness-products, when these latter were advertised by bearded endorsers, as well as for attractiveness-products, when these latter were advertised by shaven endorsers. The ability of endorsers’ perceived credibility to influence purchase intention reasonably emerges when there is a congruency between the source and the object of the ad message: the stronger the consistency between the endorser’s physiognomy and the advertised product, the greater the weight of his perceived credibility on consumers’ purchase intention.

From a theoretical point of view, the results of this research, first of all, confirmed the crucial role of physical appearance and even of its secondary attributes like a beard in the perception and formation of interpersonal judgements. Second, the obtained results are consistent with established models in persuasion research, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken 1980), as well as with recent approaches developed in social psychology, such as the dual-process approach (cf. Kahneman 2003, for a review). It is therefore possible to maintain that, in advertising contexts, consumers who do not possess sufficient information about advertised products or are not motivated to process the available one tend to use peripheral elements of the ad message as information cues to infer, through cognitive heuristics (cf. Eagly and Chaiken 1993), the credibility level of the information source (in this case, the endorser). It was also shown that this persuasive effect of these peripheral elements that characterize the physical appearance of the source emerges to the extent that consumers perceive a consistency between the source itself and the object of the message (in this case, the advertised product). This reasoning is also consistent with a recent study showing that a perceived similarity between the endorser and the advertised brand increases ad persuasiveness based on a conditioning mechanism (Till, Stanley, and Priluck 2008). The perception of an incongruity between the source and the object of the ad message, in fact, could put consumers in an alertness state (Guido 2001), thus increasing their involvement and inducing them to process the message in a more systematic manner, in order to deepen their understanding. Further research could apply this model to high-involvement products – such as investment goods – in order to examine whether and to what extent the potential central (or systematic) processing of the product might be affected by peripheral elements like endorsers’ beardedness. It could also examine the potential relationships between consumers’ perception of bearded versus beardless endorsers’ credibility and other constructs that are relevant in predicting purchase behaviour, such as the existing attitude toward the brand, perceived quality, as well as brand experience and knowledge.
Finally, the results of this study are consistent with those obtained by Guido and Peluso (2004, 2006) to the extent that *beardedness* increases the degree of *mature-facedness* in men (see Cunningham, Barbee, and Pike 1990), by apparently making them more adult and mature. According to Guido and Peluso (2004, 2006), in fact, endorsers with adult lineaments (the so-called *mature-faces*) are not appropriate to advertise *attractiveness-products* for reasons similar to those described above.

From an operational point of view, agencies managing firms’ advertising campaigns as well as marketers engaged in developing communication strategies should carefully choose endorsers for specific products to advertise. Firms incorrectly employing endorsers who are inconsistent with the advertised product category (for example, the case of a man with a very thick beard who advertises a brand of underwear), in the attempt to make their ad messages salient, could effectively make them more memorable, but would not be able to win consumers’ approval and persuade them to the purchase. Effects similar to those tested in this study could be produced in fields other than advertising, wherein there is an interaction with the general public, such as in the recruitment of human resources to employ in public relations or direct selling. The case of the Walt Disney Company is exemplary, as it has not employed personnel with a beard for 50 years and has prohibited employees from growing facial hair, in order to maintain a friendly and playful atmosphere in those work environments that interact with the general public (*Workforce* 2000). Another field of interest is politics, where the presence of a beard on the face of candidates could boost their charisma, reliability, and above all their degree of expertise as perceived by voters, with positive effects on voting intention (cf. Todorov et al. 2005).

The beard is a facial element that is *only apparently* marginal, due to its role in both interpersonal perception and inferential processes leading to the formation of an initial judgement about the interlocutor’s personality. Future research could verify whether particular styles of beards (for example, an unkempt beard), paired with particular physiognomic contexts (a more or less attractive man), can also have positive effects for *attractiveness-products*. The possibility that endorsers’ *perceived credibility* derives from the prototypicality of the stimulus (in this case, the endorser himself), rather than from specific attributes of the source, is also worthy of further investigation. This means that endorsers and information sources in general could be perceived as *credible* to the extent that they are perceived to be congruent with the mental schemata consumers hold in a specific context of perception. An analogous case is examined by Guido and Rizzo (2006) in a study concerning the usability of websites (see also Guido 2001).

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