The Advertising Business

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Celebrities in Advertising

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Advertisers pay millions of dollars to celebrities, hoping that the stars will bring their magic to the products and services they endorse and make them more appealing and successful. Are the dollars well spent? Not always. Although actress Candice Bergen's "Dime Lady" portrayal for long-distance phone carrier Sprint was highly successful, and Jaclyn Smith moved millions to buy her clothing line at Kmart, Cybill Shepherd and James Garner were discontinued as spokespersons for the Beef Industry Council. And a Pepsi commercial featuring pop diva Madonna that cost megamillions to produce was aired only once in the United States before being pulled off the air. Why? Why did entertainer Bill Cosby fail as an endorser for E. F. Hutton despite his success for Jell-O and Kodak? And what impact did boxing champion Mike Tyson's rape conviction and the allegations of child molestation and drug addiction against pop singer Michael Jackson have on Pepsi, for which both were spokesmen?

These are not only interesting questions, but questions that marketers and advertisers need answers to as they plan their advertising and make decisions

TABLE 17.1 Awareness of Celebrity Advertising

	Print	Television
Mean Awareness Index ^a	134	135
Ads with following Awareness Index (9)	%)	
Low (less than 80)	16	21
Average (80-120)	30	29
High (121 and above)	54	50
Number of ads in sample	248	488

about whether or not to use celebrity endorsers—and, if so, how. This chapter explores the impact of celebrity advertising and examines the perceptions, persuasion, and processing of advertising that uses celebrity endorsers, mainly entertainment and sports stars. Specifically, I attempt to answer the following questions:

- Is celebrity advertising more attention getting and memorable than other kinds of advertising?
- How are celebrities in ads perceived?
- Is celebrity advertising more persuasive than other kinds of advertising?
- How does celebrity advertising work?

Awareness and Celebrity Performance

Successful advertising must start by being able to break through today's highly cluttered media environment and catch the reader's or viewer's attention. It must also make an impact on the consumer such that the product or service advertised can be remembered. Do celebrity ads do this better than noncelebrity ads?

There is strong evidence that suggests celebrity advertising delivers a premium in terms of impact and memorability. In an analysis of 248 celebrity print ads studied by Gallup & Robinson, Inc., over the period 1982-1993, celebrity ads show about a 34% higher level of awareness than noncelebrity ads (see Table 17.1). Awareness is measured in terms of recall of the advertised brand the day after advertising exposure. In a similar analysis of 488 commer-

a. Indexed to each appropriate product category norm (= 100).

TABLE 17.2 Factors Influencing Celebrity Advertising Awareness in Print Ads

	Popularity of Celebrity ^a		Ease of Celebrity Recognition in Ada	
	Less Popular	Popular	Less Easy to Recognize	Easy to Recognize
Awareness Index ^b (%)				
Low (less than 80)	19	8	22	11
Average (80-120)	31	28	37	25
High (121 and above)	50	64	41	64
Number of ads in sample	190	58	106	142

cials over a 3-year period, Rockey and Green found a 35% premium related to the use of celebrities.¹

The use of a celebrity in the advertising, however, is no guarantee of awareness. As is also shown in Table 17.1, and for obvious mathematical reasons, not every celebrity ad or commercial performs above average. More than one in five commercials and one in six print ads fall 20% or more below the category norm in terms of recall. The obvious question of interest is, Why?

The two most important factors that seem to influence attention getting and memorability in the print advertising analysis are the popularity of the celebrity used and the ease with which the star is recognized in the ads. As shown in Table 17.2, significantly more ads using popular, well-known celebrities and celebrities who could be easily identified in the ads had above-average awareness levels than had average and below-average levels. Similar results were reported in the analysis of celebrity commercials.

Consumers like gazing at stars. The success of magazines like *People* and tabloids like the *National Enquirer* clearly shows that people in general are interested in celebrities' professional as well as private lives. Consumers read and listen to what is said about celebrities. Familiarity with star endorsers encourages consumers to pay attention to the advertising in which they appear. Better-known stars, therefore, perform better in terms of awareness. When celebrities in advertising are hard to recognize because of the way they are used in the ads, this premium is minimized or lost. When Telly Savalas wore a hat to endorse Gillette Twinjector, the ad performed only at norm. But when he took the hat off to show his famous bald pate, the awareness level was almost twice as high.

a. Significantly different within groups at 95% confidence level.

b. Indexed to each appropriate product category norm (= 100).

Perceptions and Celebrity Characteristics

It is, of course, not enough that advertising breaks through the clutter and is attended to. To be fully effective, advertising must persuade the viewer or reader to feel more positive toward the advertised product or service. Buying intentions and usage of product or service should also be favorably influenced.

Before getting into a discussion about whether celebrity advertising is more persuasive than other kinds of advertising, I would like to address the issue of how consumers perceive celebrities when they endorse products and services in ads. One would expect that these perceptions would influence how effective particular celebrities might be in persuading consumers. Are celebrities perceived as being trustworthy and endorsing brands out of real interest, or are they perceived to be doing it just because they are being paid?

In a nationwide survey of 661 magazine readers, only about 1 in 4 (24%) respondents indicated agreement with a statement that celebrities appear in ads because they are genuinely interested in the products they endorse; 57% disagreed with the statement. An overwhelming majority (90%) of these respondents felt that financial and publicity reasons were very important to celebrities who appear in advertising. These perceptions are not surprising, considering news reports such as those about Cybill Shepherd, then spokeswoman for the Beef Industry Council, having admitted that she avoids red meat whenever possible, and about Pepsi spokesman Michael J. Fox having been seen sipping Coke. When James "Buster" Douglas became a boxing champion in February 1990, his aides were quoted as saying that marketers and media were "coming out of the woodwork" in the days after the title fight, and that "about the only endorsements the new champ won't be doing are alcohol and tobacco. But, other than that, we will do what the market will bear." 2 Clearly, such news stories are not conducive to building consumer trust in celebrity advertising.

However, when confronted with real celebrity advertising, consumers often tend to rate celebrities quite highly on a variety of characteristics—indeed, significantly higher than noncelebrity endorsers in identical or very similar advertising. Research studies have shown this to be true again and again. For example, young adult college women rated Jaclyn Smith in a Kmart commercial for her clothing line as significantly more believable, trustworthy, attractive, and likable than an unknown but young and attractive professional model in a very similar commercial.³ In the same study, Victoria Principal in a

Jhirmack hair-care products commercial was also rated more believable, trustworthy, and physically attractive, although not more likable, than a noncelebrity endorser in an identical commercial.

Similarly, Friedman, Termini, and Washington found higher levels of believability among their respondents for an ad for a fictitious brand of sangria wine when it was endorsed by actor Al Pacino than when it was endorsed by a professional expert, a company president, or a typical consumer. Atkin and Block studied three pairs of celebrity-noncelebrity ads featuring Telly Savalas, Happy Hairston, or Cheryl Tiegs for alcoholic drinks and consistently found higher ratings on trustworthiness, competence, and attractiveness—although not for believability—for the celebrity endorsers.

There is a halo effect. Celebrities enjoy higher source ratings because they are stars. In another interesting study, college women rated celebrities Jaclyn Smith and Victoria Principal significantly higher in physical attractiveness than two other unknown, attractive professional models only when the respondents recognized the celebrities as actresses. Those viewers who were not familiar with the stars rated the unknown models equally or significantly more attractive than the celebrities.⁶

What impacts do these favorable perceptions of celebrity endorsers have on the overall effects of the advertising? Is celebrity advertising more persuasive than noncelebrity advertising?

Persuasion and Celebrity Influence

Celebrities have often, though not always, been found to be more persuasive in advertising than other endorsers. In most instances, the attitude toward the product is more favorable when the product is associated with a celebrity. Results are mixed, however, for the variables of overall ad effectiveness and purchase intentions.

It has been found, for example, that endorsements attributed to celebrities produce higher intention to buy, and significantly more positive scores have been found for brand attitude and purchase intentions for a celebrity ad compared with its noncelebrity counterpart. Other research, however, has found no difference in buying intention as a function of the endorser's celebrity status. Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann found that the product was liked better when it was endorsed by sports stars, but intention to buy did not

differ.⁸ It should be noted that most of this research has investigated the effects of celebrity advertising on fictitious brands, and thus the consumer participants in these studies have had no prior knowledge of or attitudes regarding these brands. The results, therefore, are most applicable to new brand introductions.

Advertisers pull in new celebrities to endorse existing brands all the time. Some have done well in these situations. A study of an Amoco Oil campaign using celebrity Johnny Cash found not only increased awareness of the advertising, even in periods of lower media weight, but also a positive change in company image, especially among users. Unilever's beauty bar Lux is sold in more than 70 countries and is a leader in many of them. The company's strategy all over the world for more than six decades has been to use current leading national and international film actresses as endorsers. Stars can persuade consumers to buy. Kmart has had huge success in tying in with Jaclyn Smith; it has been estimated that 30 million American women owned items from the Jaclyn Smith collection shortly after the launch.

All celebrity advertising, however, does not persuade. In an analysis of print celebrity ads, "Persuasion" (among recallers using the measure "Favorable Buying Attitudes" on a 5-point scale) showed a figure 20% higher than its product category norm for only about one in three ads (see Table 17.3). The mean for all celebrity ads was only at the norm. In fact, one in five ads fell at least 20% below norm. In a similar study of celebrity commercials, Rockey and Greene report a mean somewhat higher at 110; and whereas one-third of the celebrity commercials performed above norm, one in four fell 20% below.¹¹

One of the most important variables that seems to influence how persuasive a celebrity will be in any advertising is the appropriateness of the celebrity for endorsing a particular brand and product. This appropriateness may be defined as the natural linkage between personality and product category, regardless of how the celebrity is actually used in the ad. As shown in Table 17.4, significantly more ads and commercials using appropriate celebrities have high Persuasion Indexes than those that use less appropriate celebrities (or inappropriate ones).

The selection of the appropriate celebrity thus becomes a very important decision for the advertiser. Researchers have studied celebrity-product appropriateness under a variety of names, including the *matchup hypothesis* and *product-brand congruence*. ¹² To understand this selection process fully and implement it successfully, it is important to understand how celebrity adver-

TABLE 17.3 Persuasion in Celebrity Advertising

	Print	Television
Mean Persuasion Index a	104	110
Ads with following Favorable Buying Attitudes Index ^a (%)		
Low (less than 80)	19	24
Average (80-120)	50	40
High (121 and above)	. 31	36
Number of ads in sample	123	189

tising works. Why is matchup or celebrity appropriateness important? What are the dynamics of the celebrity advertising process?

Processing and Celebrity Dynamics

Source Model

Early attempts at understanding the influence of any source in the persuasive context suggested that an attractive, trustworthy, likable, or credible source facilitates the message-learning and acceptance process. Results, however, have been mixed in celebrity advertising. Highly desirable sources have been effective under some, but not all, conditions. Further, although in one study respondents rated a product for beauty (razors) higher when a physically attractive celebrity endorsed it compared with an unattractive celebrity, in other analyses for fashion and cosmetic products—namely, jeans and perfume—the celebrities' expertise, rather than attractiveness or trustworthiness, influenced intentions to buy. Even highly credible sources have not been found to be universally influential. These mixed results have been explained on the basis of the interacting influence of consumer involvement.

Cognitive Response Model

It has been suggested that involvement levels may influence to what extent a celebrity or any other source is successful in being persuasive. The elabora-

a. Indexed to each appropriate product category norm (= 100).

TABLE 17.4 Celebrity-Product Appropriateness and Persuasion

	Celebrity Appropriateness			
_	Print		Television	
	Less Appropriate	Appropriate	Less Appropriate	Appropriate
Persuasion Index ^a (%)				
Low (less than 80)	19	20	34	18
Average (80-120)	56	42	36	37
High (121 and above)	25	38	30	45
Number of ads in sample	e 68	55	67	122

respondents use the source (celebrity) in the message as a peripheral cue to help them accept or reject the message (peripheral route processing). ¹⁵ However, under conditions of high involvement, the influence of the source is minimal and respondents "claborate" on the message itself (central-route processing) and diligently consider the information provided. Peripheral and central-route processing can be monitored by means of capturing the thoughts and feelings—cognitive responses—respondents generate during advertising exposure. The more favorable these responses, the more the likelihood of persuasion in the desired direction.

Although simultaneous processing of the peripheral and central routes has generally been found to occur in most cases, celebrity advertising was found to dominate through the peripheral process in the study of Kmart clothing with Jaclyn Smith. As viewers watched the Kmart commercials (either featuring celebrity Jaclyn Smith or an attractive professional, noncelebrity source), the thoughts and feelings generated during the exposure were measured by means of thought lists. These lists were categorized as related to (a) the product or brand, (b) the source (celebrity or noncelebrity), or (c) ad execution. Although all viewers generated all types of thoughts, the celebrity advertising viewers had significantly higher numbers of source-related thoughts than did the noncelebrity commercial viewers. Further, structural equation modeling showed that it was clear that the persuasive process had been different for the two groups. As shown in Figure 17.1, for the celebrity ad, source-related thoughts significantly influenced commercial attitude, which influenced brand attitude and intention to buy. With the noncelebrity ad (Figure 17.2), neither sourcerelated thoughts nor commercial attitude had any influence on the brand attitude or buying intentions.

a. Indexed to each appropriate product category (= 100).

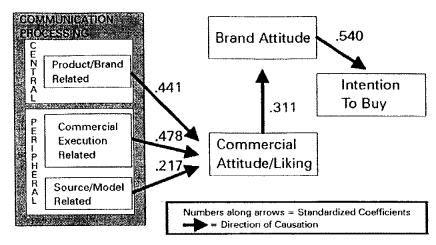


Figure 17.1. K-Mart Celebrity Commercial—Jaclyn Smith SOURCE: Abhilasha Mehta, "How Advertising Response Modeling (ARM) Can Increase Ad Effectiveness," Journal of Advertising Research, May/June 1994, 62-74.

The implications of these findings are important to advertisers. The finding that celebrity-related thoughts influence the persuasive process suggests, first, that it is important that the celebrity herself, and her use in the commercial, generate positive thoughts so that persuasion is in the desired direction. Second, because product-related thoughts are few in connection with the celebrity herself, and do not influence overall attitude and buying intentions directly, it is important that the use of the celebrity in the advertising is able also to bring some focus on the product. Often the advertising is remembered, the celebrity in the advertising is remembered, but the brand name is lost. Clearly, that kind of vampire creativity is not beneficial to the advertiser. Also, under conditions where peripheral cues are important, as is the case here for the celebrity advertising, the celebrity-product/brand associations need to be reinforced strongly to establish a stable association. Often, the impact of the peripheral cue is lost when cues are no longer present—unless strong associations are built.

The Matchup Hypothesis and Balance Theory

Recognizing the need for a celebrity to influence the endorsed product positively, it is well established that the message conveyed by the image of

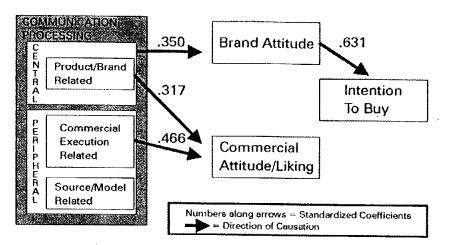


Figure 17.2. K-Mart Noncelebrity Commercial

OURCE: Abhilasha Mehta, "How Advertising Response Modeling (ARM) Can Increase Ad

Effectiveness," Journal of Advertising Research, May/June 1994, 62-74.

the celebrity and the message about the product ought to converge in effective ads. The matchup or congruence between the two is important because it allows for meaningful processing and makes it more possible for the brand name to be effectively linked and associated with the celebrity.

From an advertiser's perspective, whether the celebrity is brought in to endorse a new brand or an existing one is an important consideration. It is easier to create a new attitude than to change an existing one; thus it should be less difficult to associate the meanings of a celebrity with a product lacking an existing meaning than to change the existing meaning of a brand by adding new associations. Change should be particularly difficult when there is a discrepancy between the existing meaning and the proposed new meaning, or when there is a perception of product-endorser incongruence.

When the celebrity's image or attributes do not coincide with the known attributes of the brand, product, or service, incongruence results. This incongruence produces tension and generates forces in the reader or viewer to restore balance. This can be achieved either through a change in perceptions of the celebrity or through a change in attitudes about the product or service. As a result, a positively viewed celebrity could improve a not-so-positively viewed brand or, alternatively, suffer negative perceptions her- or himself if the brand perceptions are highly negative. Thus the perceived strength and

nature of a celebrity's attributes as well as the perceived image of a known brand interact to produce the final outcome, which may or may not be a successful celebrity endorsement process.

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Cultural Meaning Transfer

Research has focused on explaining how this celebrity endorsement process may be better understood, proposing a "meaning transfer" perspective. According to the model hypothesized by Grant McCracken, celebrities' effectiveness as endorsers stems from the cultural meanings with which they are endowed. A celebrity, possessing a unique, "individualized and complex bundle of cultural meaning," may transfer that meaning to the product, and from the product, it may transfer to the consumer.¹⁷ The research suggests that celebrities are effective endorsers to the degree that they are able to bring clear and unambiguous meanings to the products they endorse.

From this perspective, then, Candice Bergen was effective in the Sprint commercials because her portrayal in the advertising used the same wit that made her character on *Murphy Brown* a hit. Her savvy, smart, and humorous attitude in the campaign easily transferred to Sprint as she simplified and explained to consumers the complexities of long-distance calling plans, setting the carrier apart from its overly serious-minded competitors, AT&T and MCI.

It is also easy to see how Bill Cosby's image of a fun-loving, good-humored father figure transferred successfully to Jell-O and Kodak but not to E. F. Hutton, and why Elizabeth Taylor was a successful spokeswoman for the fragrances Passion, White Diamonds, and Fragrant Jewels, as were Joan Collins for Scoundrel and Cher for Uninhibited; the perfect image transfers, indeed, in all three cases. In a Gallup & Robinson test of these fragrance brands' ads, scores were extremely high for intrusiveness—more than 60% higher than the norm for Elizabeth Taylor's Passion and more than twice the norm for Joan Collins's Scoundrel. Uninhibited by Cher scored more than two and a half times the norm. On the other hand, when John Wayne, wearing a tuxedo, endorsed Datril pain-relief medication, it just did not work. The ad tested below average. It was hard to believe that this icon of macho would ever get a headache, much less take a pill for it!

It is very important for the advertiser to measure what the cultural meaning of a particular celebrity is. Whereas early attempts were made to measure celebrities on source characteristics such as trustworthiness, credibility, attractiveness, and likability, McCracken proposes that these are not enough. It is possible that two or more celebrities may be rated similarly on these scales, but that this "sameness masks profound and thoroughgoing differences." ¹⁸ It is not enough to know the degrees of attractiveness or credibility—the *kinds* of attractiveness and credibility must also be measured, and how these meanings serve the endorsement process must be better understood. For example, although Jodie Foster and Madonna are both seen as physically attractive, there are clear differences in perceptions of the two women. In a study with a college student sample, Jodie Foster's beauty was perceived to be of the "sophisticated and elegant" kind, whereas Madonna's was seen as being the "sexy and slutty" type. ¹⁹ Some researchers have expanded the list to measure as many as 25 different image traits in attempts to capture "unique cultural meanings," but it may be useful to employ other methods that do not limit respondents' reactions. ²⁰

Qualitative procedures were used in one study to allow consumers to free-associate about celebrities' images, and meaningful image profiles were drawn up by means of multidimensional concept mapping.²¹ This method allowed for the quantifying and relating of celebrities' unique meanings to congruent products.²² Results revealed multiple, though related, facets of Madonna's persona; she was mostly seen as "daring/outspoken" (58%), "slut" (42%), "sexy" (33%), and "talented/artist" (32%). These perceptions influenced her possible congruence with particular products and services. Whereas the "daring/outspoken" Madonna was seen as appropriate for endorsing lingerie and underwear, her "attractive and powerful" image was considered congruent with fragrance and cosmetics; the "slut" persona was seen as right for condoms, and "obnoxious and sexy" Madonna was perceived as suitable for selling "sex products." She was not seen as an appropriate endorser of the "vote in the election" message—a campaign in which she appeared.

Dynamic and Ever-Changing Celebrity Personas

An important consideration in the use of celebrities in advertising is the dynamic nature of their cultural meanings. Celebrities embody their personal and professional achievements. As these change, their cultural meanings also change. Sometimes, they change to become incongruent with brands they are endorsing. For example, James Garner could not continue to be an effective spokesman for the Beef Industry Council after he reportedly suffered heart

trouble. With embarrassing reports of celebrities testing HIV-positive, or being accused and even arrested on drug and sex charges, advertisers need to worry about who they choose for endorsements. Some are even reaching for celebrities guaranteed never to offend—dead celebrities! Diet Coke, Hershey, and Levi Strauss have used Humphrey Bogart, Marilyn Monroe, and James Dean. The Gap's well-received print campaign for its khaki trousers featured stars such as Orson Welles, Rock Hudson, Humphrey Bogart, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Marilyn Monroe.

The changes in celebrity personas over time can sometimes be expensive for advertisers, as Pepsi can testify. After spending large sums to have pop star Madonna featured in a 60-second commercial, the commercial was taken off the air after one exposure due to the controversy surrounding her then-new video and album release. Another celebrity endorser Pepsi used was Mike Tyson, who has served time in prison for rape. As if the then-recent allegations of drug addiction and child molestation were not enough, when Michael Jackson canceled his 1993 Pepsi-sponsored summer tour in Thailand because of dehydration, Coca-Cola found a special competitive advantage and came up with an ad in the newspapers reading, "Dehydrated? There's always Coke."

Social Validity Hypothesis

Although cognitive response theory, balance theory, and the cultural meaning transfer hypothesis provide theoretical frameworks to explain the celebrity endorsement process, there are situations in which more is needed. For example, what is the mechanism that operates when a celebrity endorses a pain-relief medication or a fruit yogurt—or even a financial service or bank? Can there really be a meaningful transfer of image when celebrities endorse such products? It appears that when a celebrity endorses a product for which "image" is not critical, and performance or taste of the product is the key to product acceptance, the celebrity may serve as a source of social validity. In consumers' minds, a celebrity can typically have anything he or she wants; if a celebrity chooses this particular brand, it must be a good brand. In other words, if this brand is good enough for a successful star (given, of course, that I believe the celebrity uses the brand), then it is good enough for me, a regular customer. This is the mechanism that allows the celebrity to be successful, and celebrities who are well liked and respected can serve as influential social validators.

Audience Characteristics and Celebrity Influence

Audience characteristics also moderate the extent to which celebrities may be effective. Some studies have shown that younger adults may be more influenced by celebrities than are other groups. Users of a brand have also been found to be more influenced by celebrity advertising than have nonusers of the brand.

Inherent personality variables may also influence how effective celebrity advertising will be. The influence of one such variable, cognitive style, has been studied.²³ Cognitive style refers to an inclination to be more (or less) likely to differentiate various kinds of messages, environments, and so on. Respondents with low differentiation, referred to as field dependent, are less likely to be cognitively, perceptually, and socially inclined to analyze the environment than are respondents who are field independent, who tend to be highly analytic. As expected, field-dependent consumers rated the product (clothing) significantly higher and had slightly higher buying intentions when the product was endorsed by a celebrity than when it was endorsed by a noncelebrity, and the ratings were also higher than for field-independent consumers watching a celebrity commercial. More such research involving different product categories and a variety of celebrities is needed, because the marketing implications of these findings are very large indeed. Further, from a marketing perspective, it is important to identify demographics and other usable characteristics of field-independent and field-dependent respondents. There is some indication that higher education may be concomitant with cognitive style.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Clearly, all that celebrity glitter is not gold, but it can be. If appropriately used, celebrity advertising has a payoff. The strategy of using celebrity testimonials has endured over time. From 1903 to 1905, Coca-Cola was endorsed by Lillian Nordica, the then-reigning American queen of Wagnerian opera. Other opera stars, such as Adelina Patti, and stage actress Lillie Langtry recommended Pears soap as far back as 1888.

Celebrity advertising does deliver a premium in terms of impact and memorability. There is also a positive influence on persuasion, though less strong. As discussed above, the success of the celebrity endorsement process depends on many factors. Using a celebrity in advertising is no panacea, and many such uses have failed. There is evidence that well-known celebrities do better, and it is important that advertisers facilitate the recognition in ads of any celebrities they use. Further, it is also clear that consumers must see the celebrity as congruent to the advertised brand, and the message must be believable. It is less clear, however, how advertisers can establish this congruency. Advertisers need to study, on a case-by-case basis, the various aspects of the brand and celebrity in question as they develop the strategy and executions of any advertising. Equally important are the characteristics of target audience members and their perceptions of both the brand and the celebrity.

It is not enough that the celebrity in the advertising be remembered; more important, the brand must be. In using celebrities as endorsers, advertisers need to understand not only how to choose celebrities, but also how to use them in the advertising. The strategy and creative execution should reinforce strongly and consistently the celebrity-brand association. And the celebrity should not only evoke positive reactions, but help focus attention on the brand in the advertising. Thus the product will be made more desirable because of its association with the star.

Notes

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