



## The Effects of Celebrity-Brand Congruence and Publicity on Consumer Attitudes, Buying Intention, and Loyalty

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**Introduction:** Celebrities have been used for decades as a marketing tool to endorse brands or products (McCracken, 1989). However, once a direct link has been formed from a celebrity to a brand, the negative information about the celebrity may reflect back on to the endorsed brand (White, Goddard, & Wilbur, 2009). Despite the growing popularity of celebrity endorsements, few attempts have been made to evaluate the potential impact of negative celebrity publicity, celebrity endorsement, and the consumer attitude toward the brand after the publicity scandal. Also, the effect of celebrity-brand congruence and negative publicity on consumers' buying intention and their loyalty are unknown. Therefore, applying the balance theory, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of celebrity-brand congruence and publicity on consumers' attitudes toward the celebrity and brand as well as their buying intention and loyalty.

**Literature Review:** The balance theory explains that individuals in a triad seek balance in their interpersonal relationships (i.e., the positive or negative relationship of a person to another person or to another impersonal entity) among their attitudes toward these relationships (Heider, 1946). For a relationship to be balanced, there must be three positives, or 2 negatives and a positive. The balance theory in this study states that by adding 2 positive links between a celebrity and a brand with a consumer, the consumer and the brand are more likely to develop a positive link which translate to sales. An important factor in determining the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement is celebrity-brand congruence. A good match-up between a celebrity and a product is more effective for generating positive consumer responses to advertising than a bad fit between them (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). In terms of publicity, consumers will either positively or negatively view celebrities based on public news. Consumers' positive feelings toward the celebrity endorser will make the brand more attractive to them, but negative information about a celebrity endorser has negative impact on the consumer attitudes (Miciak & Shanking, 1994). An attitude can be defined as an individual's assessment or opinion of people's objects, advertisements, or issues and this attitude is influenced by internal and external factors. Buying intention is the likelihood that he/she will buy a particular product in the future in response to his/her need for the product and opinions about the product (Brandmore, 2004). The likeability created from the celebrity endorsement and product attractiveness is a large influence on consumer purchase intention, and in turn influencing consumer loyalty toward the brand/product. Four hypotheses are developed for this study based on the literature review:

*H1: Attitudes toward the celebrity will be different by celebrity-brand congruence and publicity.*

*H2: Attitudes toward the brand will be different by celebrity-brand congruence and publicity.*

*H3: Buying intention will be different by celebrity-brand congruence and publicity.*

*H4: Loyalty toward the brand will be different by celebrity-brand congruence and publicity.*

**Methodology and Results:** A target sample of generation Y consumers with aged 18-27 were invited to participate in the study. A Qualtrics survey of 2(congruence vs. incongruence) × 2 (positive vs. negative publicity) experimental design was conducted. A total of 105 usable data were collected. In this study, advertisements were developed to convey celebrity-brand congruence (Steve Madden, a fashion shoe brand) and incongruence (Hoover, a vacuum brand) for female celebrity, Sarah Jessica Parker. In addition to advertisement manipulation, a negative and positive publicity story about Sarah Jessica Parker were created. Each participant got to see the randomly selected advertisement and publicity story.

An exploratory factor analysis was performed and a factor loading above 0.60 was retained. Each factor has a satisfactory reliability above 0.90. One-way ANOVA analyses were performed to test hypotheses. Regarding H1, there was a significant difference among 4 different groups in consumers' attitudes toward the celebrity,  $F(3,101)=12.650^{***}$ ,  $p<0.001$  with regard to congruence and publicity. The first group (congruence and positive publicity) has the most positive attitudes toward the celebrity ( $M=5.90$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ) compared to the second group (congruence and negative publicity) ( $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=1.45$ ) and the fourth group (incongruence and negative publicity) ( $M=3.95$ ,  $SD=1.70$ ). For H2, there was a significant difference in consumers' attitudes toward the brand,  $F(3,101)=4.62^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ . The mean scores of attitudes toward the brand for the first group ( $M=5.67$ ,  $SD=1.70$ ) was different from the fourth group ( $M=4.10$ ,  $SD=1.71$ ). Regarding H3, a statistically significant difference was also reported among 4 groups on buying intention,  $F(3,101)=4.24^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ . The buying intention level for the first group ( $M=5.37$ ,  $SD=1.96$ ) was significantly higher compared to the third group (incongruence and positive publicity) ( $M=3.90$ ,  $SD=1.54$ ) and the fourth group ( $M=3.68$ ,  $SD=2.19$ ). Regarding H4, a statistically significant difference was reported on consumer loyalty,  $F(3,100)=4.57^{**}$ ,  $p<0.01$ . The first group has a significantly higher loyalty level ( $M=5.26$ ,  $SD=1.66$ ) compared to the third group ( $M=3.76$ ,  $SD=1.50$ ) and the fourth group ( $M=3.82$ ,  $SD=1.68$ ).

**Conclusion and Implications:** This study examined the differences of consumers' attitudes toward the celebrity and the brand, buying intention, and loyalty by celebrity-brand congruence and publicity. The study revealed that consumers tend to like and be loyal to the brand/product when there is a celebrity-brand congruence and positive publicity. Interestingly, the congruence was found to be more important influencer to motivate consumers to purchase a brand/product to be loyal to the brand/product compared to publicity. Knowing the importance of celebrity-brand congruence and publicity plays a significant role in consumer behavior related to the brand/product. The results of this study would help retail marketers to select the celebrities matched with the brand and to monitor positive publicity for the effectiveness of their endorsement. Future research could be conducted with different demographic characteristics, such as age and ethnicity with regard to congruence and publicity.

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