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## **“The Power of Celebrity as a Medium of Coercing Behaviour - A Marks and Spencer’s Case Study”**

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### **Abstract**

The power of celebrity as a medium of coercing behaviour is arguable more prevalent now than in any time in history (Church-Gibson, 2012), assisted with the enhancement of marketing channels a situation in which celebrity endorsement has become one of the most prominent forms of marketing communications for fashion retailers to embrace (Erdogan, 1999).

Retail brands are willing to spend considerable amounts of their marketing budget in order to secure an endorsement from individual celebrities who are easily recognised by consumers to possess key traits such as that of attractiveness, likeability and trustworthiness, which customers aspire to. The instance of seventy-five percent of retailers advocating that products endorsed by celebrities perform better than non-endorsed products (Mintel, 2009) and the likes of Friedman and Friedman (1979) revealing that celebrity endorsements are more effective than other types of endorsers, due to celebrities being seen as aspirational to the consumer (McCracken, 2005). This has resulted in a situation in which the cost of celebrity endorsements can be in excess of tens of millions of pounds (Greene, 2012).

The excessive amounts of money a celebrity can demand does not however guarantee the success of a brand, in the instance of reviewing the activities of Marks and Spencer’s, a traditional British high street retailer, one can argue that power of celebrities to enhance brand equity and generate sales is questionable. As sometimes, the reality of endorsement does not necessarily transpose into an increase in profitability.

The assessment of celebrity endorsement theory in conjunction with the activities of Marks and Spencer’s has been reviewed in an attempt to clarify if the power of celebrity is indeed as beneficial to retail as is perhaps assumed. This paper will to explore if it is too simplistic to assume that there will be a direct correlation between the successes of a celebrity to the success of a brand ( $OB(x) = \uparrow \pounds$ ). Hence, this equation will be examined in relation to the celebrity endorsement activities of Marks and Spencer’s over the previous decade in an attempt to ascertain the true coercive nature of celebrity endorsement.

The results of the investigation reveal that the effective harnessing of the power of the celebrities ability to entice consumers requires careful consideration. Strategies merely predicated on simply relying on the celebrity status that fail to consider a series perquisites advocated in the theory, reveal that they have limited coercive power on consumer behaviour. Akin to early theorist’s on the very nature of *power* discussed by the likes of Vilfredo and indeed Mosca, power within in any context requires effective enablement and careful strategic thought if it seeks to be effective in order to coerce behaviour (Haralambos and Holborn, 1991).

## 1.0 Introduction

The origin of celebrity endorsement in marketing communications is not a recent phenomenon (Kaikati, 1987). In the nineteenth century Charles Worth, whom some would advocate as the 'Father of Haute Couture', understood the importance of linking celebrities to brands, using Princess Von Metternich, an influential fashion figure and high society lady to promote his fashion house. This use of celebrity contributed hugely to his success, making 'La Madison Worth' the most influential couture house at the time (Okonkwo, 2007).

Subsequently, celebrity endorsement historically appeared within the confines of marketing strategies of luxury apparel retailing within the fashion industry, and is now arguably an innate part of every aspect of fashion and marketing communications. The use of celebrities as tool through which to influence consumers is increasingly becoming more inherent within the fashion apparel marketing arena amidst all levels of the retail sectors, indeed it could be advocated that the use of celebrity endorsement is more prominent now than ever before, and it is indeed impossible to ignore the level of engagement with the phenomenon both nationally and globally (Church-Gibson, 2012).

The increasing instance of celebrity endorsement on an international scale within fashion apparel retailing could be attributed to endorsement having the power to provide a substantial positive impact on the financial returns of companies (Erdogan, 2001), thus one could rationalise why the instrumental use of celebrity endorsement is and is likely to perhaps continue to increase.

The likes of Sherman (1985), uncovered via his study on advertising specialist that celebrities are being sought out to endorse products as never before and that academics have argued that as well as enhanced profitability 'celebrity endorsement of a product is a potent mechanism for generating both brand equity and celebrity equity' (Seno and Lukas 2007:130).

A series of academic thought further considers that celebrities are preferential as they have the power to make advertisements more believable and enhance message recall (Freidman & Freidman, 1979). Celebrities are attributed to beneficial in advertising as they serve to be a powerfulness means through which customers are able to recall brand names, create a positive attitude towards the brand and create a distinct personality for the endorsed brand (McCracken, 1989). Hence, celebrity endorsements are likely to generate a greater opportunity of customers' choosing the endorsed brand, thus enabling the customer to establish the reasons for retailers using celebrities within marketing and promotions.

A celebrity is someone who is recognised by consumers due to having a prominent profile and commands a large degree of public fascination and influence within the media (Turner, 2010). However, the growth of celebrity culture has spawned a growth in the ways in which celebrity is now defined. The likes of Pringle (2004) describes a true celebrity as a person who has a clearly defined personality and is known for a particular skill. While all definitions vary, advocates for the use of celebrity endorsements to improve the effectiveness of marketing communications (advertising), argue that using a true celebrity can enhance the brand and product image, therefore increasing sales and awareness (Tantisenepong, 2012). For the purpose of this paper on the power of celebrity endorsement as tool through which merchandise is advertised to the consumer, a celebrity is defined as an individual or indeed a character who is well known by the majority of the population because of their achievements and surrounding publicity (Tellis, 1998).

A 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' (McCracken, 2005. p97). The literature reveals that celebrity endorsers are traditionally from the entertainment or sport arena, however well-known business personalities, politicians, reporters, designers, actors and models could also serve as effective endorsers (Tellis, 1998). The likes of Spry *et al* (2011) revealed that embracing celebrity endorsement as opposed to 'the professional expert', 'the company manager', or 'the typical consumer', influences advertising less effectively. Thus, celebrity endorsement is beneficial to retailers, as it has been advocated as aiding consumers within areas such as brand recognition, brand recall, purchase intentions and even to coerce purchase behaviour.

The way in which an endorsement is manifest could be in the form of the celebrity being promoted as an expert, as a spokesperson associated with a product in a long-term capacity, or as an aspirational figure with no particular knowledge of, or relationship with, the product (Seno & Lucas, 2007).

The likes of Tellis (1998) describes an expert as an individual who has the power to enable the general population to perceive that she/he has considerable knowledge in a certain area. Retailers may choose to embrace this form of endorsement as they feel an expert will support and indeed corroborate the meanings and messages of their product and advertisement. The embracement of expert endorsements is notably used within the sports retail sector to coerce consumers, for example the 2007 Adidas 'Nothing Is Impossible' campaign, starring high profile athlete David Beckham. The campaign provides the endorser (Adidas) association with Beckham as a top-class footballer, but also displayed an insight into his personality off the pitch, which enabled the viewers to connect emotionally to the celebrity.

The extra meanings and associations with the David Beckham's personality that Adidas wanted to establish, suggests that retailers sought to communicate a specific message via the use of an expert celebrity endorser in an attempt to engage the target market.

The role that will conveyed by celebrity endorsement can be manifest in four main endorsement forms as; explicit/overt 'I endorse this product', implicit: 'I use this product', imperative: 'you should use this product', or co-present (covertly) which is merely appearing with the product. The explicit mode of celebrity endorsement is incumbent on the celebrity's authority and emanates from the knowledge, skills, personality or perhaps the experience being promoted to attract customers. This is considered the most powerful means of communication to consumers, however it is also the most expensive, as celebrities who generate substantial public interest have the power to charge more for the endorsement. The use of the celebrity as a means of advertising is considered to generally provide high financial returns and hence justifies the use.

The celebrity endorsement strategy of 'overt endorsing' occurs when the celebrity is paid to wear the brand, that they enter a contractual agreement to represent an actual retailer, which traditionally prevents the celebrity from advertising for its direct competitors. However, the effectiveness of the promotion is all relative to the appropriateness of the celebrity associated to the product.

The appropriateness of brand and celebrity has been advocated by the likes of Friedman and Friedman (1979) who have advocated that 'match-up' is an important factor affecting consumers attitudes towards purchase intentions, demonstrating that celebrities are not effective for every product category (Kahle and Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990; McCracken, 1989). The likes of McCracken et al (2005) also implied there was a need for greater understanding in relation to type of celebrities required to appropriate advertise a products. Research instigated by Kamins (1990) uncovered that a high *match-up* could improve the celebrity's power to enable consumers to recall the brand associated with them (Misra and Beatty, 1990).

The way in which celebrity endorsement strategy could operate is to adopt the co-present mode in light of their status and appeal is so strong that their association with a brand is enough to promote the brand. An example of this method is when an A-list celebrity is photographed carrying a specific item of retail apparel – advancement in modern technology reveals that not only is that an image immediately available throughout the world (Ryan, 2003; Sallot et al., 2004; Porter and Sallot, 2005), but it can also be featured in an appropriate magazines targeted at specific demographic target. This method of covert celebrity advertising serves to be the most cost effective method embraced by many retailers in order to reduce promotional activity costs, thus identifying why this method is particularly powerful within the retailing industry. The likes of Manning-Shaffel (2006) highlights that when a celebrities are featured with a product, it offers the viewer or consumer an immediate shortcut to a retailers branding message, thus serving to be a powerful visual medium that generates a desired mass-market appeal. Lea-Greenwood (2013) stipulates that the public are more responsive and indeed tend to prefer covert endorsement compared to overt endorsement. The power of covert endorsement is so coercive to consumers that it has resulted in situation in which a brand's products have actually sold out online within a matter of minutes (Young, 2011, Online).

However, the importance of harnessing the celebrity's power as an advertising medium must be considered in a rational and thoroughly evaluated manner or its embracement could be essentially meaningless.

The three most prevalent frameworks which should arguably be considered in the development of any marketing communication strategy using celebrity endorsement is that of the source credibility model, the source attractiveness model and the meaning transfer model.

### **The Source Credibility Model**

The *Source Credibility Model* (SCM) is derived from social-psychology research by the likes of Hovland in the former part of nineteen fifties, this model is underpinned on the power the message receiver perceives from the source as possessing *expertise* in respect of a certain area. The perceived expertise results in the perception that the source can be trusted to provide an objective opinion on the subject which in respect of celebrity endorsement, which will be the product and or brand advertised. Hovland and his associates popularized the term “source credibility” and used it to describe a communicator’s positive traits, which affect the consumer/receiver’s acceptance of a message.

The more positive a consumer’s perception of expertise and trustworthiness, the more the celebrity endorser is seen as a credible source of product information and by virtue a credible representation (Seno and Lukas, 2007; Johnson and Kaye, 2004). The greater the credibility of the celebrity, the greater the power of the celebrity to entice a consumers to purchase. This is advocated as being the means through which the probability of the consumer to believe the message (Wu and Wang, 2011), thus persuading the consumer and influencing their attitudes in respect of the advert of a certain product and indeed or brand. The Hovland model contends that if the source (*celebrity*) exhibits expertness and trustworthiness, there will be a high degree of credibility, which in turn affects how effective the advertisement will be on the consumer. (Bower and Landreth, 2001; Basil, 1996; Debono and Telesca, 1990; Kahle and Homer, 1985; Kamins and Gupta, 1994).

This credibility thesis identifies a dichotomy, whilst a consumer may trust a source for their expertise and knowledge, they will not necessarily be attracted to the endorsed product. Thus, one can question the power that the celebrity influence has on the consumer’s attitude towards the brand indeed the purchase intention. It is important to recognise that even if the source is highly credible, it is not necessarily financial successful.

The likes of Ohanian (1990), Basil (1996) argued that a series of items were required to create a reliable measurement of credibility, proposing the tri-component ‘source credibility scale’. This theorem is based on the cognitive recognition in relation to the product and celebrity and a number of researchers have expanded on the dimensions encompassing the source-credibility construct, despite a series of differences in what they perceive the essence of credibility to be (DeSarbo and Harshman, 1985; Simpson and Kahler, 1980-81; Wilding and Bauer, 1968; Wynn, 1987).

The result of many of the empirical investigations revealed that celebrity endorsement advertising strategies are not always thought to be credible and effective due to an inappropriateness of celebrity to the target audience and the product. (Atkin and Block, 1984; Freiden, 1984, Wynn, 1987).

### **Source Attractiveness Model**

The Source Attractiveness Model (S.A.M) akin to the credibility construct is underpinned by social-psychology and indicates that the power of a message conveyed by the celebrity depends on a series of factors, which include source familiarity, likeability, similarity, and physical attractiveness of the celebrity endorser (McGuire, 1985; Ohanian, 1990, Richins, 1991, Mishkind, Striegel-Moore, Silberstein and Rodin, 1986). The foundation of this endorsement model is built upon the process of identification, which subsequently leads to persuading the consumer to purchase. Source attractiveness models envisage that the consumer aspires to emulate the source of attraction and therefore seeks to adopt a similar position in terms of beliefs, attitudes, preferences or behaviour.

A series of academics have who have investigated physical attractiveness and have found that physically attractive celebrities have a positive effect on the products and brands with which they are associated with (Seno and Lukas, 2007: Kahle and Homer, 1985: Kamins, 1990).

Suggesting the more attractive the celebrity, the more powerful the endorsed product's brand image will become, as a direct result of the celebrity advertisement. Although negative publicity in some instances can in actuality result in dissociation of the celebrity with a specific brand.

The use of celebrity endorsement models amidst various tiers of retail in which the academics have sought to address the power of celebrity in marketing communication via the measurement of perceived credibility, attractiveness, expertise, etc (Bower and Landreth, 2001; Basil, 1996; Debono and Telesca, 1990; Kahle and Homer, 1985; Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Ohanian, 1990; Till and Shimp, 1998). Academic thought has acknowledged that whilst although models explain endorsements strategies most fundamental features, it reveals that the power of such marketing communication approaches must also recognise the actual endorsers role as a medium for the message.

The Meaning Transfer Model (MTM) advocated McCracken (1989) suggests that endorsement effectiveness is better explained by the "meanings" consumers associate with the celebrity endorser and subsequently transfer to the brand.

The (MTM) suggests that the power of an endorser depends on the meanings and associations already inherent within that specific celebrity. Thus, individual traits associated with the celebrity (e.g. sports ability, attractiveness compassion etc. are all entwined define the meaning of the celebrity. Those inherent traits are accompanied with the celebrity within the endorsement process from other aspects of their celebrity/career. This theorem suggests that the celebrity endorser obtains some beneficial advantages through the associations from outside the endorsement and then transfers these associations to the endorsed product by virtue of the consistent co-occurrence of the endorser and the brand (Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010; Flynn and Foster, 2009). In its essence the meaning-transfer theorem suggest that the celebrity has the power to act as conduit between the organisation and its customers as the qualities of a celebrity transfer from the celebrity to the product and then to the desired consumer (McCracken, 2005; Keller, 1993; Petty 1983).

### Meaning Movement and the Endorsement Process

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Meanings → Celebrity	Celebrity → Product	Product → Consumer

(McCracken, 2005:106)

The framework presented by McCracken (1989) implies several instrumental factors facilitate this transfer. The meanings which are transferred from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods through advertising, and the movement of meanings from consumer goods to the individual consumer is fulfilled by the efforts of the consumer.

The process is predicated on what the retailer decides is the messages and principles that the advert should entail such as that of lifestyle, status or age etc, and these element should be consistent with the perception and the personal traits that the celebrity is perceived to possesses. The retailer has to be particularly careful when portraying these elements, as the chosen endorser has the power to emit several elements of meanings simultaneously and these must be consistent with the product and the brand.

The elements of the message to be delivered by the celebrity and product must also be presented in such a way that the similarity between them is attractive and indeed clear to the consumer. This precise combination of elements to be conveyed in the marketing communication via the celebrity for the transfer of meaning from the product to the consumer should not be imprecise or unsophisticated as this could inevitably result in the process is being ineffective. (Martin, 1996; Langmeyer and Walker, 1991)

The simple analysis of the three basic models of celebrity endorsement provides one with the foundation through which the assessment of Marks and Spencer's celebrity endorsement strategies can be scrutinised.

Marks and Spencer was set up in 1884, and is a UK high street retailer and has in excess of seven hundred stores across the UK and some three hundred stores internationally (Marksandspencer:Online,2014). The middle market retailer seeks to provide apparel that is stylish, high quality and of great value and has embraced the power celebrity endorsement since 2001 in an attempt to communicate this message to its consumer.

The timeline reveals the development of their marketing strategy through the embracement of a series celebrity endorsements. The initial use first use of celebrity endorsement by Marks and Spencer's was in November 2001 for its initial television advertisement. The celebrity endorsers chosen were all UK celebrities and included the likes of Zoe Ball, George Best, Hugh Laurie, Julian Clary, Honor Blackman, Sir Steve Redgrave and Matthew Pinsent whom all represented the different age ranges of apparel available akin to the rational celebrity endorsement theorem advocated by the likes of Tellis (2004) (Edrogon, 1999). In the next year a series of other celebrities were introduced in to the advertising campaign which again included UK celebrities including Footballer David Beckham, actor Sean Bean, Ronnie Corbet as well as international celebrity actress icon Joan Collins. The use of Joan Colin's could arguably be the first emergence in which traditional thought in relation to celebrity endorsement constructs was challenged. In 2007 Myleen Class who was used for two years was asked to take a pay cut in 2009 due to the continual financial decline of Marks and Spencer. Advertising strategy then departed to include the likes of Patricia Fields to design a range to entice more consumers in to stores underpinned by the success of the American series of Sex in the City. This collection which was fronted by sixties top model (Twiggy) but still failed to curb Marks and Spencer's financial losses. The use of Patricia Fields confirms that Marks and Spencer was aiming to reposition the brand by reaching the more fashion focused consumer. However, the fact that they decided to use Twiggy repeatedly in the campaigns relates by virtue of the fact that she fits the brand and the majority of its consumers was inappropriate and illustrates again how the meaning of the celebrity and the product were juxtaposed, as it exhibited an older model for a much younger target audience.

Nevertheless, Marks and Spencer attempt to consolidate its position and pursue a much younger market continued with the embracing the likes of Brazilian model Ana Beatriz Barros to endorse the products. This still continued with in 2011 with Marks and Spencer signing Rosie Huntington-Whitely an actress and famous supermodel with the face of international luxury apparel retailer Hugo Boss's Ryan Reynolds who is also a Hollywood actor in the campaign for the in house Autograph range. The most latest celebrity recruited to advertise Marks and Spencer has included the face of Italian fashion house Dole and Gabanna's David Gandy.

The overview of this timeline reveals that it is evident that there is a juxtaposition between the celebrity, the product and the actual consumer that Marks and Spencer's. the status of a mid-market retailer using aspirational celebrities conflicts with its traditional ethos and is not compatible with the aspirational celebrity endorsers it uses to underpin its advertising. The attractiveness, meaning and credibility constructs which underpin celebrity endorsement have completely been abandoned and the instance of the product's/clothing not being aspirational and indeed being embraced by the celebrities advertising them implies that such dichotomy is inevitable to lead to failure.

This fundamental miscommunication is the essence of the failure as the clarity of the message as highlighted by McCracken (1989) is arguably not clear to consumers, hence cognitive recognition of the customer in line with the celebrity in the marketing strategy and product they sell are not necessarily recognisable which are the key tenants upon which the success of celebrity marketing is underpinned (Hovland cited in Halonen-Knight, and Hurmerinta 2010).

Thus and exhaustive/prolonged lack of appropriateness pertaining to the choice celebrity endorsement in Marks and Spencer's advertising completely refutes any academic or in deed business rationale (DeSarbo and Harshman, 1985; Simpson and Kahler, 1980-81; Wilding and Bauer, 1968; Wynn, 1987). It appears that Marks and Spencer's marketing communication strategies is merely predicated on using existing attractive premium apparel celebrities, famous actors and models (Ryan Reynolds, Antonio Banderas and David Gandy) all reveal that simple reliance on the credibility of the celebrity as the crux of the marketing strategy with an inconsistent brand can be attributed to be cause of the consistence reduction in the effectiveness of the marketing strategy.

The action of Marks and Spencer's reliance on such a celebrity endorsement approach which appears to be built upon a framework of attractiveness and through virtue of credibility from association appears to be an adhoc and arguably an extremely naive and indeed simplistic premise of marketing communication for an middle tier retailer. Thus, such a fundamental flaw should be addressed as failure to align themselves correctly with the celebrities they employ in advertising would subsequently lead to a continued level of disparity between the product, customers and the celebrity selected. Hence, it may be preferential focus attention on the meanings contained within the celebrity (traits) and how they affect the endorsement process (McCracken, 1989). Failure, to address the *meaning's* in relation to Marks and Spencer's and continual reliance on *attractiveness* in the absence of *credibility* as they continue to use of celebrities who endorse multiple and or more premium products/brands needs to be re-evaluated as consumers can question the credibility of both the celebrity and the brand which could potentially lead to instances of the celebrity becoming recognised but the associations with Marks and Spencer in fact being lost. Hence, it may be appropriate for brands such as Marks and Spencer's to exploit credible celebrities for small specific brands but on a highly politicised level. It may be pertinent to perhaps use less high profile celebrities and more lay endorsers for the rest of their ranges as these anonymous personalities could serve to provide Marks and Spencer with the association with the target audience they desire with lower cost with the advantage of reduced risk of brand adulteration.

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