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Celebrity Endorsement as an Element of Promotion on the Example of Selected Luxury Brands

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Abstract: This work focused on using celebrity endorsement as a promotional strategy in the luxury sector. The goal was to understand the impact of different types of fit between celebrities and brands. Through qualitative case studies and a quantitative experiment, the research showed that image fit had a significant impact on customers' purchase intention and attitude towards the brand. When the image of a celebrity was in line with the brand identity, it increased authenticity and credibility, which translated into a higher purchase intention and a more positive attitude. Carefully selecting celebrities who match the brand identity is crucial in positively shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours. Celebrity endorsement is proving to be an effective tool for luxury brands to build aspirations and emotional bonds with their target audience.

Keywords: celebrity endorsement, fit, image fit, brand attitude, luxury brands

1. Introduction

To attract consumer loyalty and interest to the brand, companies started to use celebrities in their advertisements as a very effective strategy (Roy, 2016). With the rise of internet development, celebrities endorse nowadays in many different virtual environments, especially on social media (Djafarova and Trofimenko, 2018). This form of practice is one of the most widespread forms of advertising in the modern, global world (Gilal et al., 2020). Many scholars have investigated this strategy according to today's rapidly evolving world. Gupta, Kischore and Verma (2015) believe that usage of celebrities in advertising is a key to success in product or brand promotion.

The use of endorsement strategies by companies dates back to the 19th century but it gained popularity with the oncoming of radio and TV commercials in the 1930s

and 1950s, respectively. In the 1970s, the use of celebrity endorsers in advertising increased to 15%. Celebrity endorsements have a significant impact on luxury brands, leading to a decline in sales due to consumer confidence being influenced by the endorsement. However, celebrity endorsers have a positive effect on consumer perceptions of psychological ownership, brand trust, and brand attitude (Khan and Zaman, 2021). Using a celebrity endorsement strategy to set a business apart and gain a competitive advantage can be highly advantageous. Celebrities are widely observed by people globally, making them recognizable and famous, which helps to grab people's attention. Consequently, they can significantly influence products, brands, and buying intentions. Companies can incorporate celebrity endorsement into their brand creation and development process, allowing them to establish a connection between their brand and a prominent figure, such as a celebrity (Kheder, 2018).

Okorie and Agbaleke (2017) believe that Celebrity endorsement is a tactic of persuasion where customers relate to the person featured in an advertisement. Companies can maximise the impact of celebrity endorsement when the endorser's personality aligns with that of the brand or product. The endorser is presented as a well-known personality for their achievements rather than just their association with the product category. This leads advertisers to believe that celebrity endorsement not only increases brand recognition but also creates a sense of comfort among consumers regarding the brand or product. In the early days of celebrity endorsement, the focus was on personal endorsements, with celebrities simply stating their support for a particular product or service. However, over time, the endorsement process became more sophisticated, with celebrities appearing in advertisements and actively promoting products on behalf of the brands.

2. Theoretical Background

Fit Hypothesis and The Meaning Transfer Model

More recent research has continued to explore the use of celebrity endorsement in advertising, with a focus on understanding the factors that influence the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement and the impact of endorsement on various aspects of consumer behaviour.

Some of the key factors that have been found to influence the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement include the fit between the celebrity and the product, the celebrity's popularity, and the celebrity's reputation (Kapferer, 2012). The fit hypothesis proposes that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement is influenced by the degree of fit between the celebrity and the brand being endorsed. This hypothesis suggests that the endorsement is more effective when the celebrity's image or personality matches the image or personality of the brand being endorsed.

Overall, the "fit" hypothesis suggests that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement is contingent on the degree of fit between the celebrity and the brand being endorsed. When the celebrity and brand have a high degree of fit, consumers are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards the brand and the product being endorsed. Nowadays with the rapid increase in the advertising world, a lot of research was conducted around that topic. Kim et al. (2017) found that a good fit between the celebrity and the brand was positively associated with consumers' attitudes toward the brand and purchase intentions, and that this effect was mediated by perceived product quality. Min et al. (2019) found that the fit between the celebrity and the product was positively related to consumers' attitudes toward the ad and brand. Childs and Jin (2020) suggested that while creating a co-brand it is crucial to get the right partner for the right brand image. Another important thing is to give thought to the image fit of the holding companies but also the fit between holding product categories. Retailers must consider several factors when developing a co-brand. This includes assessing whether the parent brand's image complement each other, evaluating how well the parent product category aligns with the co-brand's product category, and determining the strength of the retailer's own brand (Banerjee and Drollinger, 2017).

Studies distinguished 2 main types of fits which can be observed in brand-endorser partnerships.

a) Functional fit: This type of fit refers to the extent to which the brand endorser's skills and expertise match the needs of the brand (e.g., Gordon Ramsey – a celebrity chef might be a good functional fit for the brand which sells kitchen appliances), but also it means the link between the product (its functions/attributes) and the supported idea.

b) Image fit: This type of fit refers to the degree to which the endorser's public image and persona align with the brand's values or image (Kamins and Gupta, 1994) but also if the brand and an endorser concern the same target group (Gwinner, 1997).

McCracken (1989) described how a celebrity transfers meanings to the endorsement process through their status and personality. He has also argued that cultural meanings (lifestyle, status, gender, age) are transferred from consumer goods to the life of the consumer, while advertising serves as a tool for the transfer process.

Marketers determine the cultural meanings that a product should convey, and celebrity endorsement is a crucial strategy in this process. Products are believed to have their own personalities, and consumers tend to choose brands that reflect their own personality. If managed effectively, a company can successfully transfer its meanings to consumers through the endorser. 3 stages in the McCracken's model were distinguished (see Fig. 1): the formation of a celebrity image, the transfer of meaning from celebrity to product, and the transfer of product to consumer (Fortini--Campbell, 1992).
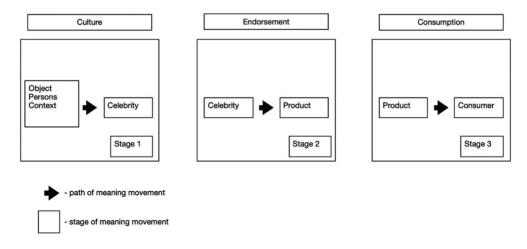
Fig. 1. The Meaning Transfer Model

Source: own elaboration based on (McCracken, 1989)

Celebrity endorsement is particularly important in the luxury sector as luxury is subjective and evolves with individual needs, budgets, and socio-cultural factors (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). A common definition of luxury brands includes high quality, authentic value, prestigious image, premium pricing, and a deep connection with consumers (Ko et al., 2017). That is why this sector was chosen as an empirical context for this study.

3. Research Design

As for the research goal, based on literature studies and qualitative analysis, this part is aimed to verify how image and functional fit impact on purchase intentions and attitude toward the brand. The chosen design for the study is a between-subjects design. Shadish et al. (2002) stated that between-subjects design is a research method which is used in experimental studies. The aim of this method is to compare different groups of participants. Each group is exposed to different conditions (stimuli) and their responses are compared to determine the effect of the independent variable.

For the purpose of the between-subjects study, the following variables were considered: dependent variables – customers' purchase intentions, general attitude toward the brand, and existing fits within each case, and independent variables, which were different celebrities put in the advertisement. Aiming to determine the impact of different types of fit on consumers' purchase intentions and general attitude toward the brand, and based on literature and case research, the following research hypotheses were formulated.

H_0: Image and Functional fit has no impact on customers' purchase intention and general attitude toward the brand.

H_1: Image fit has a positive impact on customers' purchase intention and general attitude toward the brand.

H_2: Functional fit has a positive impact on customers' purchase intention and general attitude toward the brand.

The data for the study was selected through a questionnaire, which was based on the "endorser/brand fit" scale (Sengupta et al., 1997). Other scales, which were considered during the preparation process, were: "Fit (Brand/Endorser)" scale (Bower and Grau, 2009), "ad trust (willing to use)" scale (Soh et al., 2009), "attitude toward the ad (truthfulness)" scale (Feldman et al., 2006), "trust in brand" scale (Chaudhiri and Holbrook, 2001), and "endorser similarity" scale (nd). All selected scales are 7-point, Likert-type except for "Attitude toward the ad (truthfulness)" scale (5-point) which was reconstructed for 7-point in order to unify the research.

The research participants were divided into three groups: two experimental ($n = 30$, $n = 30$) and one control ($n = 30$). The studied population consisted of Polish women and men of different age and residence of living. In the control group 60% of participants of the study were women and 40% men. According to the age, 50% of respondents were between 27 and 35 years old, 46.7% between 19 and 26 and only 3.3% between 36 and 44 years old. In the 1st experimental group 47.1% of respondents were women, 47% men, and 59% preferred not to say about their sex. In case of age there were two equal age groups of 44.1% each, in ranges 19-26 and 27-35. Only 11.8% declared their age to be 18 or younger. In the 2nd experimental group 38.7% were women, 54.8% men and 6.5% preferred not to say. This group was the most diverse in terms of age, but the vast majority belonged to the group of 19-26 (61.3%). 29% declared to be in the range of 27-35, 6.5% 18 or less, and only 3.2% were in the range 36-44. The participants in the study were randomly selected, however, in accordance with the principle applicable in between-subject design, which says that the target groups cannot be repeated, and each of the groups (2 experimental and 1 control) must consist of different, unique people.

As for the stimuli, three advertisements of "Bentley's" brand endorsed by three different celebrities, while preserving the unity of origin, gender and race, were prepared by the authoress for the purpose of the research. In control group, an advertisement with the Harry Styles persona (Fig. 2) was used (in researcher opinion neither image fit nor functional fit – young, controversial British singer), while for the experimental groups respectively: Hugh Grant (Fig. 3) (in researcher opinion image fit – British, mature actor) and Jeremy Clarkson (Fig. 4) (in researcher opinion functional fit – Brit, host of the largest automotive show "Top Gear").

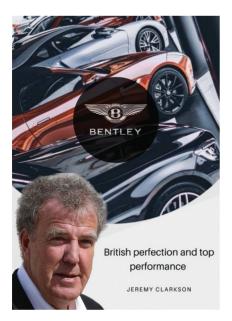**Fig. 2.** Stimuli for the control group – no fit

Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 3. Stimuli for the 1stexperimental group – image fit

Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 4. Stimuli for the 2nd experimental group – functional fit

Source: own elaboration.

The procedure was as follows: after having looked at the advertisements, the subjects in each of the groups were asked to answer questions regarding celebrity/ brand related effects. The research tool was a questionnaire with a 7-point Likert scale. The ANOVA method is a statistical method which is used for testing existing differences between different groups (Snedecor and Cochran, 1980).

The researcher decided to conduct one-way ANOVA analysis, calculate and check the means for each of the scales in all three samples (one control and two experimental), and then compared them to investigate and draw conclusions about the importance of fit between a celebrity with a particular brand and how particular fit influences customer purchase intention and general attitude toward the brand endorsed.

The following ANOVA hypotheses were considered.

H_0: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$: The population mean values for the compared groups or conditions are equal.

H_1: Not all population means are equal.

After conducting one-way ANOVA analysis, *p*-value of 1.06432E-13 (0,0000000000010643) ($p < 0.05$) was obtained. This means that differences between groups or conditions are very unlikely to occur by chance. This result suggests that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups or conditions that were compared in the ANOVA analysis. The null hypothesis was rejected.

To see general differences between each of the experiments, *post-hoc* tests were conducted (Tab. 1).

Table 1. *Post-hoc* test results

Comparison of experiments	$P(T \leq t)$ two-sided	Comment
Test *post-hoc*: control (Harry Styles) vs experimental 1 (Hugh Grant)	0,0000000000002913	$p < 0.05$ significant difference
Test *post-hoc*: control (Harry Styles) vs experimental 2 (Jeremy Clarkson)	0,3736703742504390	$p > 0.05$ not significant difference
Test *post-hoc*: experimental 1 (Hugh Grant) vs experimental 2 (Jeremy Clarkson)	0,0000000079300541	$p < 0.05$; significant difference

Source: own elaboration.

To obtain more detailed data, the means for each scale used in the study were calculated and then compared between all three experiments. This allowed for a deeper analysis of the created stimulus and evaluation of existing fits and their effects (see Tab. 2). The highest possible mean was 7.

Table 2. Comparison of averages responses according to scales

Name of the scale	Control stimuli (C)	1st experimental stimuli (1st E)	2nd experimental stimuli (2nd E)	Comments
"Endorser/brand fit"	3,65	**5,70833333**	3,56666667	1st E > C > 2nd E
"Fit (Brand/ Endorser)"	3,71111111	**5,73333333**	3,67777778	1st E > C > 2nd E
"Ad trust (willing to use)"	3,90833333	**5,75833333**	4,7	1st E > 2nd E > C
"Attitude toward the ad (truthfulness)"	3,78333333	**5,675**	3,95833333	1st E > 2nd E >C
"Trust in brand"	3,91666667	**5,43333333**	4,50833333	1st E > 2nd E > C
"Endorser similarity"	3,35555556	**5,67777778**	2,87777778	1st E > C > 2nd E

Source: own elaboration.

As it can be observed, 1st experimental stimuli achieved the highest rates in all scale categories. Again *post-hoc* test was conducted to check differences between control (Harry Styles) vs experimental 2 (Jeremy Clarkson) in scales as it turned out there is no significant differences in general.

Table 3. *Post-hoc* test for control and 2nd experimental stimuli

Name of the scale	Control stimuli (C)	2nd experimental stimuli (2nd E)	*p*-value
"Endorser/ brand fit"	3,65	3,56666667	0,80411442
"Fit (Brand/ Endorser)"	3,71111111	3,67777778	0,93188156
"Ad trust (willing to use)"	3,90833333	4,7	0,01110985
"Attitude toward the ad (truthfulness)"	3,78333333	3,95833333	0,43226607
"Trust in brand"	3,91666667	4,50833333	0,05900862
"Endorser similarity"	3,35555556	2,87777778	0,21171268

Source: own elaboration.

"Endorser/brand fit". The research participants (1st experimental group with Hugh Grant as an endorser of "Bentley") achieved the highest average in scoring. 2nd Experimental group (Jeremy Clarkson) achieved lower average than the control group (Harry Styles). These two, however, were not statistically significantly different.

"Fit (Brand/Endorser)". The research participants (1st experimental group with Hugh Grant as an endorser of "Bentley") achieved the highest average in scoring. 2nd experimental group (Jeremy Clarkson) achieved lower average than the control group (Harry Styles). These two, however, were not statistically significantly different.

"Ad trust (willing to use)". The research participants (1st experimental group with Hugh Grant as an endorser of "Bentley") achieved the highest average in scoring. Control group (Harry Styles) achieved lower average than 2nd experimental group (Jeremy Clarkson). These two were statistically significantly different.

"Attitude toward the ad (truthfulness)". The research participants (1st experimental group with Hugh Grant as an endorser of "Bentley") achieved the highest average in scoring. Control group (Harry Styles) achieved lower average than 2nd experimental group (Jeremy Clarkson). These two, however, were not significantly different.

"Trust in brand". The research participants (1st experimental group with Hugh Grant as an endorser of "Bentley") achieved the highest average in scoring. Control group (Harry Styles) achieved lower average than 2nd experimental group (Jeremy Clarkson). These two, however, were not significantly different.

"Endorser similarity". The research participants (1st experimental group with Hugh Grant as an endorser of "Bentley") achieved the highest average in scoring. 2nd experimental group (Jeremy Clarkson) achieved lower average than the control group (Harry Styles). These two, however, were not statistically significantly different.

4. Interpretation of Results and Managerial Implications

The aim of the experiment was to verify the impact of different types of fit on consumers' purchase intentions and general attitude toward the brand. In the light of ANOVA analysis, the null hypothesis was rejected and significant differences in the types of advertisement, endorsers, and particular scales used for the research were found. That allowed for further verification of each stimulus with the use of a post-hoc test. The test revealed differences between pairs of stimuli (C vs 1st E; C vs 2nd E; 1st E vs 2nd E). In each case compared with 1st E there was a significant difference in the results.

These results prompted me to compare the means of each scale in each group. Since each scale had 7 points, the maximum score that could be obtained was 7. After comparing all scales, it could be seen that the 1st experimental group had the highest mean on each scale compared to the other groups. Thanks to this, it can be concluded that the endorser used in this stimulus "spoke" the best to the target group, and the fit-image used had a positive impact on customers purchase intentions and general attitude toward the brand. Thus, one of the research hypotheses was confirmed. Image fit has a positive impact on customers' purchase intention and general attitude toward the brand. This shows for the enterprises that image fit between the brand and endorser brings benefits. It means that brands should carefully select their partnerships and pay a lot of attention to this topic. Thanks to the second post-hoc test, which compared the control group and the 2nd experimental group, the significant difference was observed in "Ad trust (willingness to use)" scale in which 2nd experimental group obtained much higher result than the control one. It means that functional fit between the brand and endorser is an appropriate choice for more functional brands itself. Customers who associate functional brands such as the car industry appreciate functional fit between the brand and endorser when it comes to willingness to use or general trust in the brand, probably because of the expertise in the industry which they promote. The advertisement for the control group contained the image of Harry Styles: young British singer who by the assumption of the experiment had no fit with the promoting brand. The results of that choice were not surprising. All the averages scores of scales were neither below the score of 4 nor above (out of 7). On this basis, it could be suggested to the company that the random selection of a person for cooperation brings average profits, both in terms of image and the willingness to purchase or use the service.

As mentioned in the literature review, the main goal of ideal fit between a famous person and a product is to utilise the famous person's impact, standing, and principles to elevate the product's reputation, connect with the intended audience more efficiently, and ultimately boost product recognition, devotion, and revenue. The objective is to establish a mutually advantageous collaboration where the celebrity's promotion flawlessly coincides with the product's essence, principles, and promotional goals. The conducted research explains whether the type of fit has an impact on customers' purchase intention and general attitude toward the brand. The results of the research indicate that the image fit has the greatest influence on brand-related effects, functional fit is crucial only in case of trust in the product or brand and no fit has an average influence on these factors.

5. Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

Certain limitations of the described experiment were identified. The generalizability of the findings may be limited due to the usage of already existing brands in the advertisements. Different brands may have varying levels of brand equity, brand image, and consumer perceptions, which can impact the outcomes. Secondly, the study may include potential confounding variables, such as participants' prior exposure to the brand or the celebrity, which may influence their attitudes and purchase. Additionally, the experiments might not fully capture the complexity of real-world consumer behaviour, as they were conducted in controlled settings. Lack of a coherent scale may be another limitation. The scales that were selected were considered the most appropriate ones, although not perfect.

To overcome these limitations, future research could examine the impact of celebrity-brand fit using a wider range of brands and product categories. This would provide a more complete understanding of the phenomenon in different contexts. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine the long-term effects of celebrity-brand fit on customer behaviour and brand loyalty. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could also be employed to gain insights into the underlying psychological processes and motivations driving consumers' responses to celebrity-brand fit. Lastly, incorporating real-world measures, such as actual purchase behaviour or observational studies, would enhance the ecological validity of the findings and offer a more accurate reflection of consumer decision--making.

Referring to these research directions, it can be argued that future studies may contribute to a more detailed understanding of the impact of celebrity-brand fit on consumer attitudes and behaviour.

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Celebrity endorsement jako element promocji na przykładzie wybranych marek luksusowych

Streszczenie: Autorka skupiła się na wykorzystaniu aprobaty celebrytów jako strategii promocyjnej w sektorze dóbr luksusowych. Celem było zrozumienie wpływu różnych rodzajów dopasowania między celebrytami a markami. Jakościowe badania przypadków i eksperyment ilościowy wykazały, że dopasowanie pod względem wizerunkowym miało znaczny wpływ na intencję zakupową klientów oraz ich postawę wobec marki. Gdy wizerunek celebryty był zgodny z tożsamością marki, zwiększało to autentyczność i wiarygodność, co przekładało się na intencję zakupu i bardziej pozytywne podejście. Staranne dobranie celebrytów, którzy pasują do tożsamości marki, ma kluczowe znaczenie w pozytywnym kształtowaniu percepcji i zachowań konsumentów. Aprobata celebrytów okazuje się skutecznym narzędziem dla marek sektora luksusowego w budowaniu aspiracji i emocjonalnych więzi z docelową grupą odbiorców.

Słowa kluczowe: aprobata celebrytów, dopasowanie, dopasowanie wizerunkowe, postawa wobec marki, marki sektora luksusowego