

Celebrities in advertising: the role of congruency

Abstract: The concept of congruency has been used in many research streams like brand extensions, sponsorship, or advertising. This paper aims to show the interest of considering this concept through the two dimensions proposed by Heckler and Childers (1992): relevancy and expectancy, in the case of celebrity endorsers in advertising. In order to measure this concept, we will then develop and empirically test a scale adapted from the works of Fleck-Dousteyssier, Darpy and Roux (2005) on sponsorship.

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Brands all over the world use celebrities to advertise their products. As early as 1890, actress Sarah Bernhardt appeared on posters for La Diaphane, a famous brand of rice powder at the time (Lehu, 1993). The use of celebrities in advertising is not, therefore, a new phenomenon, but it has become increasingly widespread. In a single week, French footballer Zinedine Zidane appeared on posters for Dior perfume and Leader Price hard-discount supermarkets, as well as TV ads for Dannon yoghurt. Stars have become a vital component of advertising for certain categories of products, like perfume and cosmetics.

While celebrity endorsement in advertising is not a new phenomenon, it has certainly become much more widespread over the past twenty years. It has even become common practice for some companies. In fact, consumers have become increasingly keen on celebrities (Masse-Stamberger, 2005): they are interested in people who are well-known simply due to the fact they have appeared on television, — like the stars of reality shows —, and celebrity magazines are tremendously popular, as people always want to know more about stars' lives. The number of celebrities in advertising increased by 60 % between 2000 and 2004 (Neumann, 2006). As a result, in 2004, nearly 700 French television advertisements featured celebrities.

Alongside this phenomenon, research into the role of celebrities in advertising has also increased since the 1990s (Pringle and Binet, 2005; Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1991). This research more specifically investigates the concept of congruency between celebrity and brand, which is apparently a crucial factor. We shall start by defining "endorsement" and presenting the main models in this field then introduce a two-dimensional analysis of congruency. We shall attempt to define this concept and its antecedents in more detail. We shall then propose a scale for measuring perceived congruency between celebrities and brands.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENTS IN ADVERTISING

We will use McCracken's definition (1989, p.310): "*the celebrity endorser is defined as any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement*". It is significant that celebrity endorsements are a way of avoiding anonymity and standing out from the competition in saturated markets. Beyond this objective of differentiation, it also gives brands an opportunity to focus their positioning in consumers' minds. Sometimes, celebrity endorsements also give a brand considerable exposure in the press, who are more likely to report on events concerning the brand if the celebrities are present (e.g. brand promotion parties; Erdogan and al., 2001). The impact on sales is more difficult to assess. The results of celebrity endorsements are, however, highly variable, as there are many factors involved, including the choice of celebrity, and the quality of the advertising itself, as well as the media programme, or even press relations.

This is why it is interesting to understand how endorsement works and identify the decisive factors for its effectiveness. From this perspective, we shall present the main models devised to explain the type of relationship that develops between celebrities and consumers. These models are essential to our understanding of the influence of celebrity on brand perception.

The attractiveness model assumes that the effectiveness of the message depends on the physical characteristics of the source. A celebrity spokesperson's physical attractiveness has a positive impact on brand recall, attitude towards the brand, and purchasing intent (Kahle and Homer, 1985).

The source credibility model was developed by Hovland and Weiss, in 1951. According to this model, the effectiveness of a message depends on the perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness of an endorser (Ohanian, 1991). Ohanian (1990) developed a three-dimensional scale for assessing a celebrity's credibility. The three dimensions in this credibility scale are attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. However, as McCracken (1989) and Erdogan (1999) noted, limiting the assessment of an individual to certain dimensions may seem rather restrictive.

These models may seem attractive but they have been criticised on several levels (Erdogan, 1999, Bower and Landreth, 2001). They do not properly take into account the multifunctional aspect of certain characteristics of the source and there is no proof that the dimensions examined are the correct ones. However, above all, these models seem incomplete as they do not consider all the significance and perceptions connected to a particular celebrity, merely focusing on certain characteristics of the endorser, so we do not feel they are capable of capturing what a person, as a whole, is capable of contributing to an advertisement. We think that McCracken's meaning transfer model (1989), which includes all the cultural connotations of celebrity, is more suitable, as it explains the endorsement process as a whole. This model has the advantage of including affective and cognitive aspects. The transfer theory relies on the endorsement process described by McCracken (1989). This process is based on the idea that, in the consumer society, which is organised around culture, celebrities have a shared cultural significance in the eyes of consumers (McCracken, 1986, 1989). McCracken defines this transfer as the translation of the meaning of celebrity to a product or brand, e.g. in advertisements with celebrity spokespersons. Endorsement is effective when an individual who buys and consumes the product appropriates the meaning associated with the celebrity, which has been transferred to the product.

The McCracken model makes it possible to explain how celebrities transmit an extensive set of associations to the brands they endorse. Therefore, before companies select celebrities to represent their brands, they need to ensure that the person conveys the right meaning. It is precisely this congruency between personality and brand that facilitates meaning and affect transfer from one to the other (Misra and Beatty, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994, Lynch and Schuler, 1994). It is thus useful to define this concept of congruency in greater detail.

THE ROLE OF CONGRUENCY

The term "congruency" is used in several research areas, particularly brand extension, co-branding, sponsoring, and endorsement. In all these cases, the aim is to assess the fit between a brand and another entity. A variety of terms have been used (congruency, fit, link, "match up effect", etc.) but the general concept is the same. In the field of celebrity spokespersons, congruency was not really defined as such until Misra and Beatty's work (1990, p. 161). They deduced that it consisted of the fact "*that the highly relevant characteristics of the spokesperson are consistent with the highly relevant attributes of the brand*". A number of authors have studied specific aspects of celebrity, such as gender and skin colour (Huston and al., 2003) or physical attractiveness (Kamins, 1990), but few have analysed congruency in the broader sense.

Heckler and Childers (1992) analysed the congruency between visual and verbal elements in advertisements, adapting concepts used in social cognition and, particularly, the memorisation of social characteristics, to advertising. Thus, they started from the concept of theme, which originates in verbal discourse and presents the general content of the story told by the advertisement. Congruency is then defined in two dimensions: *relevancy* and *expectancy*. Relevancy reflects the extent to which the information contained in the stimulus contributes to or prevents a clear identification of the main theme or message being communicated. Expectancy refers to the degree to which an item or piece of information fits into a predetermined pattern or structure evoked by this theme. This interesting approach suggests that the concept of congruency may be two-dimensional.

At first glance, it may seem logical that congruency between the celebrity and the brand endorsed should have a positive impact on the brand's image and that, the stronger the link, the more impact the association should have on the brand. Furthermore, the better-suited, more relevant or congruent the celebrity/brand pair is perceived to be, the greater the positive response to advertising in terms of attitude, or even purchasing intent (Misra and Beatty, 1990; Kamins and Gupta, 1994).

However, it is possible to imagine a more complex relationship and examine an alternative hypothesis, i.e. that a certain level of incongruence may have a positive impact on response to advertising, particularly in terms of brand image. Indeed, a moderate level of incongruence between an expectation and an object may be beneficial, provided it is perceived as interesting and positive (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989). In that case, a relatively poor fit between brand and celebrity may be stimulating and encourage individuals to process the information more intensively and elaborate more. In the case of sponsoring, a slight inconsistency between the sponsor and the event should lead to enhanced recall and more favourable attitudes than in the case of total consistency (Jagre and al, 2001). However, if the incongruence is so great that consumers have to change their cognitive structures to comprehend it, they have a tendency to exhibit negative reactions, leading to negative cognitive elaboration and a feeling of frustration (D'Astous and Bitz, 1996).

The superiority of moderately incongruent pairings over highly congruent or very incongruent ones has also been confirmed by some research into brand extensions. Thus, moderate incongruence of a product in relation to the expectation activated may lead to more positive reactions to this product than strong congruency or incongruence (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989; Meyers-Levy, Louie and Curren, 1994; Sheinin and Schmitt, 1994), and the effect is accentuated by repeated exposure to the moderately incongruent extension (Lane, 2000). We note that hypotheses and, therefore, results in research based on the theory of congruency may seem contradictory.

Whereas information processing theories tend to indicate that congruency is two-dimensional, there is not, at present, a reliable scale of measurement for congruency in the case of celebrity endorsements that meets these specifications. A suitable scale has, however recently been developed in the field of sponsoring (Fleck-Dousteysier and al., 2004).

PROPOSAL AND EVALUATION OF A TWO-DIMENSIONAL CONGRUENCY MEASUREMENT SCALE

Definition of the construct

We retained the two-dimensional structure of congruency, as defined by Heckler and Childers (1992). Current congruency measurements do not meet this criterion as they are based on a single-dimensional approach or consist of a simple manipulation check by an item (Fleck-Dousteysier and al., 2005).

In the context of celebrity endorsement of a brand in an advertisement, we consider that:

- a brand/celebrity pair is relevant if it is meaningful and contributes to clear communication of a message about the brand
- the pair is expected if it corresponds to a predefined expectation about the brand.

Generating items

We adopted the scale developed by Fleck-Dousteysier and al. in 2005, adapting it to our case (this scale was initially developed to analyse brand/sponsored entity pairs). This scale is based on work by Speed and Thompson (2000) and Heckler and Childers (1992). We also created a 3-item scale for measuring predisposition towards an advertisement featuring a given celebrity. This scale is used to assess to what extent an advertisement presenting a celebrity and the brand endorsed was favourably received by the respondents. This tool provides a more rigorous confirmation of the discriminant validity of the other scales (table 1).

Test of the scales

These scales were tested on 290 business students, including 55% women. We chose to focus on a single brand (for optimum internal validity) and selected four celebrities who seemed quite varied in terms of congruency (to maximise external validity, table 2). We prepared four versions of the questionnaire, on the basis of the association between Citroën and each of the four celebrities, each presenting two potential endorsers in turn. A short, factual presentation of the celebrities preceded the questions. Once they had read the text and answered the first 12 questions, respondents read the text

presenting the second celebrity then answered the next 12 questions. We then checked that the profile of the answers to the first 12 questions was similar to that of the next 12, so that we could aggregate the results.

The questionnaires were accessible via the Internet. Respondents who visited the site set up for this purpose were allocated one of the four versions of the questionnaire at random.

Once we had eliminated any incomplete questionnaires, we had a total of 530 answers (265 persons answered all the questions on two celebrities).

Following the recommendations of Gerbing and Hamilton (1996), we subjected the answers to a PCA with Varimax rotation. The results were very satisfactory: the first four axes accounted for over 87% of the variance, with each item saturating strongly on its own dimension and very little on the others (all the loadings were above 0.81 on their respective axes and below 0.3 on the others).

Two Structural Equation Model (SEM) analyses were carried out: first, a Confirmatory Factorial Analysis (CFA) that provided a more rigorous assessment of the psychometric properties of our four scales, then a second analysis to test any links between the dimensions of the congruency scales, as they were established conceptually and emerged through PCA (figure 1). The concept of predisposition towards an advertisement featuring an endorsing celebrity was not included in the second model, as we assumed a non-linear correlation between predisposition and congruency, which is impossible to specify in an SEM, as it only accepts linear correlations between constructs.

CFA was then carried out and the estimation procedure used was that of maximum likelihood. CFA was used to evaluate the reliability and validity of the four scales, as well as estimate their inter-correlations. It was then possible to quantify the relative impact of the two dimensions of congruency on this concept.

The CFA results were entirely satisfactory: the fit indices were good (particularly the SRMR value of 0.026, as well as CFI and TLI above 0.98) and high internal parameters (e.g., all the λ were significant, with values between 0.81 and 0.95).

Once the items had been finalised in this way, we could then analyse the reliability and validity of our scales.

Construct validity, which consists of convergent and discriminant validity was assessed. We checked the Jöreskog's ρ , the SMC and the ρ VC (AVE). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of ρ VC of each construct must be higher than its correlation with the other constructs (Hulland, 1999). We also tested predictive validity. All results were very satisfactory.

A structural model was built to test for links between the dimensions of congruency established conceptually (figure 1). The model had a good fit with the data (table 3). SMC (i.e., explained variance) corresponding to congruency was 0.57, which is correct: the two dimensions identified explained over half the variation in congruency. These results are also similar to those of Fleck-Dousteyssier and al. (2004).

We may thus conclude that the psychometric properties of the scales are entirely satisfactory.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research makes contributions on both a theoretical and methodological level.

This article proposes the integration of information processing theories, congruency, and celebrity endorsement practices. We based our research on work on sponsoring, itself based on research in the fields of advertising, brand extensions, and co-branding. We highlighted the role of congruency, which is, in our opinion, based on a two-dimensional structure, consisting of "relevancy" and "expectancy". This link was empirically confirmed.

The relevancy of the brand/celebrity pair indicates that, during intensive processing, an individual exposed to the message will find this pair meaningful. In the advertising field, Grunert (1996) showed

that individuals initially processed a message via an automatic, generally subconscious process, during which they determined its relevancy. The type of processing applied next depended on relevancy, as did a possible change to a strategic process which enabled them to make inferences concerning the brand. Furthermore, relevancy should increase an individual's ability to give meaning to a pair and analyse the message without too much difficulty. Individuals can then elaborate on that basis, creating new brand associations or strengthening existing ones, which build up the brand's image (Keller, 1993). Furthermore, we assume that unexpected or surprising brand/celebrity pairs stimulate an individual's attention and curiosity, making them want to process the message more intensively. Expectancy thus has a negative impact on an individual's motivation to process the message. The fact that the message is processed less intensively means that it has less impact on an individual's perceived image of the brand. In the area of brand extensions, Boush and Loken (1991) also demonstrated an inverted U-shaped relationship between the typicality of a brand extension and the process used to assess it: moderately typical extensions were assessed less globally, i.e. more intensively, than highly typical or atypical extensions. Similarly, Meyers-Levy and al. (1994) emphasised that, in case of incongruence, processing was more intensive, leading to the generation of a greater number of thoughts, more thoughts on the content of the message, and a smaller proportion of thoughts not directly related to the message.

We therefore hypothesise that there is a curvilinear relationship between brand/celebrity congruency and brand image: advertising featuring a celebrity will have more impact on brand image if there is a moderate incongruence between the brand and the celebrity, i.e. the pair is relevant but unexpected, than when congruency is also high (both relevant and expected) or low (non-relevant and unexpected). Having said that, it may be assumed that in cases of strong congruency (expected and relevant), even if cognitive processing is limited, the individual's attitude towards the advertising will be strongly positive, making it possible to enhance attitude towards the brand in the future (Lee and Labro, 2004). However, this approach has its limitations. The *relevancy* dimension, in particular, raises questions as its impact on congruency is limited (standardised coefficient: 0.27). Furthermore, it was found to be only weakly discriminant, as indicated by the fact that the difference in relevancy between S. Loeb and A. Karembou was only 0.8 on a 7-point scale. This may be due to an excessively "restrictive" formulation of the items. The questions focused mainly on finding out information about the brand, following the celebrity endorsement. Perhaps it is necessary to integrate a simpler concept, asking whether the endorsement seems "meaningful" to the respondent. In other words, perhaps we should consider that relevancy is not just providing information, but also an overall assessment of a given celebrity's added value for a brand as compared to any other celebrity and/or endorser.

It would also be interesting to carry out a similar study involving larger numbers of brands and celebrities, to raise the external validity. For example, we did not have the means to monitor the effect of physical attractiveness (note, however, that there was little or no difference between the men's and women's answers). One possibility would be to replicate our study using fictitious celebrities, as described by Till and colleagues (Till and Shrimp, 1998; Till and Busler, 1998), which would neutralise certain variables such as fame, familiarity, or physical attractiveness, likely to cause bias in the results.

The measurement scale proposed here was among the first contributions to research on congruency and offers new insight into other research that has attempted to explain the impact of celebrities in advertising.

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	Scale devised by Fleck-Dousteyssier and al. (2004)	Scale used in this study
Expectancy		
Att1	<brand> could be expected to sponsor <event>	<celebrity> could be expected to appear in advertising for <brand>
Att2	I am not surprised that <brand> sponsors <event>	I am not surprised that <celebrity> appears in advertising for <brand>
Att3	It was foreseeable that <brand> would sponsor <event>	It was foreseeable that <celebrity> would appear in advertising for <brand>
Relevancy		
Pert1	The fact that <brand> sponsors <event> shows me something new about <brand>	The fact that <celebrity> appears in advertising for <brand> shows me something new about <brand>
Pert2	This sponsoring operation helps me to understand more about <brand>	<celebrity> helps me to understand more about <brand>
Pert3	Through this sponsoring operation, I discover a new facet of <brand>	This association between <celebrity> and <brand> shows me a new facet of <brand>
Congruency		
Cong1	<event> and <brand> are a good match	<brand> and <celebrity> are a good match
Cong2	<brand> is totally appropriate for <event>	<celebrity> is totally appropriate for <brand>
Cong3	I feel <brand> is an appropriate sponsor for <event>	I feel <celebrity> is a good spokesperson for <brand>
Predisposition towards advertisements featuring endorsing celebrities		
Pub1	I like the idea of <celebrity> appearing in an ad for <brand>	
Pub2	I am pleased to see <celebrity> in an ad for <brand>	
Pub3	<celebrity> in an ad for <brand> is something I appreciate	

Table 1.- Adaptation of the items used by Fleck-Dousteyssier and al. (2004) to celebrity endorsements in advertising.

N.B.: The last four items were not adapted from Fleck-Dousteyssier and al. (2004) but devised specially for this study.

	Relevant pair	Non-relevant pair
Expected pair	Sébastien Loeb/ Citroën Reason: races for Citroën, world champion	Adriana Karembeu/ Citroën Reason: previous Citroën campaign with Claudia Schiffer, has already appeared in ads for the brand in other countries
Unexpected pair	Dominique Chapatte/ Citroën Reason: car expert	Jean-Pierre Foucault/ Citroën

Table 2.- Examples selected as a basis for the questionnaire measuring congruency

Chi-Square	Degrees of freedom ; p	GFI	RMSEA	RMSEA: 90% confidence interval	SRMR	TLI	CFI
4.036	24 ; .21%	.98	.040	(.015 ;.060)	.025	.993	.996

Table 3. – Test of a two-dimensional model of congruence

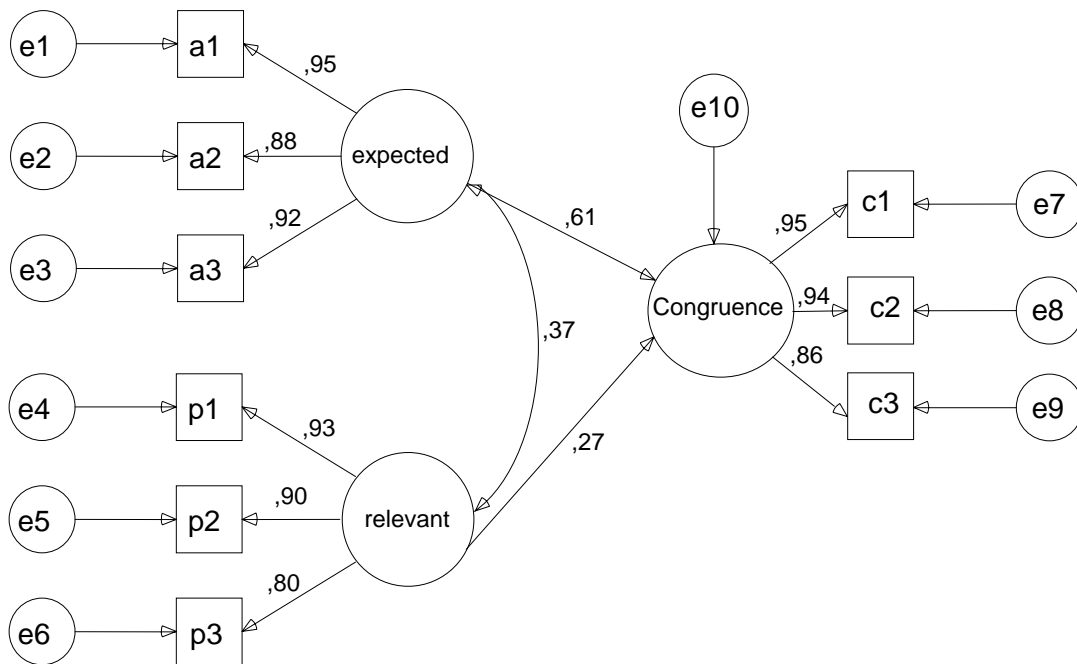


Figure 1. – The structural equation model of congruence