

Celebrity endorsements not always a good bet, study shows

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(Phys.org) -- Companies paying celebrities big money to endorse their products may not realize that negative perceptions about a celebrity are more likely to transfer to an endorsed brand than are positive ones, according to a new University of Colorado Boulder study.

Celebrity endorsements are widely used to increase brand visibility and connect brands with celebrities' personality traits, but do not always work in the positive manner marketers envision, according to Margaret C. Campbell of CU-Boulder's Leeds School of Business, who led the study.

"In three different studies, negative celebrity associations always transferred to an endorsed brand, even under conditions when positive associations did not," said Campbell, an associate professor of marketing. "The overall message to marketers is be careful, because all of us, celebrities or not, have positives and negatives to our personalities and those negatives can easily transfer to a brand."

Campbell and Caleb Warren of the Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi in Milan, Italy, reported their findings in the current issue of the journal *Social Influence*.

In one study, participants were asked to read several celebrity news stories, including one short piece about pop singer and reality TV star Jessica Simpson and a brand she was endorsing. An earlier test had revealed that consumers had both positive (sexy and fun) and negative

(ditsy and weak) associations with the star. When participants were later asked to evaluate a variety of products, including the brand Simpson endorsed, the researchers found participants were likely to think of the brand as both ditsy and weak and sexy and fun.

“However, when the endorsed product wasn’t a good match with the celebrity, in this case Jessica Simpson endorsing a pocketknife, the celebrity’s positive associations of sexy and fun did not transfer to the brand, while her negative associations did,” Warren said.

The fact that an endorsed brand is likely to take on the same negative traits as the celebrity means that marketers need to consider all facets of any potential endorser, according to Campbell.

“Marketers often focus on the traits that they want without also considering whether the celebrity has traits that they do not want to be associated with their brands,” she said.

They also must give careful thought as to whether to continue with a celebrity endorser when the endorser does something that causes him or her to accumulate strong, negative traits in consumers’ eyes.

“The global company Accenture, for example, chose to sever endorsement ties with Tiger Woods shortly after his extramarital affairs came to light,” Campbell said. “This new research indicates this helped lower the risk of gaining associations with disloyalty and lack of commitment rather than high performance.”

With celebrities often in the news for negative reasons, one might ask why companies continue to use them as endorsers.

“Oftentimes, too often, brand managers measure attention and celebrity and forget to measure the overall attitude and personality traits that are

garnered by the [brand](#),” Campbell said. “So I think part of it is the lack of considering all of the positives and negatives that can occur with a [celebrity](#).”

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

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