

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Paid versus unpaid celebrity endorsement in advertising: An exploration**

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Advertising and marketing managers spend a great deal of money to have celebrities endorse their product. Some view it to be an effective form of advertising as evidenced by the number of celebrity-endorsed advertisements that have increased. Despite numerous amounts of research on celebrities endorsing a single product, little research has been conducted regarding the use of multiple-celebrity endorsements in advertising. This study is based on the research by Hsu and McDonald (2002), who documented the use of multiple-celebrity endorsement advertising in the milk moustache campaign in the USA. This study investigated the tendency towards correspondence inference of 200 respondents and researched their attitudes towards celebrities, the product being advertised, and the advertisement as a whole. The main findings are that there is a significant correlation between correspondence inference and attitudes towards the celebrity, but suggests that the levels of correspondence inference between the paid and unpaid situations depend on the celebrity. Implications are that marketers need to realise that correspondence inference might have an influence on people's attitudes towards the celebrity who endorses the product.

**Key words:** Celebrity endorsements, paid versus unpaid, advertising, campaign, marketing, attitude, message appeals.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Little research has been conducted regarding multiple celebrity endorsers in advertising (Hsu and McDonald, 2002). Silvera and Austad (2004) state that using celebrities to endorse a product enhances positive advertising ratings and product evaluations. According to Silvera and Austad (2004), an explanation for the success of celebrity-endorsed advertisements could be ascribed to consumers' beliefs that celebrities endorse products as the result of their true emotions towards the product, and not because of the remuneration they receive.

In this study, correspondence inference and consumers' attitudes were investigated by exposing respondents to print advertisements. Correspondence inference refers to the celebrity's behaviour, which is ascribed to his or her personal beliefs or opinions, and therefore his

or her fundamental dispositions, when in fact the behaviour can be explained by the situation that the individual finds him- or herself in (Cronley et al., 1999).

### **Literature review**

Consumer products consist of convenience products, shopping products, speciality products, and unsought products (Kotler and Armstrong, 1990). Convenience products are bought regularly, instantly, without much comparison between the products, and require little buying effort (Kotler and Armstrong, 1990). Convenience products can further be classified as staples, which are products that consumers buy on a regular basis and without much shopping effort, which applies to milk (Lamb et al., 2000). An unknown campaign in South Africa was selected to choose celebrities from. The rationale was not to contaminate respondents with preconceived perceptions on the campaign. For this purpose the milk moustache

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campaign in America was selected.

Advertising is defined as any non-personal form of mass communication paid for and controlled by the sponsor (Swanson and Everett, 2000; Du Plessis and Rousseau, 2003). The American Marketing Association (2005) define advertising as the placement of persuasive messages in any of the mass media by organisations in order to inform and/or persuade people of a specific target market "... about their products, services, organizations [sic], or ideas." Therefore, marketing managers hope to influence people with their messages to take a particular action. The milk moustache campaign was designed to persuade the American population to drink more milk.

There are two types of advertising approaches, namely emotional or rational. Emotional advertising approaches seek to emotionally influence the target audience and to encourage them to identify with the advertisement. Rational advertising approaches, on the other hand, are based on the objective and factual features of the product. One specific form of the rational approach is the testimonial advertisement, in which a significant personality or celebrity appears (Du Plessis and Rousseau, 2003). This was used in the milk moustache campaign.

Consumers seek information in order to aid them in their purchase decision-making processes (Lamb et al., 2000). Information from external sources, for example celebrities, might sometimes be sought in order for consumers to compare their purchase options to each other (Lamb et al., 2000; Watson et al., 2002). There are two types of external information sources: non-marketing-controlled and marketing-controlled. The former refers to information obtained other than from a marketing source (Lamb et al., 2000). The latter is biased because marketers are promoting the product, highlighting only benefits, not weaknesses (Lamb et al., 2000). Therefore, for the milk moustache campaign, various media, for example billboards, are used to promote the benefits of milk to consumers from a marketing-controlled perspective. Whether a consumer will conduct an external search depend on the perceived risk, knowledge, prior experience and level of interest in the product (Lamb et al., 2000).

### **Celebrities in advertising**

The use of celebrities in advertising is not a new phenomenon and evidence of early case studies exists (Kamins, 1989). Celebrity endorsement refers to any person who is publicly known and who appears in an advertisement with a product with the purpose of promoting the product (McCracken, 1989). The use of multiple-celebrity endorsers entails making use of more than one celebrity to advertise a single product (Hsu and McDonald, 2002). Making use of celebrities on a regular basis over a period of time generally ensures a return on investment for the amount of money spent on employing the celebrity. This repetition strengthens the connection between the associations of the product with that of the celebrity (Till,

1998). The marketing manager must take great care in choosing the appropriate celebrity to endorse a specific product.

### **Selecting an appropriate celebrity**

It is essential that an appropriate fit between the celebrity and the product's target audience be considered (Till, 1998). An associative link occurs when there is a fit between the product and the celebrity and the consumer will associate the celebrity with the product being endorsed, and vice versa (Till, 1998). McCracken (1989) developed a model that describes the process of meaning transfer between the product and the endorser. The congruent dispositions that the celebrity possesses are ultimately transferred, through the consumption of the product, to the consumer (Byrne et al., 2003).

### **Attitudes towards the celebrity endorser and the product**

Attitudes towards a celebrity endorser refer to the positive or negative feelings towards the particular celebrity used to endorse a product (Du Plessis and Rousseau, 2003). In this study the relationship between the consumers' attitudes towards the advertised product will be explored. Attitudes towards a product refer to the positive or negative feelings towards the particular product being advertised (American Marketing Association, 2005).

### **Attitudes towards the advertisement**

Attitudes towards an advertisement refer to the positive or negative feelings towards the particular advertisement (American Marketing Association, 2005). Whether the transfer of meaning also affects the attitudes of consumers towards the advertisement, the correlation between the attitudes towards the celebrity endorser, as well as the attitudes towards the product will be tested in this study.

### **Research problem and hypotheses**

Within the Southern African context, little evidence could be found with regard to paid versus unpaid celebrity endorsement Emerald (Accessed: 16 October 2006), EbscoHost (Accessed: 22 August 2006), Sabinet (Accessed: 18 August 2006) and Science Direct (Accessed: 19 October 2006). Lessons learned from America and Europe could help advertisers and marketers to make informed decisions on the selection of the most appropriate celebrity irrespective if they are paid or not for the endorsements. The research question posed is: What are the views of consumers with regard to paid versus non-paid celebrity endorsements in advertisements?

The objective is to ascertain if consumers perceive celebrities differently when they are paid as opposed to

non-paid services rendered.

H<sub>1</sub>: Correspondence inference will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations.

H<sub>2</sub>: The attitudes towards the celebrities will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations.

H<sub>3</sub>: The attitudes towards the product will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations.

H<sub>4</sub>: The attitudes towards the advertisement will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations.

## METHOD

Correspondence inference was tested where one set of respondents were told that the particular celebrity was remunerated for endorsing the product. The other set of respondents were informed that the celebrity endorsed the product at no charge. The main objective of this study was, therefore, to determine whether correspondence inference existed amongst students when exposed to print advertisements in which two celebrities endorsed milk. Generally, milk is a low-risk product with which most consumers have had prior experience, especially in their childhood years. The level of interest to purchase milk might be quite low, as it is a product which some consumers use daily. These factors would lead to a low probability of consumers conducting an external search about milk. However, there appears to be a lack of knowledge and misperceptions about milk in the USA, resulting in Americans drinking less milk, which has led to a calcium crisis in the country (Whymilk.com, n.d.). As consumers are unlikely to actively seek information about a staple product, billboards displaying celebrities drinking milk were used to increase awareness of milk as a beneficial beverage.

The milk moustache campaign was used to correct misperceptions and educate consumers about the benefits of milk. The aim was to increase Americans' health by demonstrating that milk is a healthier option compared to soft drinks (Whymilk.com, n.d.). By advertising milk's benefits, marketers create the opportunity for consumers to become aware of these benefits and therefore engage in mutually beneficial exchanges.

To effectively reach consumers, it is recommended by Lamb et al. (2000) that marketers need to divide the market into smaller segments. Generally, milk is a product needed by everyone to sustain one's health, from infants to the elderly. Therefore, the target market is made up of literally the whole population. Fifty celebrities were used in the milk campaign in order to appeal to mostly all consumers in the American population (Whymilk.com, n.d.). For the purposes of these research two celebrities as single celebrity endorsements were selected as part of the research design.

## Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of undergraduate students on the campus of a tertiary institution in Pretoria between the ages of 18 and 21. A non-probability sample in the form of convenience sampling was used, and 200 usable questionnaires were obtained.

The celebrities that were selected for the purposes of this study were Britney Spears and Jackie Chan. Both these celebrities appear in the milk moustache campaign, which can be seen on the website <http://www.whymilk.com/>. Two sets of questionnaires were distributed: The one stated that the celebrities have been remunerated to endorse milk as a product. The other questionnaire stated that the celebrities have not been remunerated to endorse milk as a product. The respondents of Questionnaire 1 consisted of 41 males and 59 females, and 25 males and 75 females for Questionnaire 2.

## Measurement instrument

The initial questionnaire was pre-tested with a convenience sample of 14 (divided equally between both questionnaires) undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 21 on the main campus of the University where respondents were informed of either the paid or unpaid situation, played a huge role in this study. All the items of the scale were seven-point semantic differential scales, except for the demographic section, which consists of multiple-choice, single-response scale statements.

Questionnaire one comprises of the paid situation in which respondents were informed that both Britney Spears and Jackie Chan were remunerated for endorsing milk. Questionnaire two encompasses the unpaid situation in which respondents were informed that both Britney Spears and Jackie Chan endorsed milk for free.

## Validity of the questionnaire

The validity of the scales used in the questionnaire was measured through face and content validity. Face validity is the extent to which a measurement scale seems to measure what it is supposed to (McDaniel and Gates, 2001). This was determined by the judgment of the researchers, who compiled the questionnaire with various scales, which logically appeared to accurately reflect what they were supposed to measure. Content validity is the degree to which a scale provides adequate coverage of the topic under study (McDaniel and Gates, 2001). Content validity was measured by firstly defining what exactly needed to be measured. In this study key components were identified through the hypotheses constructed that helped to identify what needed to be measured. Second, by doing an extensive literature search and conducting focus groups helped to identify all possible items that needed to be included in the scale. This study was focused on an extensive literature search where all possible items were identified. Third, opinions were sought from experts on whether certain items should be included or even excluded. Statisticians were approached to assess the scale and items selected in this study (Statomet, 2006). Finally, scales needed to be pre-tested and open-ended questions were asked that identified other items that should have been included.

## Reliability of the questionnaire

The reliability of the scales was assessed through the adaptation of the research of Cooper and Schindler (2006). The internal consistency of reliability, when items in the measurement scale all coincided with the same underlying construct, identified by Churchill's scale development process (Churchill, 1979) was measured by using Cronbach's alpha and corrected item to total correlations. If the Cronbach alpha values were higher than 0.7 they

**Table 1.** Cronbach's coefficient alpha.

Variable	Condition	Alpha
Correspondence inference	Paid situation	0.82
	Unpaid situation	0.84
Celebrity endorser	Paid situation	0.76
	Unpaid situation	0.88
Advertised product	Paid situation	0.86
	Unpaid situation	0.90
The advertisement	Paid situation	0.81
	Unpaid situation	0.84

were regarded as having sufficient internal consistency reliability but if the values were lower than 0.7 the items to total correlations of less than 0.3 were rejected and the scales were retested until they stabilised at an acceptable level of internal consistency.

## Results and hypotheses testing

In this study, correspondence inference was tested by analysing whether celebrities who endorse products for remuneration influence consumers' attitudes towards the product. This statement was tested under two conditions using multiple celebrity endorsers: when the respondent believed that the particular celebrity was remunerated to endorse a product; and when the respondent believed that the celebrity endorsed the product without payment.

Table 1 gives a summary of Cronbach's coefficient alpha on the paid and unpaid situations in correspondence inference, celebrity endorsement, advertised product and the advertisement.

Correspondence inference was measured by three items for both celebrities. The seven-point semantic differential scale ranged from 1="Not at all likely" to 7="Very likely". A high score indicated a high tendency towards correspondence inference, whereas a low score indicated a low tendency towards correspondence inference. The items relating to correspondence inference indicated a satisfactory level of internal reliability.

Attitudes towards the celebrity endorser were measured by four items for both celebrities. The items used for measurement include interesting/uninteresting, pleasant/unpleasant, likeable/not likeable, and good/bad. A high score indicated a negative attitude towards the celebrity endorser, whereas a low score indicated a positive attitude towards the celebrity endorser. The items relating to attitudes towards the celebrity endorser indicated a satisfactory level of internal reliability.

Attitudes towards the advertised product were measured by four items for both celebrities. Four scores were computed by calculating the average of the responses given by each respondent to Britney Spears and Jackie Chan across both situations, to provide a total score for the overall attitudes towards the product. The items relating to attitudes towards the advertised product indicated a satisfactory level of internal reliability.

Attitudes towards the advertisement were measured by four items for both celebrities. Four scores were computed by calculating the average of the responses given by each respondent to Britney Spears and Jackie Chan across both situations, to provide a total score for the overall attitudes towards the advertisement. The items relating to attitudes towards the advertisement indicated a satisfactory level of internal reliability for both the paid and unpaid situations. All hypotheses were tested at a 5% significance level.

### Hypothesis 1

H1: Correspondence inference will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations.

Correspondence inference was measured at an interval level in both situations. The appropriate parametric significance tests include the independent sample t-test. The first assumption of this measure states that the variables that will be compared must be normally distributed. The second assumption states that the variables that will be compared need to have equal variances (Green et al., 1999).

The assumptions of normality were analysed by conducting a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality, as well as through a visual examination of histograms and normal probability plots. The test for normality was violated across both situations and both celebrities. The Mann-Whitney U test was, therefore, used as a non-parametric alternative. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test are illustrated in

Table 2. (For all tables: \*BS = Britney Spears, \*\* JC = Jackie Chan). As indicated in column 2, the results of this test indicate that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the paid and unpaid situation when referring to Britney Spears ( $p_{BS} = 0.003$ ). The null hypothesis for Britney Spears can therefore be rejected. However, column 3 indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of these two situations for Jackie Chan, because the p-value is larger than 0.05 ( $p_{JC} = 0.857$ ). In this case, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected for this celebrity. The findings, therefore, indicate that correspondence inference will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situation when referring to Britney Spears.

### Hypothesis 2

H2: The attitudes towards the celebrities will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations.

However, as previously, the non-parametric significance test, namely the Mann-Whitney U test, was used to test this hypothesis. The results of this test are illustrated in Table 3.

It can be observed that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of these two situations as the p-value for both celebrities is larger than 0.05 ( $p_{BS} = 0.245$  and  $p_{JC} = 0.301$ ). The null hypothesis cannot be rejected and it can be concluded that the attitudes towards the celebrities do not differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations.

### Hypothesis 3

H3: The attitudes towards the product will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations

The attitudes towards the celebrities were measured at an interval level in both situations. The appropriate parametric significance tests therefore include the independent sample t-test. However, as previously the Mann-Whitney U test, was used to test this hypothesis. The results of this test are given in Table 4.

Table 4 indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of the attitudes towards the product in both situations as the p-value for both celebrities is larger than 0.05 ( $p_{BS} = 0.346$  and  $p_{JC} = 0.373$ ). The null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the attitudes towards milk as a product when comparing the paid and unpaid situations.

### Hypothesis 4

H4: The attitudes towards the advertisement will differ significantly between the paid and unpaid situations

Table 5 illustrates the output of the Mann-Whitney U test. It can be seen in Table 5 that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the paid and unpaid situations for Britney Spears ( $p_{BS} = 0.020$ ). In this case, the null hypothesis can be rejected. However, column 3 shows that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the two situations for Jackie Chan, because the p-value is larger than 0.05 ( $p_{JC} = 0.457$ ). For Jackie Chan, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

There is, therefore, a significant difference between the attitudes towards the advertisement in which Britney Spears is endorsing milk when comparing the paid and unpaid situations. Respondents seem to have liked the advertisement more when they believed that Britney Spears endorsed the product for free. The same is true for Jackie Chan, but according to Table 4, this difference is not significant.

**Table 2.** Mann-whitney u test: hypothesis 1.

	Correspondence inference –BS*	Correspondence inference JC**
Mann-Whitney U	3781.500	4926.500
Wilcoxon W	8831.500	9976.500
Z	-2.987	-0.180
P-value	0.003	0.857

**Table 3.** Mann-whitney u test: hypothesis 2.

	Attitudes towards the celebrity endorser – BS*	Attitudes towards the celebrity endorser – JC**
Mann-Whitney U	4578.000	4526.000
Wilcoxon W	9628.000	9576.000
Z	-1.034	-1.163
P-value	0.301	0.245

**Table 4.** Mann-whitney u test: hypothesis 3.

	Attitudes towards the advertised product – BS*	Attitudes towards the advertised product – JC**
Mann-Whitney U	4615.500	4636.500
Wilcoxon W	9665.500	9686.500
Z	-0.942	-0.891
P-value	0.346	0.373

**Table 5.** Mann-whitney u test: hypothesis 4.

	Attitudes towards the advertisement – BS*	Attitudes towards the advertisement – JC**
Mann-Whitney U	4052.500	4696.500
Wilcoxon W	9102.500	9746.500
Z	-2.320	-0.743
P-value	0.020	0.457

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This study explored the tendency towards correspondence inference of respondents as well as their attitudes towards the celebrities, the product being advertised, and the advertisement itself. Despite abundant research on celebrities endorsing a single product, there has been little focus on the use of multiple- celebrities in advertising. The results of this study should provide some clarity regarding the use of multiple-celebrity endorsers in a single advertising campaign.

Hypothesis 1 tested whether there was a significant difference in the levels of correspondence inference between the paid and unpaid situations. Results suggest that the levels of correspondence inference depended on the celebrity, as a significant difference in the levels of correspondence inference was found to be significant for Britney Spears, but not for Jackie Chan. These findings are in line with findings in previous research (Silvera and

Austad, 2004). The results could be ascribed to the fact that respondents had a more negative attitude towards Britney Spears when compared to Jackie Chan. The target market of Britney Spears could also be the reason for these results.

The second hypothesis tested whether there was a significant difference in the attitudes towards the celebrity endorser in the two situations. This study suggests that the attitudes towards the celebrity do not differ significantly between both situations. This supports the findings of Silvera and Austad (2004).

Hypothesis 3 tested whether the attitudes of respondents towards the product differed significantly between the paid and unpaid situation. The results indicated that there is no significant difference in both situations. This is in contrast to previous research, in which it was found that the attitudes towards the product differed significantly between both situations (Silvera and Austad, 2004). This finding could be ascribed to the possibility that no clear

associative link was created between the celebrities and milk as a product (Cronley et al., 1999). Milk is also not an expert product, which could have influenced this finding.

The fourth hypothesis tested whether the attitudes towards the advertisement differed significantly between both situations. Findings suggest that this variable of Britney Spears did differ significantly. The opposite proved to be true for Jackie Chan, where the findings indicated that there was no significant difference between the two situations. This suggests that this variable depends on the celebrity. Previous research indicates that the attitudes towards the advertisement were not affected by correspondence inference and therefore did not differ in the paid and unpaid situation (Silvera and Austad, 2004). The difference in results could be ascribed to the fact that respondents might have a negative perception towards the particular celebrity that endorses a brand or product. The fact that the respondents might not have been part of the target market of Britney Spears could have influenced the results.

### **Managerial implications**

The managerial implications of the findings are that marketers should be careful when considering the use of a celebrity to endorse a brand or product. This study suggests that, because some celebrities, like Britney Spears, are remunerated for featuring in an advertisement, the believability and credibility of this celebrity are influenced in the minds of the target market.

Till (1998) states that it is essential for marketers to test potential combinations of products and celebrities "... to ensure that the impression and image of the celebrity is positive for the target audience." This study, therefore, suggests that positive attitudes towards the celebrity endorser lead to positive attitudes towards the advertisement irrespective if the celebrity endorser is an opinion leader on the product of service or not Cronley et al. (1999) state that when a celebrity features in an advertisement with a product, might not be a reason for respondents to experience correspondence inference when told that the celebrity was remunerated. Therefore, a stronger association between the product, advertisement and celebrity needs to be created to increase believability of the fit.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study might be the product used in the advertisements. Because milk is viewed as a staple product, and is therefore used by most of the South African population almost every day, people already have set attitudes towards this product. Celebrities might therefore not have a great influence on consumer attitudes towards milk. This is supported by Till (1998), who states that celebrity endorsements are more effective

for less well-known products. He also states that celebrity endorsers are "... more effective for brands for which consumers have limited knowledge/facts." (Till, 1998). It is therefore recommended that future research could focus on more exclusive or specialised products, such as a Rolex watch, where it is expected that celebrities might have a greater influence on people's attitudes. A staple product, like milk, that consumers buy on a regular basis without weighing price and prestige of the brand name may have a limiting impact on consumer decisions, behaviour and actions. It could be that consumers are less opinionated towards products that they use daily as opposed to products or services of a specialised nature.

It might also be possible that students, although known by the respondents, do not form part of Britney Spears' target market. This might have influenced the perceptions of respondents and, therefore, also the findings of this study. It is proposed that an advertisement campaign is chosen that uses celebrity endorsers that appeal to the respondents that will be used to test the correspondence inference phenomenon.

Most of the findings of this study are not strong enough to generalise results to other campaigns or populations than the present research framework. Lynch (1982) and MacGrath and Brinberg (2004) also state that student samples could "... limit external validity and thereby limit generalizability [sic] of results". Generalisations can therefore not be made concerning the findings of this study.

### **Future research**

Additionally, future research might focus on measuring the effectiveness of using celebrity endorsers across the marketing mix. Till (1998) states that this leads to increased value from a celebrity endorser. Future research might therefore measure whether extended marketing efforts with celebrity endorsers are warranted on the following research areas: i) Country and culture specific celebrities in local advertising campaigns could be perceived differently ii) Product category could also impact on consumer perceptions with regard to paid versus unpaid celebrity endorsements. A comparison or distinction between opinion leaders and celebrities may also influence consumer perceptions differently.

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