



Match or Mismatch? The Influence of Brand-Celebrity Endorser Personality Congruity on Brand Evaluation: Fashion Brand as the Example

Chih-Huang Lin^{1*} and Li-Hui Zhang²

¹Feng Chia University, No.100, Wenhwa Road, Seatwen, Taichung 40724, Taiwan, ROC.

²University of Bath, Claverton Down, Bath, BA2 7AY, UK.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: This study examined the Match-up Hypothesis [1] in celebrity endorsement from attractiveness and expertise to personality aspect and investigate the impact of brand personality and celebrity personality congruity on brand and endorsement evaluation.

Study Design: Quantitative and experimental design.

Place and Duration of Study: School of Management, University of Bath, between May 2008 and September 2009.

Methodology: This research included 195 university students (93 male, 102 female; age range 18-27 years) in School of Management, University of Bath. Two independent variables were manipulated, brand preference and personality congruity, only one of personality congruity or incongruity was manipulated in the main experiment. Two manipulated situations were designed separately into two online research questionnaires with the same fashion brand "Levi's" as a stimuli. Moreover, real celebrities were also included into experiment as brand-congruent (Match) and brand -incongruent (Mismatch) celebrity-endorsements treatments. Two questionnaires were

*Corresponding author: E-mail: linchihh@fcu.edu.tw;

identical in both format and structure, except different celebrities endorsements were displayed to manipulate celebrity/brand personality congruity vs. incongruity situations. The entire experiment took around 10 minutes to complete.

Results: The experimental result indicated that personality congruity and incongruity were observed to have influence on evaluations toward the endorsement, while brand preference has direct impact on brand-related evaluations. Moreover, there was no interaction between brand preference and personality congruity. Attitude towards the brand (A_B) and Purchase intention (PI) were measured as dependent variables.

Conclusion: This study used the real fashion brand and celebrities as experimental stimulus based personality salience. This study extended the product/endorser Match-up hypothesis from attractiveness and expertise aspects to a more intrinsic personality traits matching prospect.

Keywords: Match-up hypothesis; brand personality; celebrity endorsement; congruity; brand evaluation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brand personality plays a significant role on establishing brand image [2]. Constructing a brand with distinctive human personality has become an efficient tactics adopted by marketers to differentiate their brand from other competitors in a particular product category since personality uniqueness can contribute to build brand image [3]. Consuming a brand which possesses distinctive and favorable personality might help consumers express their self-image [4], and even achieve their ideal self [5].

In order to establish a unique, strong and favorable brand personality which could encourage consumers' positive brand attitude and driving their purchase intention [6,2], marketers tend to apply two approaches either through directly transferring human personality traits to brands by using product endorsement strategy [3], or indirectly associating brands with product-related attributes, brand name, symbol or logo, and the entire marketing mix [7]. Each of these brand personality creating strategies might interact each other to deliver a consistent brand image to consumers. Among these various ways of strategies, using celebrity endorsement could be considered as a widespread and effective technique to promptly catch consumers' attention and efficiently communicate brand image and personality to target consumers [8].

Therefore, when selecting a celebrity to endorse the brand, does the personality congruence or incongruence between brand and celebrity have the impact on consumers' attitudinal and behavioral response to the brand and the endorsement? There have been many researches focusing on exploring brand personality dimensions covering different product

categories by combining sources from psychology scale, marketing scale and original qualitative researches (e.g. [9]). Some studies have investigated how brand personality is constructed and transferred by moving the meaning from celebrity personality to consumer good and from good to final consumers (e.g. [8]). Others have examined the matchup hypothesis of celebrity physical attractiveness and attractiveness-related product and their effect on endorser and product evaluation [1]. Nonetheless, there are limited studies related to the underlying relationships between perceived brand personality and its celebrity endorser personality.

How do the level of congruency of brand personality and celebrity endorser personality influence consumers' perception and evaluation toward brand and endorser? Does consumers' perceived brand-celebrity personality congruity or incongruity affect their purchase intention? Might personality incongruity have minor impact on brand evaluation? Might personality congruity influence brand endorsement? In order to answer these questions, this research intend to improve the knowledge of consumer culture by investigating the interaction between brand and celebrity endorser personality, and examining the interactions whether the personality congruence or incongruence has positive or negative effect on brand and endorsement evaluation and their purchase intention. This study explores and contributes to the knowledge of brand literature and celebrity endorsement practice.

1.1 Brand Personality

Personality was defined as "the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment" ([10] p.48).

In recent years, marketers, brand managers and advertisers have been considering whether the human personality concept derived from psychology can be applied to their brands by assigning them with specific personality traits.

Brand personality was recently defined by Aaker [9] as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand.” By endowing a brand with human personality traits, marketers can easily create an emotional association between brand and consumer which can activate a symbolic meaning by consumption and increase consumer preference for that brand. Since brand often being animated and perceived as a person having human traits, academicians and practitioners were endeavoring to connect brand personality with human personality and directly borrowed or adapted human personality scale to measure brand personality [11]. Moreover, as human personalities are often applied by marketers to imbue distinctive meanings to their brands that could be associated by consumers with unique brand perceptions, the human personality traits derived from psychology are often taken directly to construct brand personality [12].

Individual personality traits can be inferred from interpersonal verbal communication or nonverbal behavior, while the brands which have no speaking, thinking, feeling capacity. How do brands possess and express certain personality? Plummer [3] indicated that there are two venues to understand brand personality. One is the input, what managers want consumers to think and feel about their brand, and one is out-take, what consumers actually think and feel toward the brand. Plummer [3] defined these two perspectives of brand personality into two forms: brand personality statement created by company to achieve their brand communication goals; and brand personality profiles as consumers' perceptions of the brand [3]. Endowing or perceiving brand with personality can be regarded as a process to animate an inanimate object according to the theories of animism (e.g. [13,14] cited by Fournier [15]), which is the attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman constructs (e.g. [16]). People are able to anthropomorphize the inanimate objects with human traits and emotions in order to construct and maintain interaction with the nonmaterial world and this activity has been identified as universal in all societies [17,15]. The tactics of promoting brands as having distinctive personality is to illuminate the concept of

anthropomorphism that brands are animated, humanized or personalized [15]. As a result, this brand personalization process, a nonhuman object similar to a conceptual brand can be personified, thus generates more meanings and emotional associations with brand users and potential consumers. It is widely acknowledged among academics and business practitioners that building a brand alone without adding any humanized consumer-brand communication and interaction, consumers' perception of brand may not be easily transferred from functional product attributes to emotional or symbolic aspects [18]. Brand personality tends to be one of the most efficient contemporary techniques marketing strategists applied to build consumer-brand relationships and enhance brand equity [19,20].

1.2 Celebrity Endorsement

Brand personality could be constructed directly through transferring human characteristics to brand by employing particular endorsers which could be brand's typical consumers, the company employees, CEO or celebrities [8,9]. Among these various endorsers, celebrity endorsement tends to be a most ubiquitous phenomenon in the modern marketing [8]. Especially when new product brands are launched, celebrity endorsers are often used to generate brand awareness and stimulate brand association. Celebrity endorser was defined by McCracken [8] as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement (endorsement)”.

As mentioned by Petty and Cacioppo in their Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), consumers might process information either through central route of persuasion when the product or issue is of personal relevance or through peripheral route of persuasion when consumers are less involved. Therefore, if consumers have low level of involvement with a product, they might rely more on peripheral cues such as the attractiveness, credibility or prestige of the product's endorser instead of comprehending central cues as product-relevant arguments [21]. Celebrity endorsement is not only a peripheral cue that consumers intend to associate with the brand when they only acquired limited brand knowledge, but also simultaneously increases consumers' brand involvement level by attracting their attention towards the endorser.

The importance of celebrity endorsement in brand image creation and symbolic meaning association with consumers has encouraged many researchers to further investigate its hidden power [8,22]. Erdogan [23] indicated that there are three dimensions as celebrity trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness for evaluating a credible endorser should be eventually perceived by target consumers to be effective.

1.3 Brand-celebrity Personality Congruity with Match-up Hypothesis

Celebrity endorsers as human beings might saliently possess one or more of the dimensions of human personality, while as a special type of character activating on the public stage might be endowed with specific personality similar to or different from their own.

Although it was contended that the selection of an endorser (either celebrity or non-celebrity) may be more critical for unknown brands [24] since the endorsers' characteristics might be directly transferred to the brand, it is even vital to select a suitable endorser for known brand since an incompatible celebrity endorser might diminish the persuasiveness of the celebrity and negatively impact on existing brand image (e.g. [25]). As suggested by Tripp et al. [26], "for unknown brands, the desired brand image as conveyed by the endorser would be critical, while for known brands, endorser and brand image congruency should be the pivotal aspect".

Previous studies have investigate the congruence, fittingness, appropriateness and consistency of celebrity endorsers and their endorsed products from different aspects [1,27]; [28]. That is known as the brand-celebrity personality Match-up Hypothesis. Forkan [29] first introduced the Match-up Hypothesis to increase the effectiveness of celerity selection. The core concept of Match-up Hypothesis is that the message presented by the image of the celebrity endorser and the information delivered from the product or brand ought to be congruent in an effective advertisement [1]. For example, the well-matched celebrities and brands might be David Beckham endorsing Gillette Razors, Michael Jordan for Nike, which have created profound associations with target markets and generated large sales volume and great economic return for the companies.

Previous studies conforming to the hypotheses of Social Adaptation Theory and Match-up Hypothesis capture the contention that products endorsed by an attractive celebrity tended to result in more favorable product attitude and higher purchase intention than endorsed by an unattractive celebrity [1]. The attractiveness aspect of the celebrity endorser in this study might be the main reference source for viewers to depend upon and to evaluate the product being endorsed since they might have little additional knowledge about the product or if they were processing the advertisement with low involvement. Therefore, the celebrity physical attractiveness may be the critical element to be assessed in the Match-up Hypothesis. That is, when a celebrity's attractiveness feature matches with the product's benefits (being used to enhance one's attractiveness) desired by consumers, the matching result tends to be favorable and effective.

Apart from the celebrity physical attractiveness, significant impacts on brand attitude and purchase intention was found in the expertise dimension of celebrity and product match [30] and [31]. Other than the attractiveness and expertise aspects of the Match-up Hypothesis that were examined to be an effective standard for selecting endorsers, Till and Busler [30] argued that there might be other ways in which endorsers and products can be matched, such as overall image as a match-up factor.

Accordingly, there might be many different ways and aspects in which a brand and a celebrity endorser may "fit" or "match-up" for an effective advertisement. In this study, the personality aspect of the Match-up Hypothesis will be focused to explore the effect of brand/celebrity personality congruity (vs. incongruity) on brand and endorsement evaluations. Moreover, as consumers' perceived brand personality was investigated, four well-known fashion brands were examined due to consumers might have much more knowledge about a familiar brand and they are able to describe brand personality with less difficulties. In order to measure personality congruity between brand and celebrity endorser, a brand-celebrity personality Match-up Hypothesis will be reviewed and explored.

2. METHODOLOGY

An experiment of 2 (brand preference: high vs. low) × 2 (personality match-up: congruity vs.

incongruity) between-subject factorial design was constructed. Two pretests were conducted to select the research stimulus for the main experiment. The first pretest selected a brand in a single product category. Two female and two male celebrity endorsers were selected in the pretest two by comparing various celebrities' personality congruity or incongruity with the chosen brand by using brand personality scales.

2.1 Pretests and Stimulus

Pretest one was designed to select one brand which was the most familiar and diverse in consumers' brand preference and has salient personality traits among the others. Four brands, such as Calvin Klein, Guess, Levi's and Diesel were used as materials. Forty-four young adult subjects were asked to evaluate on the scale. The scale consists each brand's perceived personality traits which was using Aaker's [9] five-dimension brand personality measurement scale with reduced items. Subjects were asked to think of each brand as if it were a person and indicate their level of agreement to the traits describing the brand from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Brand "Levi's" received the highest brand preference rating (mean = 3.55) compared to the rest of three brands.

Pretest two was conducted to select two sets of celebrities randomly in order to endorse the brand and 64 subjects took part in the pretest two. One has personality that is congruent with the brand, and the other is incongruent. The first part was focused on the evaluations and comparisons of ten celebrities in terms of their familiarity, attractiveness, likability and perceived personality traits, and the second part was to combine the celebrity with the brand to create different celebrity endorsement situations and test their compatibility. As a result, female celebrity Avril Lavigne and male celebrity Justin Timberlake were chosen as suitable endorsers who have personalities congruent with Levi's, while Anne Hathaway and Daniel Radcliffe were selected as unsuitable endorsers whose personalities are incongruent with Levi's.

2.2 Main Experiment

In the main experiment, 195 university student subjects participated in the study (age18-27, 102 female, 93 male). Online questionnaire was applied by sending the survey links to respondents. Since there are two independent variables, brand preference and personality

congruity, only one of personality congruity or incongruity was manipulated in the main experiment. Hence, two manipulated situations were designed separately into two research questionnaires with the same brand Levi's as a stimuli. These two questionnaires were identical in both format and structure, except different celebrities endorsements were displayed to manipulate celebrity/brand personality congruity vs. incongruity situations.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, the purpose of the experiment was disguised by telling the respondents they were conducting a survey about celebrity endorsement. Brand preference, as one of the independent variables was measured after presenting the participants a picture of Levi's brand logo. Four-item brand preference measurement scale (Cronbach's alpha = .85) derived from Sirgy et al.'s [32] study of measuring the impact of self-image congruence with brand on brand preference was used to investigate subjects' preexisting preference towards Levi's.

Then, celebrities Avril Lavigne and Justin Timberlake were treated as a pair of celebrities having personalities congruent with Levi's, which was displayed in one of the manipulated questionnaires. Celebrities Anne Hathaway and Daniel Radcliffe, on the other hand, were regarded as a couple of celebrities possessing personalities incongruent with Levi's that was the other manipulation presented in the second questionnaire.

Attitude towards the brand (A_B) and Purchase intention (PI) were measured as dependent variables. The entire questionnaire took around 10 minutes to complete.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Manipulation Check

The scales used in the questionnaire were checked for their internal consistency before conducting the further analyses. Scales measuring independent variables brand preference (alpha = .94), personality excitement aspect (alpha = .91), ruggedness (alpha = .86), and dependent variables A_B (Cronbach's alpha = .96), endorser credibility (Cronbach's alpha = .96), endorsement credibility (Cronbach's alpha = .93) and A_{EN} (Cronbach's alpha = .95) all recorded a high internal consistency.

3.2 Main Results

A two way between-subjects Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the experimental data. Two manipulated brand endorsement situations in terms of brand and celebrity endorser personality congruity vs. incongruity perspective caused different results on subjects' endorsee credibility evaluation ($P < .0005$). The matching or congruity between brand and celebrity endorser's personality can increase consumers' evaluation of the endorser's credibility thus enhance their overall positive attitude towards the endorsement. In other words, when it comes to the real brand and real celebrity circumstance, the result means that the Avril Lavigne-Levi's endorsement tended to result in more favorable and positive evaluation on endorser credibility and attitude toward the endorsement than the Anne Hathaway-Levi's pair. However, other dependent measures such as attitude towards the brand and purchase intention were not significantly affected by these two different endorsement situations.

The other significant main effect was also discovered for the other independent variable: brand preference, and its impact on dependent measurements related to brand evaluation. The preexisting brand preference has a direct effect on attitude toward the brand ($P = .01$) and purchase intention ($P = .03$). Consistent with the prediction of hypotheses, the interaction effect between brand preference and personality congruity is not significant ($P = .13$). That means the effect of personality congruity vs. incongruity in the brand endorsement is not dependent on the level of the preexisting preference for that brand. In another words, the preexisting brand preference will not directly influence on consumers' evaluation toward the brand's endorsement. However, it can affect one's attitudinal evaluation and behavioral responses towards the brand itself.

4. CONCLUSION

This study empirically supported the hypotheses in this study. This study was designed mainly to inspect the theory of Match-up Hypothesis and endeavored to extend the Match-up perspective beyond celebrity endorser attractiveness and expertise toward a consideration and matching of the personality of the celebrity endorser with that of the brand endorsed. That is, this study investigated the impact of brand personality and celebrity personality congruity on brand and

endorsement evaluation based on the concept of Match-up Hypothesis. The experimental result confirmed brand/celebrity personality aspect as an effective match-up basis, though only has effect on endorsement evaluation (endorsement credibility and attitude toward the endorsement).

This study adopted the real fashion brand "Levi's" as a brand stimuli which was selected from a group of fashion brands based on some criteria such as personality salience. Moreover, the celebrities used as research manipulation in the study were also selected from the real situation. Therefore, the major contribution of this research is that this study extended the brand-endorser Match-up hypothesis from attractiveness and expertise aspects to a more intrinsic personality traits matching prospect.

For the research in the future, apart from quantitative methods, qualitative research methods can be applied to explore deeper in the celebrity endorsement field. Since personalities tend to be innate psychological characteristics uniquely for describing human tendencies, it might add more knowledge and comprehension to explore celebrities' or brands' personality by using qualitative skills.

DISCLAIMER

This paper is based on preliminary dataset. Readers are requested to consider this paper as preliminary research article, as authors wanted to publish the initial data as early as possible. Authors are aware that detailed statistical analysis (Univariate tests and Post hoc tests) is required to get a scientifically established conclusion. Readers are requested to use the conclusion of this paper judiciously as statistical analysis is absent. Also correction procedure like *Bonferroni's adjustment* was not done. These were the limitation of this study. Authors also recommend detailed statistical analysis for similar future studies.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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