Brand trait transference: When celebrity endorsers acquire brand personality traits

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Abstract

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Using celebrity endorsers can be an effective way to influence brand perceptions and elevate the brand. However, although there is a significant amount of research investigating how endorsers influence brand perceptions, there is little research showing whether traits associated with the brand influence perceptions of the endorser. This article addresses this under-researched area and provides evidence for brand trait transference. Brand trait transference occurs when a trait transfers from a brand to people associated with that brand. Three studies demonstrate brand trait transference and identify a boundary condition for this novel effect. The article discusses the implications of these findings for effective marketing communications as well as the theoretical implications for the growing research on branding, association transfer, and endorsers.

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1. Introduction

Imagine a celebrity endorsing bungee jumping. Now imagine the same celebrity endorsing a children’s charity to help fight childhood diabetes. Does your perception of the celebrity change based on the different products they endorse? Although considerable research reports that endorser traits influence brand perceptions (Huber, Meyer, Vogel, Weihrauch, & Hamprecht, 2013; Ilicic & Webster, 2012; McCracken, 1989; McGinnies & Ward, 1980), there is little research investigating changes in the opposite direction, that is whether the traits associated with the product brands influence perceptions of the endorser. The present research examines this phenomenon, referred to as brand trait transference (BTT).

BTT occurs when the traits that are connected with a brand transfer to individuals associated with that brand. For example, if a perceiver associates bungee jumping with the trait “exciting,” he might also view a celebrity that endorses bungee jumping as more exciting than he normally would. Similarly, when a celebrity is paired with a product or brand that is associated with kindness (e.g., children’s charity), the celebrity might be viewed as more caring and kind.

Given the critical role of endorsers in marketing communications as a way to capture attention, transfer meaning, provide relevant information, and produce favorable consumer perceptions (Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Ilicic & Webster, 2012; Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; McCracken, 1989; O’Mahony & Meenaghan, 1997), it is important to understand how brands influence the perceptions of endorsers. The present paper addresses this under-researched area and provides empirical evidence for BTT. Across several studies, we find that traits from a product can be transferred to people who associate themselves with the product. These studies provide evidence for BTT as well as identify boundary conditions under which BTT is less likely to occur.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

If you describe someone as lazy, does this description cause others to view you as lazy? Research on spontaneous trait transference (STT) shows that this is the case. STT occurs when perceivers attribute traits to informants based on behaviors they describe (Skowronski, Carlston, Lynda, & Crawford, 1998; Skowronski, Carlston, Lynda, & Crawford, 1998; Skowronski, Carlston, Lynda, & Crawford, 1998; Skowronski, Carlston, Lynda, & Crawford, 1998). That is, if Sally describes someone as anxious, Sally will also be perceived as anxious.

Past research on STT has found that STT results from an associative process (Carlston & Skowronski, 2005). Associative processing has been characterized as an effortless activity that yields unlabeled
linkages in memory that result from spatial and temporal proximity (Carlston & Smith, 1996; Carlston & Skowronski, 2005). When perceivers are exposed to a behavioral description, they spontaneously infer the implied trait (Uleman, Newman, & Moskowitz, 1996). That is, if Tom states “John did not contribute to the team project,” people spontaneously think of the trait “lazy” and attribute it to the actor (e.g., “John is lazy”). However, due to associative processing, the inferred trait can also become linked with the informant. As a result, the informant is misremembered as possessing the very trait he informed about (e.g., “Tom is lazy”).

In STT, perceivers are largely unaware of their person–trait associations (Carlston & Skowronski, 2005). The process lacks the deeper more elaborative activity characteristic of attributional processing, which involves “attributional knowledge and rules, resulting in the formation of labeled associative linkages that designate one construct as a property of another” (Carlston & Skowronski, 2005, p.884). Associative processing results in “unlabeled links” that convey little information about the underlying relationship.

Evidence suggests that consumers spontaneously and effortlessly infer traits and transfer these traits to items in close proximity. For instance, several studies show that the characteristics associated with an endorser can transfer to the products they endorse. Huber et al. (2013) report that age of endorsers transfer to products, such that manipulating an endorser's age can change consumers' brand age perceptions. Additionally, celebrities possess cultural meanings, which can be transferred to the products they endorse (McCracken, 1989). These studies illustrate trait transference from traits associated with endorsers (e.g., youth) to the products they endorse.

Drawing on STT research, the opposite might also occur, such that the traits associated with products (e.g., “sophisticated”) can be passed to the people associated with those products (e.g., celebrity endorsers or salespeople). The brand based inferences about endorsers (once made) might emulate STT and occur spontaneously; however, unlike STT, which involves a person's behavior, BTT refers to a situation where traits that are connected with a brand transfer to an individual associated with that brand.

Like people, some brands possess a “brand personality,” which refers to a set of human characteristics or traits associated with the brand (Aaker, 1997). Similar to how the Big-Five traits represent human personality (Aaker, 1997; Briggs, 1992), brands can possess traits such as sophistication, ruggedness, competence, and sincerity (Aaker, 1997), which potentially can be transferred to individuals associated with the brand. Given that brands possess personality traits (Aaker, 1997), consumers might spontaneously activate traits related to products they are exposed to (e.g., the trait “exciting” from bungee jumping equipment) and transfer the activated traits to individuals associated with the product brand (e.g., endorsers).

Brands are vehicles for consumer self-expression. Consumers often choose brands to express who they are and/or who they want to be (Aaker, 1997; Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2009). However, unlike consumers, celebrity endorsers 1) fail to choose the product they endorse, 2) are paid to endorse the product, and 3) often endorse multiple products that exhibit competing traits (safety vs. adventure/risk). Thus, although products are diagnostic for consumers (Swaminathan et al., 2009), it is unclear whether products are diagnostic for celebrity endorsers.

This research explores this novel topic and provides evidence that traits associated with products transfer to celebrities associated with those products. That is, if a celebrity endorser is paired with a brand associated with the trait “sophistication,” such as Nordstrom boots, this association is expected to increase the perceived sophistication level of the endorser. Based on this reasoning, it is proposed:

H1. Endorsers paired with a product characterized by a specific trait are perceived as more strongly possessing that trait than when not paired with that product.

However, research suggests that strong attitudes are resistant to change (Zuwerink & Devine, 1996). In the case of BTT, a strong pre-existing trait associated with the communicator could conflict with a trait that might otherwise be transferred from a product, thus overriding BTT. For example, if the trait “selfish” is strongly associated with an endorser, this might interfere with the transfer of the trait “generosity” from a charity advertisement. To the extent that consumers’ impressions of a celebrity are affected by the celebrity’s prior endorsements, this could limit the celebrity’s usefulness as an endorser for brands with opposing brand personalities. Thus, based on this reasoning, it is proposed:

H2. BTT does not occur for endorsers with a strong pre-existing trait that conflicts with the product’s associated trait.

2.1. Overview of studies

Three studies provide evidence for BTT and show that brand traits may also transfer to people who are associated with the brand. Study 1 reveals that celebrity endorser’s perceived attributes are influenced by the products they endorse. Study 2 uses the IAT (implicit association test) to establish evidence that the brand trait transference effect is spontaneous and requires little cognitive effort. Study 3 identifies a boundary condition by showing that strong pre-existing traits associated with the communicator undermine the brand trait transference effect. In each study, participants were presented with a brand that was associated with a specific target trait and asked to describe the degree to which the trait described the endorser associated with the brand.

3. Study 1

3.1. Pretest

In order to create advertisements that featured products strongly associated with specific traits, a pretest was conducted to select products that were significantly associated with three target traits: (1) adventurous, (2) generous, and (3) neat. A pretest on celebrity endorsers was also conducted to select endorsers who were relatively neutral on the target traits.

In the product pretest, participants were asked to view a variety of products (e.g., personal organizers) and indicate how much each of the target traits (adventurous, generous, and neat) described each product (1 = not descriptive at all ... 5 = very descriptive). Camping equipment was rated as the most “adventurous” product (M = 4.9), personal organizers were rated as the most “neat” product (M = 4.5), and a children’s charity was rated as the product most strongly associated with the trait “generous” (M = 4.7).

In the endorser pretest, participants were presented with a list of female celebrities and asked to rate how much each of the target traits described each celebrity (1 = not descriptive at all ... 5 = very descriptive). Three celebrity endorsers, Elizabeth Banks, Rashida Jones, and Rachel McAdams, were chosen because the pretest indicated that they did not have any strong preexisting associations with the traits adventurous, organized, and generous.

Based on the results from the pretest, nine advertisements were created, featuring each of the three celebrity endorsers (Elizabeth Banks, Rashida Jones, and Rachel McAdams) paired with each of the three products (camping equipment, children’s charity, and personal organizers). See Appendix A for the three advertisements featuring Rashida Jones.

3.2. Participants and procedure

One hundred and sixty one undergraduates (52% male; age: 19–26) at a large university participated in this study for course credit.
Participants were randomly assigned to view one of the nine advertisements developed based on the pretest. After viewing the advertisement, participants were asked to rate the endorser featured in the advertisement on a variety of traits. The list of traits included the target traits (adventurous, daring, generous, caring, organized, and neat) in addition to several filler traits (picky, expressive, open-minded). Ratings were made on 7-point scales (1 = not descriptive at all ... 7 = very descriptive).

3.3. Results and discussion

The traits neat and organized were highly correlated ($r = .52, p < .001$) and were aggregated to reflect the trait dimension “neat.” The traits adventurous and daring were also highly correlated ($r = .41, p < .001$) and were aggregated to reflect the trait “adventurous.” The traits caring and generous were also highly correlated ($r = .41, p < .001$) and were aggregated to reflect the trait “generous.” Preliminary 3 (endorser) × 3 (advertised product) ANOVAs were conducted for each of the target trait dimensions (adventurous, generous, and neat). As expected, the endorser variable had no significant main effects or interactions, and thus the three endorsers were collapsed in the final analyses.

A 3 (advertised product: camping equipment, personal organizers, children’s charity) between–subjects factor × 3 (target trait: adventurous, neat, generous) within–subjects factor ANOVA was run, yielding a significant interaction, $F(4,314) = 7.09, p < .001$. A series of one–way ANOVAs, one for each target trait, was run to clarify this interaction.

The one–way (advertised product: camping equipment, personal organizers, or children’s charity) ANOVA predicting the trait adventurous revealed a significant main effect for advertised product ($M_{camping} = 4.3$ vs. $M_{organizers} = 3.5$; $F(2,158) = 4.35, p < .02$). Contrasts revealed that the celebrity endorser was viewed as significantly more adventurous when featured in the camping equipment advertisement compared to the charity advertisement ($F(1,158) = 5.40, p < .03$) and compared to the personal organizer advertisement ($F(1,158) = 7.03, p < .001$). Ratings of perceived adventurousness did not differ between the latter two conditions ($F(1,158) = 0.17, p > .67$). See Fig. 1 for an overview of the results.

The one–way (advertised product: camping equipment, personal organizers, or children’s charity) ANOVA predicting the trait generous revealed a significant main effect for advertised product ($M_{caring} = 3.6$ vs. $M_{organizers} = 3.5$; $F(2,158) = 4.35, p < .02$). Contrasts revealed that the celebrity endorser was viewed as significantly more generous when featured in the camping equipment advertisement compared to the charity advertisement ($F(1,158) = 5.40, p < .03$) and compared to the personal organizer advertisement ($F(1,158) = 7.03, p < .001$). Ratings of perceived generousness did not differ between the latter two conditions ($F(1,158) = 0.17, p > .67$). See Fig. 1 for an overview of the results.

The one–way (advertised product: camping equipment, personal organizers, or children’s charity) ANOVA predicting the trait neat revealed a significant main effect for advertised product ($M_{organizers} = 4.1$ vs. $M_{camping} = 3.2$ vs. $M_{charity} = 3.8$; $F(2,158) = 4.23, p < .02$). Contrasts revealed that the mean rating for neat in the personal organizer advertisement was significantly different from the camping equipment advertisement ($F(1,158) = 8.14, p < .01$). However, although participants rated the endorsers as more neat in the personal organizer advertisement than the children’s charity advertisement ($M_{organizers} = 4.1$ vs. $M_{charity} = 3.8$), this result was not significantly different ($F(1,158) = 1.29, p = .26$). One possible explanation for the lack of significance might be due to the fact that the children’s charity advertisement featured a child receiving an insulin shot. The medical properties associated with this advertisement could have activated thoughts of cleanliness and neatness because hospitals and shots are often associated with sterilization and organization, and these traits might have transferred to the celebrity endorser. As expected, the means in the camping and the organizer condition also did not significantly differ ($F(1,158) = 3.08, p = .08$). Admittedly, the difference approached significance. This, however, is in line with the suggestion that the charity advertisement inadvertently may have triggered thoughts of cleanliness and neatness. See Fig. 1.

Overall the results show that the celebrity endorser was perceived as significantly more adventurous when featured with camping equipment, more organized when featured with personal organizers, and more generous when featured in the children’s charity advertisement. However, ratings on the filler traits did not differ between advertisements. That is, the nature of the advertised product had no effect on participants’ ratings of the endorser on open-mindedness ($M_{organizers} = 3.4$ vs. $M_{camping} = 3.2$ vs. $M_{charity} = 3.5$; $F(2,158) = 47, p < .02$), pickiness ($M_{organizers} = 4.0$ vs. $M_{camping} = 3.5$ vs. $M_{charity} = 3.5$; $F(2,158) = 1.33, p = .27$), or expressiveness ($M_{organizers} = 4.1$ vs. $M_{camping} = 4.0$ vs. $M_{charity} = 4.6$; $F(2,158) = 1.36, p = .26$). These results illustrate BTT from the product to the celebrity endorser. That is, the traits associated with the products featured in advertisements transferred to the endorser, whereas the traits not associated with products (e.g., pickiness) did not transfer to the endorser.

These results provide further evidence for Hypothesis 1. However, it is unclear whether careful information processing by consumers is required to produce this effect. That is, previous research reports that brand personalities “rub off” on consumers who endorse beliefs that possessing brands can lead to the acquisition of traits associated with the brand (Park & John, 2010). Although this phenomenon is similar to BTT, we predict that once the association between the endorser and the product traits has been made, BTT occurs via relatively effortless and spontaneous processing, which lacks the deeper more elaborative activity characteristic of the aforementioned finding by Park and John (2010). In order to test this prediction an implicit association test (IAT) was conducted to measure how quickly consumers categorize celebrity endorsers to traits associated with different product brands.

4. Study 2

4.1. Participants and procedure

One hundred and thirty eight students (57% male; age: 19–24) from a large university participated in this study for course credit. Two participants were removed from final analysis due to long response latencies (above 3000 ms; see Greenwald et al., 2003).

Participants were asked to view one of the four advertisements that featured Rashida Jones or Rachel McAdams with camping equipment or a children’s charity. After participants viewed the advertisement they began the IAT. The IAT is a performance-
based task that uses response latencies to assess the strength of association between a pair of concepts (e.g., Rachel McAdams or Rashida Jones) and a pair of attributes (e.g., wholesome and exciting). Several practice trials were conducted in which participants matched wholesome-related words (e.g., virtuous, pure) to the wholesome attribute, exciting-related words (e.g., adventurous, daring) to the exciting attribute, pictures of Rashida Jones to the Rashida Jones concept, and pictures of Rachel McAdams to the Rachel McAdams concept.

After participants familiarized themselves with the procedure and completed the practice trials, the two critical trials began. In the first trial, Rachel McAdams was paired with the trait "exciting," and Rashida Jones was paired with the trait "wholesome." For the second trial, the associations and endorsers were flipped such that Rachel McAdams was paired with the trait "wholesome," and Rashida Jones was paired with the "exciting." In both trials, participants were asked to categorize pictures of Rashida Jones and Rachel McAdams to the condition that contained their name.

4.2. Results and discussion

Once the association between the endorser and the product traits has been made, we predict that the brand based inferences occur spontaneously. If this is the case, respondents who viewed the exciting/McAdams advertisement should more strongly associate Rachel McAdams with exciting than respondents who viewed the wholesome/McAdams advertisement. Similarly, respondents who viewed the wholesome/McAdams advertisement should more strongly associate Rachel McAdams with wholesome than respondents who viewed the exciting/McAdams advertisement. The same results are predicted for Rashida Jones.

The IAT was scored according to the revised scoring algorithm described by Greenwald et al. (2003), which uses a D measure obtained by dividing “the difference between test block means by the standard deviation of all the latencies in the two test blocks” (Greenwald et al., 2003, p. 201). Using the standard deviation as a divisor has been found to be superior to conventional IAT scoring (Greenwald et al., 2003). In this study, low D scores indicate stronger associations between the endorser and the trait “exciting,” whereas high D scores indicate stronger associations between the endorser and the trait “wholesome.”

As predicted, participants who viewed the McAdams/wholesome advertisement more strongly associated Rachel McAdams with the wholesome attribute, whereas participants who viewed the McAdams/exciting advertisement more strongly associated Rachel McAdams with the exciting attribute ($M = -1.9$ vs. $M = -8.3$; $F(1,132) = 7.51, p = .007$). Similarly, participants who viewed the Jones/wholesome advertisement more strongly associated Rashida Jones with the wholesome attribute, whereas participants who viewed the Jones/exciting advertisement more strongly associated Rashida Jones with the exciting attribute ($M = -1.9$ vs. $M = -3.0$), although this finding did not reach conventional levels of significance ($F(1,132) = 1.65, p = .20$).

These results provide further support for Hypothesis 1, such that individuals paired with a product associated with a specific trait are perceived to be more strongly associated with that trait. This indicates that BTT is relatively spontaneous. However, the endorsers used in Studies 1 and 2 were chosen because they did not have any strong preexisting traits on the variables of interest. Although this helped further demonstrate BTT, it is unclear whether strong pre-existing traits associated with a communicator can undermine BTT. Thus, in Study 3, we used an endorser with a strong pre-existing trait on the target trait of interest in order to investigate whether pre-existing traits can weaken BTT.

5. Study 3

5.1. Pretest

The sincerity dimension of brand personality (Aaker, 1997) was used for this study. Past research (Swaminathan et al., 2009) effectively manipulated brand personality by changing taglines and pictures of an advertisement. Thus, in the present study, the sincerity brand personality dimension was manipulated via slogan and pictures for a fabricated coffee brand (Caravel Coffee). In order to ensure that the advertisements activated the correct brand personality dimensions, a pretest was conducted. In this pretest, participants were shown either a sincere or neutral version of the Caravel Coffee advertisement and asked to rate how well the trait ‘sincere’ described the advertisement ($1 = $ not at all descriptive ... $5 = $ highly descriptive). The sincerity dimension of brand personality was measured by four traits: sincere, wholesome, cheerful, and down-to-earth (Aaker, 1997). These adjectives were combined to form a composite of sincerity ($\alpha = .76$). Results revealed that the sincere advertisement was rated as more sincere than the neutral advertisement ($M_{\text{sincere}} = 3.8$ vs. $M_{\text{neutral}} = 2.9$; $F(1,32) = 6.16, p = .02$). Thus, the pretest established that the slogan and pictures effectively activated the sincerity dimension of brand personality.

Because we wanted to use one endorser with a strong pre-existing trait and one endorser with a relatively neutral trait value, a pretest on ratings of sincerity for female celebrity endorsers was also conducted. In this pretest, participants were shown pictures of several different female celebrities and asked to rate how well sincere traits described the celebrity ($1 = $ not at all descriptive ... $5 = $ highly descriptive). Results revealed that Paris Hilton had the strongest negative sincerity trait among the celebrities ($M = 1.65$), whereas Angelina Jolie had only weak negative sincerity ratings ($M = 2.50$). A repeated measures ANOVA confirmed that these sincerity ratings were significantly different ($F(1,143) = 57.72, p < .001$).

Based on results from the pretest, four advertisements were created that featured Angelina Jolie or Paris Hilton in either the sincere or neutral advertisement. See Appendix B for the sincere versions of the advertisements. In support of Hypothesis 2, we predict that the sincere version of the advertisement will increase perceptions of Angelina Jolie’s sincerity (due to BTT), but not Paris Hilton’s perception of sincerity due to her strong (negative) association with the sincerity trait.

5.2. Participants and procedure

Two hundred and fifty three undergraduates (62% male; age: 19–42) from a large university participated in this study for course credit.

Participants viewed one of the four advertisements that featured Paris Hilton or Angelina Jolie with sincere or neutral slogans and pictures. After viewing the advertisement, participants were asked to rate
how much the trait “sincere” described the celebrity featured in the advertisement (1 = not at all descriptive ... 5 = highly descriptive).

5.3. Results and discussion

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) with celebrity (Angelina Jolie vs. Paris Hilton) and advertisement trait (sincere vs. neutral) as between-subjects factors revealed a significant interaction between celebrity and trait ($F(1,249) = 4.73, p < .04$). Results revealed that Angelina Jolie was perceived as more sincere in the sincere advertisement in comparison to the neutral advertisement ($M_{sincere} = 2.6$ vs. $M_{neutral} = 2.0$; $F(1,249) = 7.87, p = .005$). However, Paris Hilton was perceived as equally sincere in the sincere and neutral advertisements ($M_{sincere} = 1.9$ vs. $M_{neutral} = 1.9$; $F(1,249) = .60, p = .80$). See Fig. 2.

These results demonstrate a boundary condition for BTT, namely that a celebrity endorser with a strong existing trait will undermine BTT. That is, because Paris Hilton had a strong pre-existing (negative) association with the sincerity trait, pairing her with an advertisement that evoked sincerity did not result in BTT. In contrast, Angelina Jolie, who had a relatively weak pre-existing association with the sincerity trait, showed trait transference as evidenced by a higher sincere trait rating in the sincere advertisement compared to the neutral advertisement.

6. General discussion

The present studies expand on previous research examining STT by showing that brand traits may also transfer to people who are associated with the brand. The present research provides the first demonstration that products can serve as a source for trait transference. Previous trait transference findings have focused on trait transference from one person to another. The present research extends these findings by demonstrating broader circumstances under which pre-existing traits can be transferred, and by providing the first demonstration that products can serve as a source for trait transference to celebrity endorsers.

Study 1 reveals that a celebrity endorser’s perceived attributes are influenced by the products they endorse. Study 2 provides evidence that brand based inferences about endorsers (once made) occur spontaneously. Study 3 identifies a condition that weakened BTT effects: strong pre-existing traits associated with the communicator appear to negate the BTT effect with respect to conflicting traits in the product.

Although we propose that the mechanism underlying BTT emulates STT and works via associative processing, positive IAT results indicate that the association occurs spontaneously, but it is still unclear whether the learning process that led to formation of the association was deliberative or associative. The results indicate that brand properties rub off on the endorser (Study 1) and the brand based inferences occur spontaneously (Study 2). However, the current results do not shed light on whether the brand based inferences about endorsers are made initially through deliberative or associative processing. Future studies will be conducted to further investigate the underlying process. Specifically, another IAT task utilizing celebrity endorsers with strong opposing traits will be run in order to help examine the underlying process. That is, if BTT results from associative processing, then results from an IAT task should reveal an association between the target trait and the endorser who possesses a strong pre-existing trait that conflicts with the product’s associated trait. For instance, if BTT results from associative processing, results from an IAT task are expected to lead participants to associate Paris Hilton with the trait sincere when she is paired with a sincere product; this would indicate that BTT results from automatic association, which can be removed by asking participants to consciously evaluate the celebrity endorser on the trait of interest (as in Study 3).

Another explanation for BTT is that BTT results from the fundamental attribution error. The fundamental attribution error (FAE) occurs when individuals favor dispositional explanations over situational explanations of behavior (Ross, 1977). However, prior research indicates that FAE does not account for celebrity endorser effectiveness. Specifically, Silvera and Austad (2004) found that participants viewed celebrity endorsers as liking the product less even when they were told the endorsement was done without a fee. Measuring the degree to which an individual evaluates endorsers as liking the product is a reliable way to predict endorser effectiveness (Silvera & Lauffer, 2005, chap. 3). Results revealed that participants are “generally cynical toward the endorsers’ motives” (Silvera & Austad, 2004, p. 1522). At first blush, one might assume that consumers believe that celebrities endorse products because the celebrity shares traits with the products or likes the products, but consumers possess persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and are often distrustful of marketing communication efforts (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Forehand & Grier, 2003). Consumers are aware that celebrity endorsers often do not choose the products they endorse, receive a substantial payment for their efforts, and tend to endorse more than one product, which reduces their credibility and trust to the consumer. Doney, Cannon, and Mullen (1998) suggest that trust is built via an intentionality process where the truster evaluates a target’s motivation and interprets the target’s words and behavior in order to determine if any underlying intentions or ulterior motives exist. If consumers believe that a communicator’s behavior is due to ulterior motives or lack of genuineness then they are less likely to “buy into” the claims (Fein, 1996). Given that celebrity endorsers have ulterior motives (e.g., a good endorsement contract) and consumers are aware of these motives (Friestad & Wright, 1994), we suggest that BTT is the result of STT rather than FAE. Moreover, the FAE argument relies on elaboration of new incoming information, which is inconsistent with the spontaneous inferences implied by the IAT study.

6.1. Marketing implications

The literature suggests that there should be a high fit between a celebrity and a product in order to generate positive consumer responses to advertising (Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). To the extent that consumers’ impressions of a celebrity are affected by the celebrity’s prior endorsements, this could limit the celebrity’s usefulness as an endorser for brands with opposing brand personalities. Thus, brand managers can benefit from the knowledge that certain traits associated with products cannot transfer to the endorser if the endorser has strong pre-existing traits that conflict with the trait associated with the product brand.

Brand managers can also benefit from the knowledge that BTT effectively enhances the fit between a brand and an endorser. The present research demonstrates how traits can transfer from brands to individuals associated with the brand. Thus, because the brand is transferring a trait associated with itself onto the endorser, this increases the fit between the endorser and the brand. Studies have shown that perceived congruence between celebrity image and product image increases the fit between the endorser and the product (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). Thus, given that BTT increases the congruence between endorsers and products, this also enhances the fit between the endorser and the product. However, BTT only works for brands that are highly associated with traits. If consumers do not associate a product with any traits (e.g., Lenox Dinnerware), then BTT cannot occur (there is nothing to transfer). This further supports research on the importance of establishing key brand associations in the consumer’s mind. Not only does this allow brand managers and companies to differentiate their brands from the competition (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986), but it also increases the fit between the endorser and the product, which enhances marketing communication efforts and facilitates customer satisfaction.
Appendix A. Study 1 experimental materials

"Buy Arkia's camping equipment and live an adventurous life."
- Rashida Jones,
actress featured in The Office, Parks and Recreation, and Unhitched

"Give to Arkia's Childhood Diabetes Foundation and help save children's lives."
- Rashida Jones,
featured in The Office, Parks and Recreation, and Unhitched

"Buy Arkia's personal filing systems and organize your life."
- Rashida Jones,
actress featured in The Office, Parks and Recreation, and Unhitched
Appendix B. Study 2 experimental materials

Sincere Advertisement

“I drink Caravel Coffee because life is too meaningful to let it pass me by.”
-Angelina Jolie, actress

“I drink Caravel Coffee because life is too meaningful to let it pass me by.”
-Paris Hilton, model

References