

Connecting with Celebrities:

Celebrity Endorsement, Brand Meaning, and Self-Brand Connections

Jennifer Edson Escalas

James R. Bettman*

*Jennifer Edson Escalas is an Associate Professor of Management at the Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, 37203, (615) 322-3493, fax (615) 343-7177, e-mail: jennifer.escalas@owen.vanderbilt.edu. James R. Bettman is the Burlington Industries Professor at the Fuqua School of Business, Duke University, Durham NC 27708-0120, (919) 660-7851, fax (919) 681-6245, e-mail: jrb12@mail.duke.edu.

ABSTRACT

We propose that consumers appropriate brand symbolism that comes from celebrity endorsement to construct and communicate their self-concepts. Study 1 finds that celebrity endorsement enhances self-brand connections when consumers aspire to be like the celebrity, but harms them when consumers do not; this effect is more pronounced when the brand image is congruent with the celebrity's image. This effect is further moderated by the degree to which a brand communicates something about the user, with more symbolic brands having stronger effects than less symbolic brands. Study 2 finds that the effect of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections is augmented when consumers' self-esteem is threatened. Consumers self-enhance by building connections to favorable celebrity images or distancing themselves from unfavorable celebrity images.

About 20% of U.S. ads feature celebrities (Solomon 2009), and the percent of ads using celebrities in other countries, such as Japan, is thought to be even higher. Traditional explanations of celebrity endorsement persuasion effects are based on the source effects literature and find that 1) celebrity endorsement increases the attention paid to an ad (Buttle, Raymond, and Danziger 2000); 2) celebrities are generally attractive, which helps persuasion when consumers are worried about social acceptance and others' opinions (DeBono and Harnish 1988) or when the product is attractiveness-related (Kahle and Homer 1985, Kamins 1990); 3) celebrities may be credible sources if they have expertise in a particular area, such as an athlete endorsing shoes (Ratneshwar and Chiaken 1991) or a beautiful model endorsing make-up (Baker and Churchill 1983); and 4) celebrities are often well-liked, possibly leading to identification and consumer persuasion in an attempt to seek some type of relationship with the celebrity (Belch and Belch 2007). In traditional dual process models (e.g. ELM; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983), celebrities are most often considered a peripheral cue: they are important in persuasion only when consumers are not involved in the product category or in processing the ad. However, celebrities may provide central information when an aspect of the celebrity matches the product (as with beauty products and attractiveness; Kahle and Homer 1985). Also, as affective peripheral cues, celebrity endorsements may lead media weight to have an impact on sales in mature categories (MacInnis, Rao, and Weiss 2002).

However, our approach differs from more traditional explanations of celebrity endorsement effects on persuasion, focusing on the cultural meanings associated with celebrities. Our framework is based on the idea that people engage in consumption behavior in part to construct their self-concepts and to create their personal identities (Richins 1994; McCracken 1989; Belk 1988). We examine celebrity endorsement based upon McCracken's (1989)

perspective: as consumers construct their self-concept by using brands, they appropriate the symbolic meanings of brands derived, in part, from celebrity endorsement. According to McCracken's (1986) theory of meaning movement, symbolic properties of the celebrity first become associated with the brands the celebrity endorses. Next, these symbolic meanings are transferred from the celebrity to consumers as they select brands with meanings congruent with their self-concept. When the symbolic properties associated with brands via celebrities are used to construct the self or to communicate the self-concept to others, a self-brand connection is formed. We provide the first empirical test of this latter implication of McCracken's view.

After developing our conceptual model in more detail, we present two studies that provide empirical support for the notion that brand endorsement by celebrities with an image that consumers aspire to obtain enhances consumers' self-brand connections, whereas brands endorsed by celebrities that consumers do not aspire to be like detracts from such connections. These effects are augmented when there is a match between the celebrity's image and the brand's image. These effects also are moderated by the degree to which the brands are symbolic, that is, communicate something about the user. Finally, we show that these effects are augmented when consumers feel an increased need for self-enhancement, in response to a threat to self-esteem.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Celebrity Endorsement, Meaning Transfer, and Self-Brand Connections

Possessions can be used to satisfy psychological needs, such as actively creating one's self-concept, reinforcing and expressing self-identity, and allowing one to differentiate oneself and assert one's individuality (e.g., Ball and Tasaki 1992; Belk 1988; Kleine, Kleine, and Allen

1995). Possessions can also serve a social purpose by reflecting social ties to one's family, community, and/or cultural groups, including brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Consumer researchers have extended some of these possession findings to brands (Aaker 1997; Escalas and Bettman 2005, 2003; Fournier 1998). For example, recent research indicates that consumers construct their self-identity and present themselves to others through their brand choices based on the congruency between brand-user associations and self-image associations (Escalas and Bettman 2005, 2003).

Brands can be symbols whose meaning is used to create and define a consumer's self-concept (Levy 1959). McCracken's (1986) model of meaning transfer asserts that such meaning originates in the culturally constituted world, moving into goods via the fashion system, word of mouth, reference groups, subcultural groups, celebrities, and the media. For example, meanings can "get into" a brand through advertising because ads reference the general cultural symbols needed to provide meaning. Next, meaning moves from goods to consumers, as consumers construct themselves through their brand choices based on congruency between brand image and self-image. Thus, the meaning and value of a brand is not just its ability to express the self, but also its role in helping consumers create and build their self-identities (McCracken 1989).

We provide the first empirical demonstration of McCracken's (1989) ideas by demonstrating that brands endorsed by celebrities are a source of symbolic brand meaning. Consumers connect the symbolism associated with the celebrity and the brands they endorse, transferring these meanings from the brand to themselves as they actively construct themselves by selecting brands with meanings relevant to an aspect of their self-concept. Consumers form connections to brands that become meaningful through this process, and self-brand connections

measure the extent to which individuals have incorporated such brands into their self-concept (Escalas 2004).

We propose that symbolic brand associations can be more meaningful the more closely they are linked to the self. We conceptualize and operationalize this linkage at the aggregate level of self-brand connections. We focus on self-brand connections, rather than specific brand associations or brand attitudes, because we believe that brand meaning is most often dependent upon the entire constellation, or gestalt, of the set of brand associations. Thus, we believe that self-brand connections capture an important part of consumers' construction of self.

Additionally, the set of associations consumers have about a brand is an important component of brand equity (Keller 1993), and we believe that forming a self-brand connection is a psychological manifestation of such equity at the consumer level. For example, consumers who have used brand associations to construct their self-identities may be more more brand loyal and less likely to switch to competitors' brands in response to price cuts, special displays, bundling tactics, and coupons. Therefore, the notion that consumers form a link to a brand as they use the brand's symbolic associations for self-construction is important to marketing managers. When consumers' self-concepts are linked to a brand, then the company behind the brand may be able to gain an enduring competitive advantage, because this type of connection is difficult for competitors to imitate.

Aspirational Celebrities and Celebrity-Brand Image Match

A critical distinction in terms of self construction processes is that between brand associations derived from celebrities with whom consumers identify or feel an affinity and associations derived from celebrities that consumers do not like or do not perceive as being

similar to themselves. Consumers are likely to accept meanings from brands associated or consistent with a celebrity whom they perceive as similar to themselves or whom they aspire to be like and to reject meanings associated or consistent with a celebrity who does not represent either who they are or who they would like to become.

We propose that when consumers appropriate or distance themselves from brand associations based on celebrity endorsement, they do so in a manner that is consistent with self-related needs, such as self-enhancement (Escalas and Bettman 2003). For example, a consumer may consider himself to be athletic and hip, like David Beckham, who currently endorses many brands, including Adidas and Police sunglasses. Due to his aspiration to be more like Beckham (i.e., to appropriate Beckham's "meanings" for use in constructing himself), the consumer may choose to play soccer in Adidas gear and wear Police sunglasses when not on the field. As a result, he may form a self-brand connection to these brands endorsed by Beckham, which helps construct his self-concept around the images of being athletic and hip and communicates that self-image to others.

On the other hand, consumers may avoid associations derived from celebrities with images they do not aspire to obtain. When such a celebrity endorses a brand, consumers may form associations about the brand that they would not like to have transferred to themselves. Nevertheless, the brand becomes meaningful through the process of avoiding the celebrity symbolism in constructing one's possible self. For example, if a consumer rejects the associations of Paris Hilton and she endorses Carl's Jr., that consumer may specifically choose not to eat at Carl's Jr. in an attempt to reject (distance from) the symbolism associated with Paris Hilton. Thus, the specific symbolism associated with a celebrity will have an impact on the effectiveness of the celebrity's endorsement. Consumers will be motivated to appropriate the

symbolic associations of celebrities they aspire to be like, but reject the symbolic associations of celebrities they do not aspire to be like (which we call non-aspirational celebrities). In a sense, this could be thought of as a “match” between the celebrity’s symbolic associations and the consumer’s self-identity.

McCracken’s (1989) view also suggests that a symbolic “match” should exist between the celebrity image and the brand image in order for the celebrity endorsement to be effective. A generic, well-liked celebrity endorsement will not have the same “punch” as a celebrity endorsement where the image of the celebrity matches the image of the brand. For example, if David Beckham were to endorse Sears, or Paris Hilton to endorse Saturn, the symbolic mismatch would dampen the endorsement’s favorable or unfavorable effect. Even if a consumer aspires to be like David Beckham or rejects Paris Hilton, the effect of a mismatched celebrity-brand endorsement will be less powerful than a matched celebrity-brand endorsement. Thus, brand image match will moderate the effect of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections, as outlined in hypothesis 1:

H1: Celebrity endorsement will be moderated by the extent to which there is a match between the celebrity’s image and the brand’s image. Specifically, an aspirational celebrity will have a stronger positive effect on self-brand connections when the celebrity image matches the brand image, while a non-aspirational celebrity endorsement will have a stronger negative effect on self-brand connections when the celebrity image matches the brand image, compared to when there is a mismatch between the celebrity’s image and the brand’s image.

Note that by non-aspirational we mean celebrity symbolism that is actively rejected by the consumer, not simply associations that are meaningless or unimportant.

Brand Symbolism

Our basic premise is that consumers appropriate the meaning of brands as they construct their self-identities, in the present case by using the brand meaning that arises from celebrity endorsement. Some brands are better able than others to communicate something about the person using them. For example, prior consumer research proposes that publicly consumed (vs. privately consumed) and luxury (vs. necessity) products are better able to convey symbolic meaning about an individual (Bearden and Etzel 1982). Additionally, a brand that is very popular and used by many different types of people (e.g., a Honda Accord) may not communicate specific associations about the person who uses it. Therefore, we expect the basic effect postulated in hypothesis 1 to be moderated by the degree to which a brand is perceived to be symbolic, that is, able to communicate something about the individual using the brand (Escalas and Bettman 2005). Consumers will be more likely to form self-brand connections to symbolic brands with appropriate associations as they construct their self-identities than with brands that do not communicate much about the self-identity of the user. Conversely, consumers will be more likely to reject forming a self-brand connection with symbolic brands with inappropriate associations than with non-symbolic brands. Thus, we hypothesize a three-way interaction between celebrity aspiration level, celebrity-brand image match, and brand symbolism:

H2: The effect of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections will be moderated by the degree to which a brand is perceived to be symbolic, that is, able to

communicate something about the user's self-identity, with more symbolic brands having a more pronounced effect compared to less symbolic brands.

Thus, the strongest positive effects on self-brand connections will be for aspirational endorsements with a strong match for symbolic brands. The strongest negative effects on self-brand connections will be for non-aspirational endorsements with a strong match for symbolic brands.

Self-Enhancement Motives

The addition of self-motives can provide insight into the self-construction processes used by consumers. In our framework, celebrity-based brand associations can help consumers achieve goals that are motivated by the self when celebrity-based brand associations are linked or connected to the self. Thus, we propose that associations are appropriated from celebrity endorsement by individuals who construct their self-concepts in a manner consistent with their predominant or currently activated self-motivations. Thus, our theory implies that our hypothesized endorsement effects will be stronger when self needs relevant to constructing one's self-identity are high.

In this paper, we focus on one self-motivation that is particularly relevant to the use of brands to construct and communicate one's self concept: self-enhancement. People are often motivated to create a favorable self-identity and are heavily influenced by the need to maintain and enhance self-esteem (Crocker and Park 2004, Tesser 2000, Greenwald, Bellezza, and Banaji 1988). People are motivated to create a good impression to gain social approval and for the intrinsic satisfaction of projecting a positive self-image, even to oneself (Schlenker 1980). Self-

enhancement is particularly desired after a threat to the self (Leary et al. 1995, Tesser and Cornell 1991, Steele 1988). Heine, Proulx and Vohs (2006) assert that maintenance of self-esteem helps individuals make their lives meaningful.

Consumers with strong self-enhancement goals tend to form self-brand connections to brands used by aspiration groups, that is, groups for which the consumer wishes to become a member (Escalas and Bettman 2003). We believe a similar process is at work with celebrity endorsement. A consumer may appropriate symbolic brand meaning derived from a celebrity who has characteristics that the consumer aspires to possess. Therefore, the activation of self-enhancement goals by a threat to the self should increase the extent to which celebrity endorsement influences self-brand connections. We expect that consumers who have active self-enhancement motives will be more likely to form self-brand connections to brands that are endorsed by a celebrity that they aspire to be like. On the other hand, self-enhancers will be more likely to reject brand associations created by a celebrity endorsement where the celebrity associations are rejected (i.e., a non-aspirational celebrity), compared to consumers who do not have active self-enhancement goals.

H3: The effect of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections will be moderated by the extent to which consumers have active self-enhancement goals, with active self-enhancement goals having a more pronounced effect compared to less active goals.

STUDY 1

In this study, we examine the influence of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections and measure the degree to which the celebrity image matches the brand image and the extent to which the brand communicates something about its user in order to test hypotheses 1 and 2.

Method

Participants. The experiment was administered via a Web-based facility for fielding online research. A total of 578 respondents from an online panel responded to a randomized invitation to participate, ultimately yielding a usable sample of 321 participants after 257 subjects were eliminated for non-consent, deficits in the English language, failure to complete the study, and random responding (examples of random responding include “I can’t think of one” or “don’t know” in response to a question to fill in the name of a celebrity or brand). Up to three e-mail notifications over a one week period were used to secure cooperation, and the chance to win one of six drawings for a \$100 prize served as an incentive. Respondents were directed to a login screen where they were provided with a consent form. Those participants who consented to participate in the study proceeded through the procedure described next.

Procedure. A Web-based program allowed us to customize the study based on participants' responses. The program began with a short study introduction, after which participants entered a favorite celebrity that endorsed a product (“Please type in the name of your most favorite celebrity who endorses a product:”). Next they typed in the one of the products endorsed by that celebrity (“Which is the one product that he/she endorses that you most associate with him/her?”). This was followed by similar questions about their least favorite

celebrity and a corresponding product for him/her. After a short, unrelated filler task designed to reduce potential demand effects, participants rated the degree to which they had self-brand connections with the brand that corresponded to their most and their least favorite celebrity (with order randomized across participants; order had no effect in any of the models tested and therefore was not included in any of the results discussed below). This was followed by questions about whether the brand was symbolic, the extent to which the brand and the celebrity had similar images, and a number of celebrity covariates (see below). The program ended with a debriefing statement. The entire procedure took approximately one half-hour.

Independent Variables. Participants answered questions probing both their most and least favorite celebrities and the products they endorsed. Additionally, participants rated the extent to which each celebrity image and brand image matched on three items (0 to 100): “To what extent does the image of this celebrity match the image of this product?” “Does it make sense for this celebrity to use this product?” and “This product and this celebrity fit together” ($\alpha = .90$). Participants also rated the extent to which each of the two brands they had entered was symbolic, on two items (0 to 100): “To what extent does Brand X communicate something specific about the person who uses it?” and “How much does Brand X symbolize what kind of person uses it?” ($\alpha = .87$).

Dependent Variable. Self-brand connections were measured using seven items (Escalas 2004; see Table 1), averaged to form one self-brand connection score per participant per brand ($\alpha = .96$).

Manipulation Checks. The extent to which participants felt themselves to be similar to the celebrity was measured using a two-item scale (0 to 100): “I am a lot like this celebrity” and “This celebrity and I have a lot in common” ($\alpha = .88$). Two other items measured the extent to

which participants aspired to become more like the celebrity (0 to 100): “I would like to be more like this celebrity someday” and “I wish I were more like this celebrity” ($\alpha = .92$).

Results

The model used in the analyses to predict self-brand connections is a within-subjects GLM model, with factors the type of celebrity (manipulated: aspirational vs. non-aspirational), celebrity-brand image match (measured: continuous), and brand symbolism (measured: run as both continuous and with a median split, see below).

Manipulation Checks. Participants rated themselves to be more similar to their favorite celebrity and to aspire to become more like their favorite celebrity compared to their least favorite celebrity (favorite similar = 36.85, least favorite similar = 12.11; favorite aspire = 48.92, least favorite aspire = 13.34; $F_s(1, 641) \geq 179.90, p < .001$). Celebrity-brand image match also had a significant effect on both similar and aspire, with matches being higher.

Hypothesis 1. In the model for SBC, we find a significant main effect for celebrity-brand image match and a marginally significant main effect of celebrity type. These effects are qualified by the significant two way interaction of celebrity type and celebrity-brand image match ($F(1, 641) = 7.43, p < .01$).¹ Figure 1 graphically presents these results, using dichotomous variables for graphical purposes. In support of hypothesis 1, the effect of celebrity endorsement is augmented when there is a celebrity-brand image match, enhancing SBC when the favorite celebrity endorses the brand (match = 49.44, no match = 38.67; $F(1, 641) = 6.81, p < .01$), compared to when the celebrity image does not match the brand image. Although in the

¹ This interaction is significant whether we treat celebrity-brand match as a continuous variable or create a dichotomous variable with a median split ($F(1, 641) = 6.81, p < .01$).

predicted direction, the effect does not reach significance in the least favorite celebrity condition (match = 24.23, no match = 30.00; $F(1, 641) = 2.06, p = .15$).²

Insert figure 1 about here

Hypothesis 2. The effect reported above is moderated by the degree to which the brand is symbolic, i.e., able to communicate something about the user, with more symbolic brands having stronger effects than less symbolic brands (Escalas and Bettman 2005). We find a significant three way interaction, with steeper slopes for symbolic brands ($F(1, 641) = 4.82, p < .05$).³ These results are as shown in figure 2 (dichotomized for graphical presentation). The positive effect of aspirational celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections is stronger for brands that are perceived to communicate something symbolic about the brand's user compared to brands that do not ($F(1, 641) = 8.21, p < .01$, compared to no significant effect in the low symbolic condition, $F(1, 641) < 1.0, ns$). However, the directional effect for non-aspirational celebrity endorsement does not reach significance for either high symbolic brands or low symbolic brands (high symbolic, $F(1, 641) = 1.17, ns$; low symbolic, $F(1, 641) < 1.0, ns$). Thus, support for H2 is only found for aspirational celebrity endorsements.

² The contrast comparing favorite (49.44) to least favorite (24.23) in the high match condition is also significant ($F(1,641) = 24.40, p < .001$).

³ This three-way interaction is significant whether we treat brand symbolism as a continuous variable or create a dichotomous variable with a median split ($F(1, 641) = 4.76, p < .05$).

Insert figure 2 about here

Discussion of Results from Study 1

As hypothesized, we find that consumers report stronger self-brand connections for brands endorsed by a favorite celebrity compared to brands endorsed by their least favorite celebrity, and this effect is moderated by celebrity-brand image match, particularly in the case of the positive effect of an endorsement by one's favorite celebrity (hypothesis 1). These effects are further moderated by the degree to which the brand is symbolic, that is, able to communicate something about the person who uses it, with the positive effect of aspirational celebrity endorsements having a significantly larger impact on SBC when the brand is symbolic, compared to when it is not (hypothesis 2). This study thus provides initial empirical evidence that consumers use brand associations that are the result of aspirational celebrity endorsement to communicate their self-concept, particularly in the case of symbolic brands.

STUDY 2

Our second study examines whether self-enhancement needs moderate the influence of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections by manipulating self-enhancement goals (hypothesis 3). People engage in self-enhancement in response to a threat to the self as they attempt to repair their self-esteem (Steele 1988). Therefore, in study 2, we threaten self-esteem for half our participants in order to activate self-enhancement goals. We do not revisit hypotheses 1 and 2 in this study due to our experimental design, where we use a fictitious brand

(hence, there is no pre-existing brand image to potentially match to the real world celebrities used in the study) in a highly symbolic category, watches.

Method

Participants. The experiment was administered via a Web-based facility for fielding online research. A total of 555 respondents from an online panel responded to a randomized invitation to participate, ultimately yielding a usable sample of 311 participants after subjects were eliminated for failure to complete the study ($N = 118$) and for being non-US citizens ($N = 126$; these participants were not presented with some of our measures, which required being a US citizen, see below). Up to three e-mail notifications over a one week period were used to secure cooperation, and the chance to win one of six drawings for a \$100 prize served as an incentive. Respondents were directed to a login screen where they were provided with a consent form, after which they proceeded through the procedure described next.

Procedure. A Web-based program allowed us to customize the study based on participants' responses. The program began with a short study introduction, after which participants were asked to complete a battery of individual difference scales, including US national identity (see below). Next, participants were asked to sort seven celebrities ("Please rank the following celebrities according to how much you like them, from most favorite to most despised:"). Women sorted the following seven female celebrities: Oprah Winfrey, Madonna, Angelina Jolie, Celine Dion, Nicole Kidman, Jessica Simpson, and Paris Hilton, while men sorted the following seven male celebrities: Tiger Woods, Brad Pitt, Johnny Depp, Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks, Rush Limbaugh, and Howard Stern. Next, participants completed a series of questions relating to a different experiment.

Participants then read an article entitled “War in Iraq Badly Damages US Image Internationally” from the Voice of America website (the source was not revealed to the participants until the debriefing statement; see Appendix 1). The intention of this article was to threaten the self and hence manipulate self-enhancement needs. We believed that participants who had a strong United States national identity (USNI) would be more threatened by the article than those low in USNI and thus would have self-enhancement goals activated (Steele 1988). After reading the article, participants were shown an ad for a fictitious watch brand, Montrex. This ad featured either their second favorite celebrity or second least favorite celebrity, using the data from the sorting task conducted earlier in the study. (A sample ad can be found in Appendix 2.) Participants then rated the degree to which they had self-brand connections with the Montrex watch, followed by manipulation checks on self-esteem and a number of celebrity related variables (see below). The program ended with a debriefing statement. The entire procedure took approximately a half-hour.

Independent and Dependent Variables. Participants were randomly assigned to the second most or second least favorite celebrity conditions. For our manipulation of self-esteem, we expected that the article that shed negative light on America would affect people high in national identity with the United States to a greater extent than those low in USNI. Therefore we measured USNI, using the four item scale developed by Huddy and Khatib (2007): “How important is being American to you?” “To what extent do you see yourself as a typical American?” “How well does the term American describe you?” and “When talking about Americans, how often do you say ‘we’ instead of ‘they’?” ($\alpha = .83$). Our primary dependent variable, self-brand connections, was measured using the same seven item scale used in study 1 ($\alpha = .98$).

Manipulation Checks. The extent to which participants felt themselves to be similar to the celebrity was measured with the same two item scale from study 1 ($\alpha = .78$), as was the extent to which participants aspired to become more like the celebrity ($\alpha = .91$). In order to test our manipulation designed to threaten self-esteem, we use McFarland and Ross's (1982) twelve item self-esteem scale (e.g., "How do you feel about yourself right now?" followed by "good/bad," "competent/incompetent," "proud/shameful," etc.; $\alpha = .84$).⁴

Results

The model used in the analyses to predict self-brand connections was a between-subjects GLM model, with factors type of celebrity (manipulated: second favorite vs. second least favorite) and threat to self-esteem (US national identity measured: run as both continuous and with a median-split, see below). Each model included a dummy variable for the actual celebrity shown in the ad.

Manipulation Checks. Participants high in US national identity were more threatened by the anti-America article than those low in US national identity (high USNI self-esteem = 69.96, low USNI self-esteem = 78.26, $F(1, 310) = 13.14, p < .001$), with no other significant effects in the model. Participants rated themselves to be more similar to their second favorite celebrity and to aspire to become more like their second favorite celebrity compared to their second least favorite celebrity (second favorite similar = 31.19, second least favorite similar = 16.00; second favorite aspire = 41.76, second least favorite aspire = 18.67; $F_s(1, 310) \geq 14.38, p < .001$). In

⁴ We also measured celebrity-brand image match using the same two items as in study 1 ($\alpha = .76$), but found no effect of the celebrity shown in the ad on the extent to which the celebrity-brand image matched, as expected for a fictitious watch brand.

these latter two models, the dummy variable for the celebrity shown in the ad was also significant.

Hypothesis 3. The only main effect in our model of SBC was that of the celebrity dummy variable. We find a significant interaction of celebrity type by USNI in our model of SBC ($F(1, 310) = 4.62, p < .05$).⁵ Figure 3 graphically presents these results, using dichotomous variables for graphical purposes. In support of hypothesis 3, we find a significant difference for those participants who are high in USNI (second favorite celebrity = 26.68, second least favorite celebrity = 13.51; $F(1, 310) = 6.30, p = .01$), but not for those who are low in USNI (second favorite celebrity = 23.16, second least favorite celebrity = 17.97, $F(1, 310) < 1.0, ns$).

Insert figure 3 about here

Discussion of Results from Study 2

Study 2 provides insight into the self-construction processes used by consumers by adding self-enhancement goals to the conceptual framework. We find that people motivated to enhance their self-esteem form connections to brands that are endorsed by celebrities that they are similar to and aspire to be like. They also reject brands that are endorsed by celebrities with symbolic images that do not match their desired self-image. This finding can be compared to participants who do not have activated self-enhancement goals: these participants do not form self-brand connections to an unknown brand based solely on a celebrity endorsement. Thus, we provide some support for the idea that celebrity symbolism is appropriated by individuals who

⁵ This interaction is marginally significant when we use the dichotomous USNI high/low variable based on a median split ($F(1, 310) = 3.09, p = .08$).

wish to construct their self-concepts in a manner consistent with their active self-motivations, in this case, repairing threatened self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we argue that consumers appropriate brand meanings from celebrity endorsement to construct their self-concepts. In making this claim, we integrate literature from the sociological/anthropological tradition in marketing and social psychology. Our studies show that consumers report higher self-brand connections for brands with images that are consistent with the image of a celebrity that they aspire to be like, particularly in the case when the image of the celebrity and the brand match. Thus, celebrity endorsements can be an effective marketing strategy when the celebrity image, brand image, and consumer aspirations are taken into consideration. Our findings differ from those found by Hagtvedt and Patrick (2008), where luxury associations for Scarlett Johansson did not spillover onto the bathroom fittings being advertised. We would argue that there might not be an image match between Scarlett Johansson and bathroom fittings. Furthermore, it is impossible to know the extent to which the participants aspired to be more like Scarlett Johansson. To assess the effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement, all three elements of the model must be taken into consideration (celebrity image, brand image, and consumer aspirations).

Our studies also examine how self-brand connections are formed. We find that our celebrity endorsement effects are moderated by brand symbolism, such that brands that communicate something about the user yield stronger effects than brands that do not. In the case of aspirational celebrities, the positive effect of image congruency is stronger for those brands that are perceived to communicate something symbolic about the brand's user compared to those

brands that do not. Finally, we find that for consumers with active self-enhancement goals, the effect of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections is stronger, in both the positive aspirational celebrity condition and the negative non-aspirational celebrity condition, compared to consumers who do not have active self-enhancement goals. This finding is an important demonstration that consumers are motivated by their self-needs to utilize brand associations derived from celebrity endorsement in a contingent fashion to construct and present their self-identities. In future research, it would be interesting to explore other self-related goals (e.g., need for accurate self-perception, optimal distinctiveness, etc.) to see their impact on how consumers appropriate celebrity-based brand meaning to create and communicate their self-concepts.

One limitation of research is that our findings for non-aspirational celebrities in study 1 are not significant. While it could be argued that marketers are savvy enough to use aspirational celebrity endorsers, there are some managerially relevant scenarios where understanding the effects of non-aspirational celebrity endorsers is important. First, some celebrity endorsers engage in negative activities after they have publicly endorsed a product, for example, Michael Vick and Nike. Second, when a company simultaneously targets more than one segment, there could be negative spillover from a celebrity endorsement aimed at one segment onto the other segment. For example, a make-up company may target both young and old women, and the aspirational celebrity chosen for younger women may be non-aspirational for the older women. Future research could explore the boundary conditions for the effects of non-aspirational celebrity endorsement. For example, how different from the consumer must the celebrity be to lead to a rejection of the brand associations derived from said celebrity's endorsement? Could endorsement by a celebrity whose behavior is considered disgusting lead to symbolic contagion for the brand (Morales and Fitzsimons 2007)?

While this paper empirically tests McCracken's predictions about celebrity endorsement, there is yet another rapidly expanding area in marketing where McCracken's theory of meaning movement may be applied: product placement in movies and television shows. The E-score, which explores the personality and traits associated with the roles actors play (Solomon 2009), is a first step towards studying how product placement can create symbolic associations for brands, which in turn can be appropriated by consumers and lead to self-brand connections. In addition to the symbolic associations of the characters in the movie or television show, there are other narrative elements involved in movies and television. Narrative research has shown that people are very good at establishing the relationship between story elements and extrapolating meaning (Carr 1986, Polkinghorne 1991). Thus, product placement may provide a brand with a series of linkages to certain types of characters, settings, and usage scenarios that create meaning for brands. If some of the connections built through the narrative relate directly to the consumer him/herself, then the brand's meaning may be especially compelling. Future research could examine the effect of structural narrative elements such as temporal unfolding and goal-oriented action sequences, in addition to character symbolism, on brand associations and subsequent self-brand connections.

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TABLE 1
SELF-BRAND CONNECTION SCALE ITEMS

1. This brand reflects who I am
2. I can identify with this brand
3. I feel a personal connection to this brand
4. I use this brand to communicate who I am to other people
5. I think this brand help me become the type of person I want to be
6. I consider this brand to be “me” (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others)
7. This brand suits me well

Note. Anchored by strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (100).

FIGURE 1

STUDY 1: EFFECT OF CELEBRITY TYPE AND IMAGE MATCH

ON SELF-BRAND CONNECTIONS

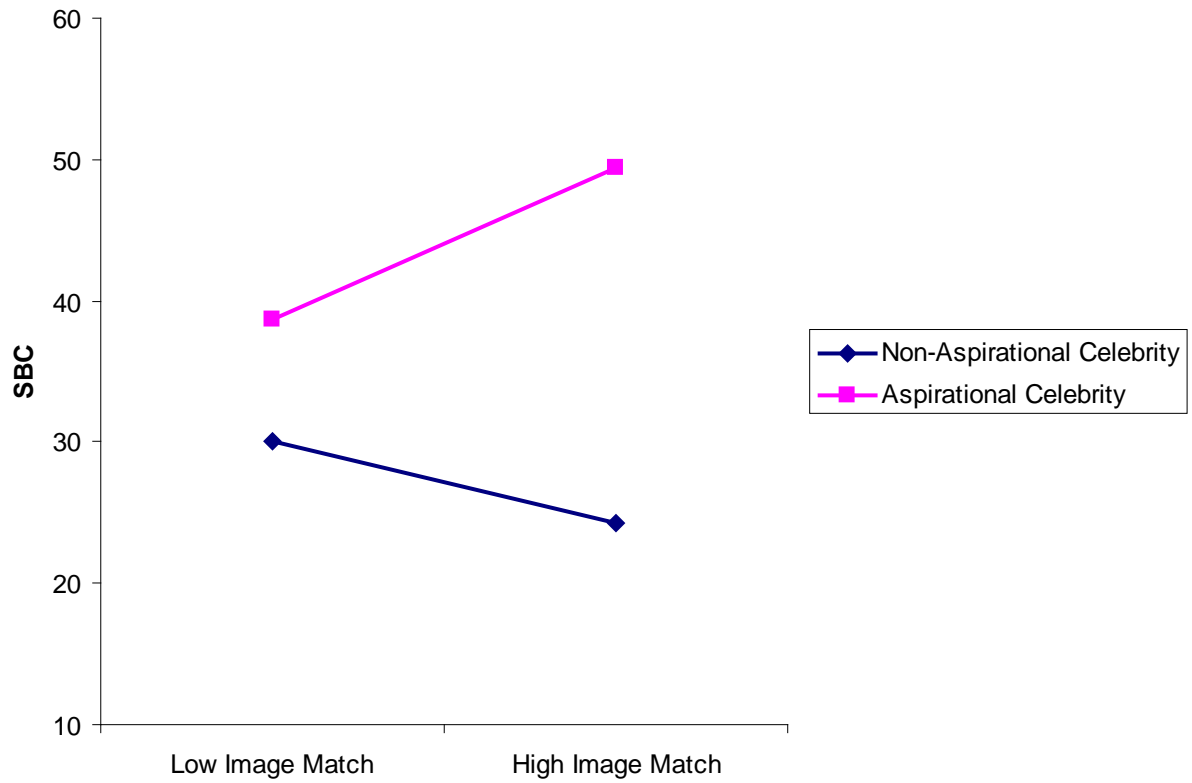


FIGURE 2
STUDY 1: EFFECT OF CELEBRITY TYPE
ON SELF-BRAND CONNECTIONS MODERATED BY BRAND SYMBOLISM

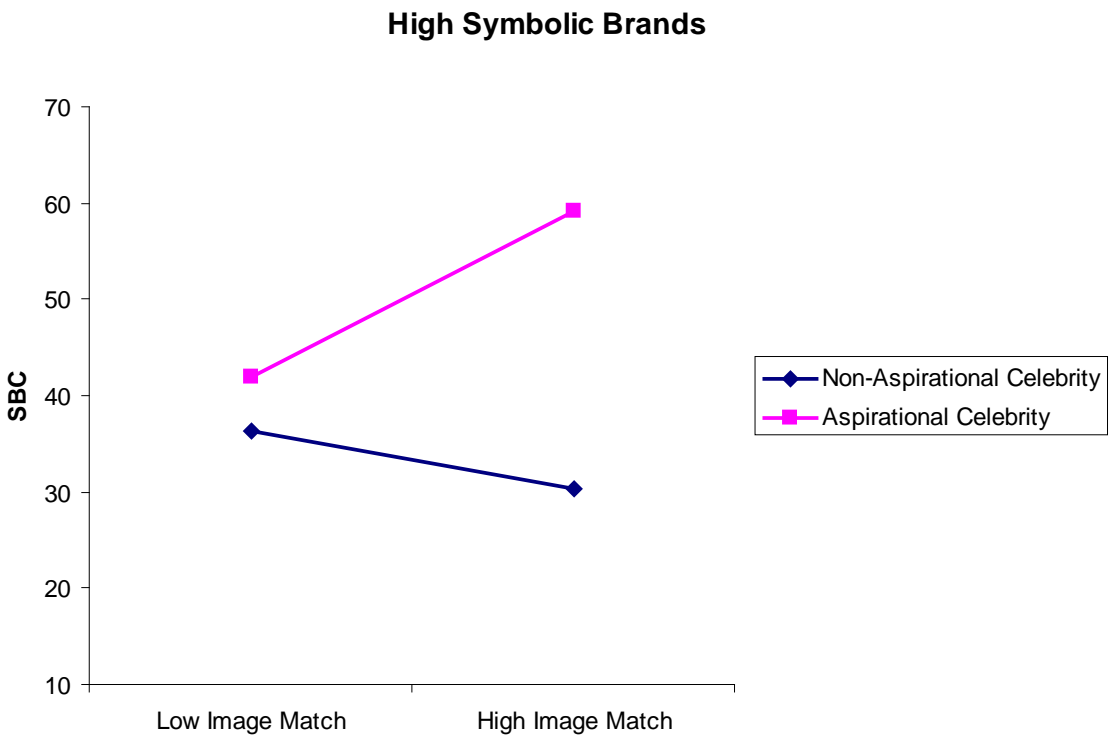
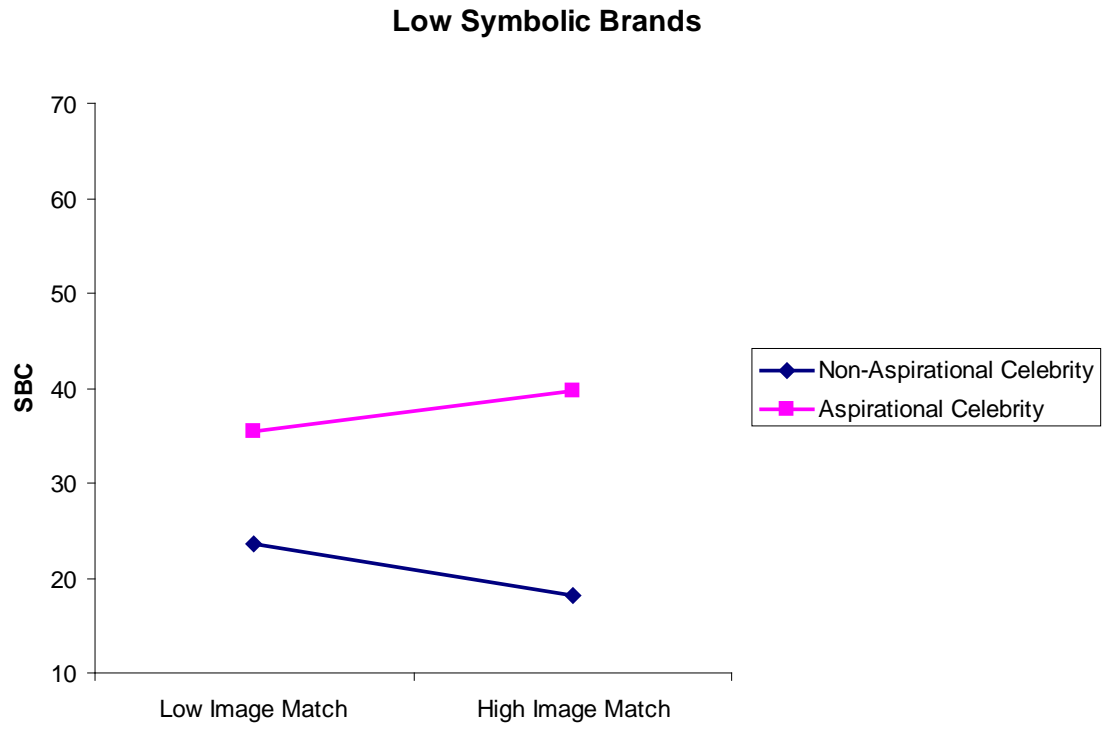
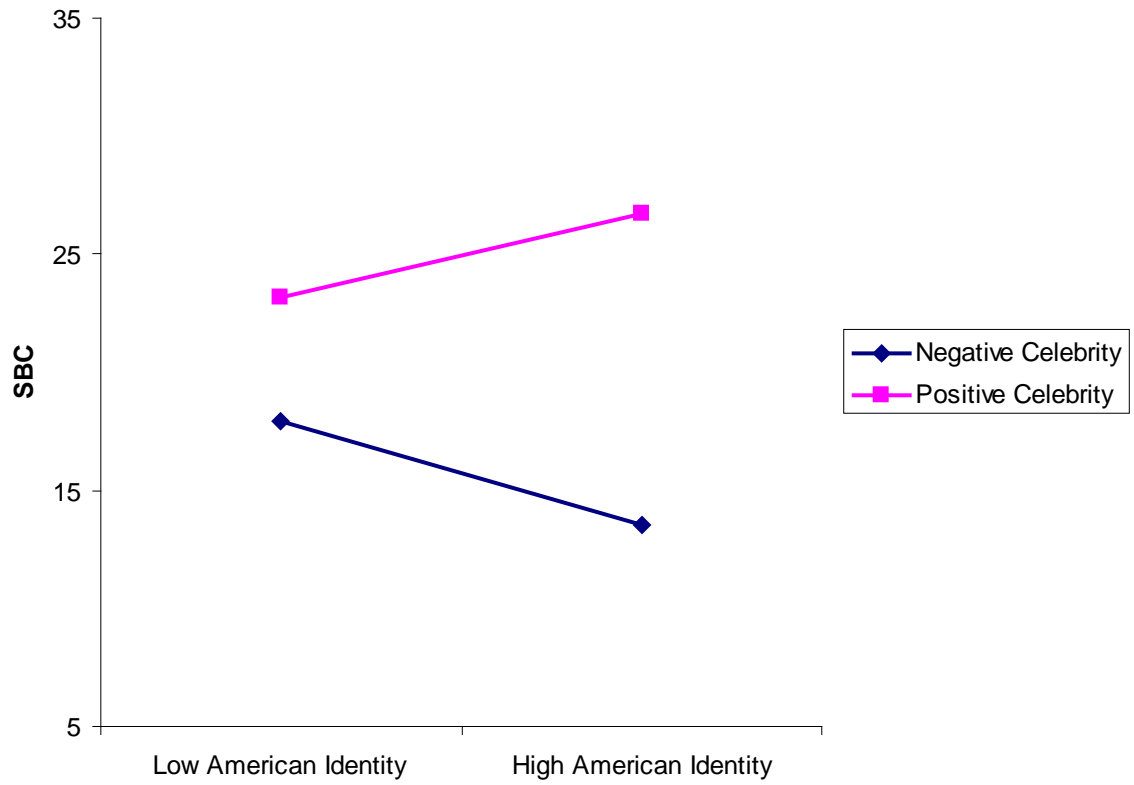


FIGURE 3

**STUDY 2: EFFECT OF CELEBRITY TYPE AND SELF-ENHANCEMENT GOALS
ON SELF-BRAND CONNECTIONS**



APPENDIX 1

ARTICLE USED IN STUDY 2

War in Iraq Badly Damages US Image Internationally

By Michael Bowman
Washington
17 March 2008

The image of the United States has suffered as a result of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein. Opinion surveys show international approval of the United States at all-time lows. Michael Bowman reports from Washington, America's continued involvement in Iraq remains a major irritant in global perceptions of the United States.



Anti-war protesters march demanding an end to the war in Iraq, the return of US troops and the impeachment of US President George W. Bush in Washington, DC

Since 2003, demonstrations against the United States have become commonplace, and not just in countries historically opposed to U.S. policies. Major protests against the U.S.-led war in Iraq have been mounted in dozens of countries allied with Washington, including Canada, Britain, Germany, and Japan.

America's image has perhaps suffered the most in the Arab world, according to Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa.

"The situation is going from bad to worse when it comes to the image of the U.S. The feelings, the friendly feelings that prevailed for so many years in the Arab world vis-à-vis America and vice-versa -- but the recent developments in fact have derailed those relations and those feelings," Moussa said.

Tens of thousands of Iraqi deaths, the documented abuse of Iraqi prisoners, and the emergence of a Shi'ite-dominated government alongside Shi'ite-led Iran have made Arab allies uneasy about U.S. policies in the region. By all accounts, America's image as a champion of the rule of law and human rights has suffered as a result.

But the damage extends well beyond the Middle East. Mamadi Kaba is a human rights activist in Guinea.

"The reputation of the United States of America has been affected by the war in Iraq, [and especially] because of Abu Ghraib [prison abuses]," Kaba said.

Even in countries that sent troops to Iraq, the war is unpopular. A London resident had this to say:

"Each time America marches in somewhere [militarily], it highlights the fact that it tends to act as global policemen," he said.

The Washington-based Pew Research Center monitors global perceptions of the United States through surveys conducted in dozens of countries. Pew President Andrew Kohut summed up the Iraq war's impact.

"It has been one of the, if not the principle reasons behind the worldwide rise in anti-Americanism since 2001," Kohut said.



Anti-war protesters in Los Angeles, 14 Mar 2008

President Bush is often the target of anti-American demonstrations. But the United States as a whole has not been spared from global public opinion. Mark Glancy is an expert on Anglo-American relations at Queen Mary, University of London.

"I think it is entirely culturally acceptable now in Britain to be anti-American. And that is a legacy of the war [in Iraq]," Glancy said.

Some, like Cairo taxi driver Saad Awad says all is not lost, that the United States can rehabilitate its image.

He says, to do so, the United States must end the occupation of Iraq and let Iraqis depend on themselves. He says everything taking place in Iraq is because of the U.S. occupation. .

President Bush has stated he will bring American forces home as quickly as the situation in Iraq allows. Andrew Kohut says, if Iraq is stabilized, lasting democracy takes root, and most U.S. combat forces withdraw, he expects global anger over the U.S. involvement in Iraq to subside.

"Certainly if Iraq becomes a success story, that might change a number of minds. But the larger issue of the way we play the game, and our power, will remain," Kohut said.

Presidential candidates of both major U.S. political parties have said that repairing America's image abroad will be a top priority upon taking office.

APPENDIX 2

SAMPLE MONTREX WATCH AD FROM STUDY 2



Oprah Winfrey for Montrex



www.montrex.com

