

“Hey Guys, Check This Out! #ad”: The Impact of Media Figure-User Relationships and Ad Explicitness on Celebrity Endorsements

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This study examined the extent to which parasocial relationships (PSR) between celebrities and media users impact the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements on social media for various products. A 2 (high/low PSR endorser) x 2 (explicit/implicit endorsement) experiment tested the effects of PSR and endorsement explicitness on media users' attitudes toward the endorsed product and product purchase intentions. A total of 346 participants were randomly assigned to 1 of 16 Twitter message conditions (i.e., 8 celebrities and 2 types of endorsements). Product purchase intentions were not significantly impacted by the celebrity credibility

or source congruence whereas attitudes toward the endorsed product was significantly affected. Media user-figure relationships significantly impacted both attitudes and intentions. PSR and endorsement explicitness had a significant interaction effect on attitudes toward products. Product attitudes were most positive for explicit endorsements from high PSR endorsers and least positive for explicit endorsements from low PSR endorsers. Implications for marketers are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: parasocial relationship, wishful identification, social media, celebrity endorsements

Over the past decade, social media sites have emerged as popular and growing marketing platforms. More specifically, marketers are using celebrity endorsers to talk about their products on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. A celebrity endorser is a person who is publically recognized and appears in an advertisement with a product, using their recognition to highlight the brand (McCracken, 1989). Celebrities can wield their fame and familiarity to become sources of influence (Moeran, 2003). Celebrity endorsers help introduce, polish, or reposition a brand or brand image via building positive celebrity-brand associations (Carroll, 2008). Therefore, companies are willing to pay a lot of money for celebrities to talk about them on social media platforms. The

number of followers and number of shares or retweets impact the amount of payment received by the celebrity endorser (Piazza, 2012). According to Captiv8, a single tweet about a product or brand can cost between \$2,000 and \$60,000 (“Celebrities’ endorsement earnings,” 2016). Studies show that a celebrity endorser has more influence on audience brand recall and purchase intentions than an expert or typical consumer endorser (Carroll, 2008). Overall, research indicates that a celebrity endorser can positively impact consumers’ brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008; Eisend & Langner, 2010; Erdogan, 1999; Kaikati, 1987) and brand loyalty (Miller & Laczniak, 2011).

Extensive research has identified factors that help predict celebrity endorsement effectiveness (for a review, see Amos et al., 2008), produced models (e.g., source attractiveness model, source credibility model, and the match-up hypothesis) to explain underlying processes of celebrity endorsement, and shown the positive effects of celebrity endorsements on brand attitudes and purchase intentions (e.g., Kaikati, 1987; Ohanian, 1991; Erdogan et al. 2001). However, celebrity endorsements on social media platforms have opened up new research opportunities. First, although social networking sites have become a popular tool among celebrity endorsers, more research is needed to examine how effective celebrity endorsements of products via these sites are at impacting brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Lueck, 2015). Further, do the traditional tenants of marketing hold in the social media context?

Second, there is a need for more research on how the relationship between the celebrity endorser and his or her audience impacts celebrity endorsement effectiveness (Choi & Rifon, 2012). Most of the past research has focused on examining traditional source effects (e.g., attractiveness, credibility) or the fit between the celebrity endorser and the product being endorsed (i.e., match-up hypothesis). However, current marketing research has begun to consider how celebrity-user relationships (e.g., wishful identification, parasocial relationships) fostered through social media impact these traditional source effects. For instance, Ding and Qiu (2017) found that parasocial relationships mediated the relationship between celebrity following intensity (i.e., frequency of checking a celebrity’s social media) and celebrity endorsement effectiveness on microblogging platforms (e.g., Twitter, Tumblr, etc.). Chung and Cho (2017) found that

consumers' quality and depth of relationships with celebrity endorsers impact their perception of trustworthiness. Additionally, celebrity authenticity on social media engenders consumers' emotional attachments toward the celebrity; both authenticity and attachment have direct, positive relationships to likelihood of product purchases (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016).

Third, a problem with this new frontier of social media marketing is the lack of transparency of many celebrity endorsements. In an effort to protect consumers, the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC; n.d.) requires social media influencers to disclose when they are paid by a company to talk about a product with clear and unambiguous language. For instance, after a celebrity touts a product in a tweet, he or she should include hashtags like #ad, #sponsored, or #promotion in the same tweet or state that they are a paid spokesperson for the company (FTC, n.d.). However, many celebrities' social media posts still do not follow the FTC guidelines (DuVall, 2017). There is a lack of research about if or how undisclosed endorsements about a product used by a celebrity impact attitudes toward that product. Media users often see celebrities endorsing a product in commercials and understand that they were paid to promote that product, but are undisclosed product endorsements via social media viewed differently than disclosed social media product endorsements?

The current study will address these gaps by examining the extent to which celebrity product endorsements via Twitter impact a variety of outcomes including attitudes toward the product and purchase intentions. Moreover, this study will also examine how the media figure-user (i.e., celebrity endorser-consumer) relationship and the explicitness of the endorsement (i.e., how direct or subtle the celebrity is in endorsing a product or brand) both impact media users' attitudes and purchase intentions related to the endorsed product.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Models Explaining Celebrity Endorsement Effectiveness

A number of theoretical frameworks have been used to explain how different factors impact the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. Two popular models are the source attractiveness/credibility model and the match-up hypothesis.

Source Attractiveness/Credibility Model. Research on celebrity endorsements mainly centers on how a celebrity's personal attributes impact his or her persuasiveness (Erdogan, 1999). For instance, scholars have examined how a source's attractiveness, which is comprised of similarity, familiarity, and likability, impacts a message's effectiveness using the source attractiveness model (McGuire, 1985). Similarity is the supposed resemblance between the message source and the receiver, while familiarity is the knowledge of the source through repeated exposures. Likability is the affection for the source as a result of physical appearance, other personal traits, and behavior (Erdogan et al., 2001). Scholars suggest that source attractiveness determines the message's persuasiveness through identification. In this process, the source's attractiveness motivates the consumer to accept the source's message out of the consumer's desire to identify with the source (Erdogan, 1999). Unlike internalization, identification usually does not integrate information from an attractive endorser into a consumer's purchase intentions or behaviors (Caballero & Pride, 1984) but directly relates to positive message evaluations (Carroll, 2008).

Similarly, researchers have studied how an endorser's expertise and trustworthiness can influence his or her effectiveness (Amos et al., 2008; Erdogan et al., 2001; Ohanian, 1991). A message from a credible source can cause a consumer to engage in internalization, in which the consumer adopts the opinion of the endorser because he or she perceives the endorser's information as credible (Erdogan et al., 2001). Expertise refers to the source's knowledge of and experience with the product, thus increasing the validity of the message claims (Carroll, 2008). The celebrity endorsers' expertise is more persuasive and influential in determining purchase intentions than their attractiveness or trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1991). Trustworthiness describes the endorser's honesty, integrity, and believability (Erdogan et al., 2001). Although it does not significantly influence purchase intentions (Ohanian, 1991), it is an important component in source credibility.

A celebrity endorser's perceived credibility positively influences a brand's credibility (Nicolau & Santa-Maria, 2013; Spry et al., 2011). Source credibility positively impacts brand attitudes (Till, Stanley, & Priluck, 2008) and purchase intentions (Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholaki, 1978). However, most literature on source credibility is based on

research from traditional mass media marketing. Lueck (2015) called for additional research on whether source credibility research extends to the context of social media celebrity advertising. This study answers that call by examining source credibility effects in relation to celebrity social media advertising.

Research on celebrity endorsements in social media is growing, with studies confirming the value of using celebrity endorsers on the Internet and social media to help influence attitudes and purchase intentions toward endorsed products (e.g., Crutchfield, 2010; Wei & Lu, 2013). In their experimental study, Wei and Lu (2013) found online celebrity endorsements to be of greater influence than online customer reviews on purchase intentions. Other studies have also found support for a significant positive relationship between source credibility and endorsement effectiveness within the online context (e.g., Chang, Chen, & Tan, 2012).

Recently, in a qualitative study of celebrity endorsements on Instagram, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that source credibility differed by celebrity type, with famous Hollywood celebrities viewed as less trustworthy and credible compared to lower-scale internet celebrities (e.g., bloggers, 'Instafamous' models whose online content inspires many others beside their friends). Overall, their results found celebrity source credibility had positive effects on people's purchasing behaviors of endorsed products.

Although a number of studies have found support for a positive link between source credibility and endorsement effectiveness, some studies fail to find the predicted relationship. For example, in their survey on celebrity endorsements on microblogging platforms (e.g., Twitter), Gong and Li (2017) reported that celebrity source credibility was not related to attitudes toward the product or purchase intentions. Similarly, Cunningham and Bright (2012) found that celebrity athlete's source credibility did not significantly impact fans' feelings toward their endorsements on Twitter. Given these findings, further testing is warranted to determine how source credibility impacts attitudes and purchase intentions. However, since most previous research supports source credibility having a positive effect on celebrity endorsement effectiveness, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H1: Perceived source credibility of celebrity endorsers is positively related to (a) attitudes toward the endorsed products and (b) intent to purchase the products.

Match-Up Hypothesis. An alternative explanation of celebrity endorsement effects is the “match-up” hypothesis. The match-up hypothesis states that a good perceived fit between the celebrity and the product elicits a positive audience response, whereas a poor perceived fit (or poor endorser-product congruence) between the celebrity and the product elicits a negative audience response (Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). For instance, research has found that physically attractive celebrities are most effective at endorsing products that are related to physical beauty (Kamins, 1990). Besides attractiveness, other match-up factors that have been examined include expertise and celebrity image (e.g., Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till & Busler, 2000). Overall, there has been empirical support to show strong endorser-product congruence is related to more positive attitudes toward the endorsed brand or product, and greater intentions to purchase the endorsed product (Batra & Homer, 2004; Erdogan & Baker, 2000; Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2000).

The match-up hypothesis has also been supported in the context of endorsements on social media. In a survey on athlete endorsements on Twitter, Cunningham and Bright (2012) reported athlete-brand congruence positively correlated with attitudes toward endorsements. Additionally, Phua, Lin, and Lim (2018) tested celebrity endorsement effectiveness in an experiment of electronic cigarette advertisements on Instagram featuring celebrities. They found that high perceived endorser-product congruence was positively associated with attitudes toward the advertisement, intention to spread electronic word-of-mouth information about the advertisement, and intention to use the product. Based on both traditional mass media marketing literature and the emerging social media research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Level of endorser-product congruence will be positively related to (a) attitudes toward the endorsed products and (b) intent to purchase the products.

Besides these models, research shows that the media figure-user relationship can also impact celebrity endorsement effectiveness. Specifically, the extent to which a media user perceives having a strong or weak parasocial relationship (PSR) with a celebrity endorser can influence his or her attitudes toward the endorsed product and intentions to share the celebrity endorsements with others via Twitter.

Media Figure-User Relationships and Celebrity Endorsement Effectiveness

When consuming media, audience members often interact with and develop some form of attachment to a character, media personality, or actor. These media figure-media user interactions and relationships are important because they can potentially impact a user's enjoyment of media and influence their attitudes and behaviors (Cohen, 2010; Moyer-Gusé, 2008). The relationship between a celebrity and their audience is significant given that social media environments allow 24/7 "access" to the celebrity. Celebrities often create an intimacy with their social media feed by posting about their daily lives, sharing photos, and even directly interacting with their fans. Further, these posts on social media appear in the same newsfeed as a user's personal friends and connections. These actions narrow the distance between a celebrity and media user by creating a sense of connection with the celebrity (Chung & Cho, 2017). Specifically, the media figure-user relationship concepts of wishful identification and PSRs will be examined to determine their impact on celebrity endorsement effectiveness.

Wishful Identification and Celebrity Endorsement Effectiveness. Wishful identification represents the media user's desire to be similar to or behave like the character or figure in some respect (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; von Feilitzen & Linné, 1975). While engaging in the media consumption process, particular character traits such as humor, likeability, success, physical attractiveness, intelligence, and strength can attract media users to wishfully identify with a character or figure (Hoffner, 1996). This form of identification can impact the user's attention to, identification with, and imitation of characters or figures (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). Moreover, wishful identification can occur outside of media exposure through the media user's desire to become or behave like a media character or figure they learn about thorough social interactions with others (Klimmt, Hefner, & Vorderer, 2009). Wishful identification can be viewed as long-term identification, which indicates the viewer's desire to become like the character after engaging in the viewing process (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). For instance, in their study on how *Jersey Shore* viewership impacts sexual attitudes and behavior, Bond and Drogos (2014) found that wishful identification mediated the positive relationship between *Jersey Shore* exposure and permissive sexual attitudes. In a qualitative study, Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) reported that a consumer used products promoted on Instagram by a

celebrity she admired because it made her feel good to share common ground with the celebrity.

Based on the source attractiveness model, because consumers want to identify with an attractive endorser, they are expected to respond positively to information from that source (Erdogan et al., 2001). Specifically, due to the desire to emulate the attractive source, it is expected that individuals who hold high levels of wishful identification toward a celebrity endorser will most likely report positive attitudes toward the endorsed product as well as high intentions to use the product. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H3: Level of wishful identification with celebrity endorsers will be positively related to (a) attitudes toward the endorsed products and (b) intent to purchase the endorsed product.

Parasocial Phenomena and Celebrity Endorsement Effectiveness. A parasocial interaction (PSI; Horton & Wohl, 1956) describes a media user's feeling of intimacy or bond with media figures or characters (i.e., personae) during the process of media consumption (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Lim & Kim, 2011). This involvement can include affective (e.g., sympathizing with personae), behavioral (e.g., verbally responding to figures), and/or cognitive responses (e.g., rationalizing or predicting character's actions) with the media figure (Rosaen & Dibble, 2008). A PSI with a media figure is one-sided and mediated, with audiences often seeking to engage in PSIs with media personae that they perceive as socially attractive (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Over time, a PSR with a media persona forms when users develop a sense of familiarity through repeated PSIs and feel as if they intimately understand the media figure (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Schmid & Klimmt, 2011). In short, PSI and PSR are distinct concepts; PSI describes a situated event, whereas a PSR is a long-term emotional connection that persists after media exposure (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016).

Both PSIs and PSRs are valuable in product promotion because consumers who have a parasocial connection with a celebrity feel like they know and understand a celebrity and these positive feelings can transfer to the product or brand. For instance, studies have found a positive link between positive PSI with media figures (e.g., TV shopping show hosts) and purchasing behaviors (Grant, Guthrie, & Ball-Rokeach, 1991;

Lim & Kim, 2011). Social media presents platforms for consumers to maintain and strengthen their PSRs with celebrities. While traditional media outlets like television and magazines allow for opportunities to view celebrities, social media creates a more personal and immediate way to connect with celebrities (Chung & Cho, 2017). Additionally, people seek out and follow celebrities with whom they have a PSR on social media to see what celebrities are doing; social media even provides an opportunity for celebrities to interact with their fans and, in turn, promote products. In terms of endorsements, social media allows for more subtle product promotion by celebrities in which they talk about or post photos about a product in a way that makes it seem part of their daily lives (Ding & Qui, 2017). Additionally, it is not just celebrities that capitalize on their relationships, Labrecque (2014) found that brands could foster PSIs with consumers and that perceptions of brands' interactivity and openness with consumers on social media strengthened PSIs.

The feeling of intimacy and trust that comes from PSIs and PSRs can have a large impact on consumers' attitudes toward an endorsed product and the effectiveness of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). eWOM is information about a product or brand communicated by potential, actual, and former consumers online (Hennin-Thurau, Qwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Examples of eWOM are product reviews on online (e.g., blogs, social media, forums, websites) (Cheung & Thadani, 2010). eWOM communicators can be anonymous or known and have been shown to impact consumers' brand selections and purchases (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006).

Celebrities serve as influential opinion leaders of eWOM because people view celebrities with whom they have PSRs as credible sources of information. In fact, Yuan, Kim, and Kim (2016) documented that source credibility serves as a positive antecedent of PSRs. Further, Schiffman, Hansen, & Kanuk (2012) explained that many individuals use celebrities as a reference when developing attitudes and values, which can impact purchase decisions (as cited by Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). For instance, Jin and Phua (2014) reported that positive tweets about a product from popular celebrities increased purchase intentions and intentions to spread eWOM.

Studies have documented the positive impact parasocial phenomena have on celebrity endorsements via social media. For instance, Lueck (2015) found audiences'

positive responses to Kim Kardashian's Facebook posts, most of which contained product or brand endorsements, were positively correlated with reports of PSI. Similarly, Rasmussen (2018) found that YouTube beauty video bloggers (vloggers) fostered PSIs with viewers and were viewed as credible sources for beauty information. Further, both participants who viewed moderately popular (100,000-250,000 subscribers) and popular vloggers (2 million or more subscribers) reported intentions to purchase products mentioned by the YouTube celebrities. Additionally, researchers have found that celebrity self-disclosure (e.g., sharing opinions, providing "behind the scenes information," posting photos of daily life) mediates the relationship between social media and PSR (Chung & Cho, 2017). Disclosure allows media users to feel like they have an intimate look into celebrities' lives. Thus, it is expected that the greater the level of PSR felt toward a celebrity endorser, the more effective the celebrity endorsement will be in influencing attitudes toward the product and purchase intentions.

H4: Level of PSR felt toward celebrity endorsers will be positively related to (a) attitudes toward the endorsed product and (b) intent to purchase the endorsed product.

Parasocial Relationships and Celebrity Endorsement Explicitness. While it is expected that individuals will react more positively to endorsements from high (vs. low) PSR celebrity endorsers, the explicitness of the endorsement may moderate the relationship between PSR and celebrity endorsement effectiveness. Some tweets like soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo's (2018) post "The world is watching. Let's go to work #HerbalifeNutrition #BehindTheResults #sponsored" explicitly disclose that it is a paid tweet with a hashtag. Other paid tweets endorsing products or brands may not have a hashtag identifier but instead makes it clear through the text such as Selena Gomez's tweet about her new partnership with Adidas: "Big news! I've partnered with @adidasNEOlabel! See what we are up to and win a chance to meet me! #selenagoesNEO <http://a.did.as/WgliVq>" (Gomez, 2012). Additionally, her Twitter profile page background featured her in an explicit Adidas advertisement, further reinforcing the explicitness of the brand endorsement.

Although the FTC states that endorsers need to disclose when their social media posts are advertisements it is not always done (DuVall, 2017). For instance, some celebrities who tweet about a brand or product may not make it clear that it is a paid endorsement for a brand or product, one that they may not even use personally. Instead, they may attempt to disguise the endorser tweet in a manner to imply that this is a personal endorsement for a brand that they themselves are using on a regular basis. Truthinadvertising.org (TINA.org; 2017a; 2017b; 2018) has filed multiple complaints with the FTC demonstrating that celebrities like the Kardashian/ Jenner sisters, DJ Khaled, and YouTube star PewDiePie did not clearly disclose their partnerships with brands in promotional social media posts.

This disclosure of sponsorship or promotion is important because consumers often do not recognize that these undisclosed endorsements are advertisements. Traditional marketing research shows that consumers commit the correspondence bias (Gilbert & Malone, 1995) when viewing celebrity endorsements, meaning that they assume a celebrity's endorsement of a product is fueled by genuine liking rather than financial compensation (Cronley, Kardes, Goddard, & Houghton, 1999). Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa (2017) found that the correspondence bias occurred with celebrity endorsements on Facebook in that participants were significantly less likely to recognize an advertisement as an advertisement when it was posted by a celebrity than by a brand on social media. However, when a celebrity's post disclosed it was "Sponsored" and participants noticed the disclosure, there was no significant difference in advertisement identification between the brand and celebrity. Importantly, Boerman et al. (2017) found that when consumers understand that a celebrity's post is an advertisement and meant to persuade them, they are more critical and distrusting of the message and less likely to engage in eWOM than if they do not think the post is an advertisement.

Research suggests that a consumer's PSR with a celebrity could impact their reaction to the explicitness of a product promotion post on social media. Chung and Cho (2017) found that PSRs shape social media users' levels of celebrity source trustworthiness. Strong PSRs with celebrities help to increase consumers' level of trust in the celebrity source, leading them to overlook negative information about an endorsed product, and help them to be more forgiving of those celebrities. So, although a consumer

may react somewhat less positively toward explicit (vs. implicit) product endorsements from high PSR celebrity endorsers, they will react more negatively toward explicit (vs. implicit) product endorsements from celebrities with whom they have a low PSR because there is trust and thus, less of a buffer. Based on this rationale, the follow hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Endorser condition (high or low PSR endorser) and endorsement type (explicit or implicit) will interact together to influence (a) attitudes toward the endorsed products and (b) intentions to purchase the endorsed products.

METHODS

Participants and Procedures

A total of 346 U.S. undergraduates (60.7% female) between the ages of 18 and 27 years ($M = 19.9$, $SD = 1.74$) completed an online 2 (PSR: low vs. high) x 2 (endorsement: implicit vs. explicit) experiment approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. After completing the consent forms, participants were randomly assigned to 1 of 16 Twitter message conditions. There were 2 endorsement types (explicit, implicit) and 8 celebrity endorsers (4 high PSR endorsers, 4 low PSR endorsers). Each person viewed 2 explicit/implicit tweets endorsing products from a pair of high PSR/low PSR celebrity endorsers. Prior to viewing the stimuli, participants completed measures of PSR, wishful identification, familiarity, and source credibility for the two celebrities assigned to their condition. Next, participants read two tweets by celebrities and two distracter tweets. Then, participants completed the posttest (i.e., PSR, wishful identification, source credibility, brand familiarity, product loyalty, product use, intent to purchase, attitudes toward product, endorser-brand congruence, demographics, and media use).

Stimulus Materials

The celebrities associated with the stimuli tweets were pretested among a separate sample of undergraduates ($N = 289$) to ensure that (a) participants were familiar with the celebrities, and (b) the celebrities either had a low or high PSR level. From a total list of 28 celebrities, the four celebrities yielding the highest PSR scores and the four celebrities yielding the lowest PSR scores were selected for the main study. Celebrities in the high

PSR condition consisted of Jennifer Lawrence, Justin Timberlake, Beyoncé, and Bradley Cooper. Celebrities in the low PSR condition included Justin Bieber, Rhianna, Miley Cyrus, and Kim Kardashian. Table 1 summarizes level of PSR with the set of celebrity endorsers pre and post exposure to tweets.

Table 1
Summary of means and standard deviations for PSR ratings pre- and post- exposure to celebrity tweets by celebrity PSR condition.

	Pretest		Posttest	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<u>High PSR celebrities</u>				
Jennifer Lawrence	5.32	1.26	5.27	1.39
Justin Timberlake	5.20	.97	5.17	1.11
Beyoncé	5.06	1.13	5.04	1.09
Bradley Cooper	5.07	1.06	5.03	1.16
<u>Low PSR celebrities</u>				
Justin Bieber	3.01	1.07	3.00	1.25
Rhianna	3.34	.98	3.45	1.06
Miley Cyrus	3.33	1.31	3.30	1.37
Kim Kardashian	3.27	1.50	3.28	1.52

The text of the tweets contained 1 of 2 types of endorsements for a product: explicit or implicit. Two versions of each type of endorsement were created to reflect the varying types of advertisements seen on social media (see Figure 1 below). Finally, four products (i.e., Vitamin Water, Proactiv, Insanity workout program, and Luna Bar) were selected to use as the endorsed brands. The products were chosen because they could be used in each endorsement with only small modifications (e.g., changing the word “body” to “skin”).

Each tweet contained the celebrity’s profile picture and user name. For celebrities with active accounts, their profile picture was used. Pictures were chosen for celebrities that did not have a Twitter account and celebrities who were not recognizable in their Twitter profile picture. The profile name consisted of actual username of the celebrities on

Twitter. For celebrities not on Twitter, their username was designed to resemble the celebrity’s actual name. The tweet’s timestamp and the number of retweets and favorites were the same across all conditions.



Explicit Ad (Version 1)



Explicit Ad (Version 2)



Implicit Ad (Version 1)



Implicit Ad (Version 2)

Figure 1. Example Stimuli used in the study.

Measures

Parasocial Relationship. PSR with the randomly assigned celebrities was measured using Rubin and Perse’s (1987) 8-item PSI-scale. Despite its name, this PSI-scale is more appropriately used to measure PSR (Dibble et al., 2016) than PSI. Sample items include “[celebrity] makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend” and “I see [celebrity] as a natural, down-to-earth person” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Responses to these items in both the pretest and posttest were averaged to form an overall measure of PSR for each celebrity. Reliabilities ranged from $\alpha = .88$ to $.93$ in the pretest and $\alpha = .90$ to $.95$ in the posttest. A summary of the means and standard deviations for PSR by celebrity endorsement condition is provided in Table 2.

Wishful Identification. A four-item scale adapted from Hoffner and Buchanan’s (2005) 5-item scale measured wishful identification with the randomly assigned

celebrities. The item, “I’d like to do the kinds of things he/she does on the show” was not included because it pertained more to how a fictional character behaves on a television show. Sample items include “I would never act the way [celebrity] does” (reverse coded) and “[celebrity] is someone I would like to emulate” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Reliabilities ranged from $\alpha = .76$ to $.87$ in the pretest to $\alpha = .72$ to $.86$ in the posttest. Table 2 summarizes the means and standard deviations for wishful identification by celebrity endorsement condition.

Source Credibility. Source credibility was measured using Ohanian’s (1991) 15-item, 7-point semantic differential scale that measures source credibility on three dimensions: attractiveness (e.g., ugly – beautiful), expertise (e.g., knowledgeable – unknowledgeable), and trustworthiness (e.g., honest – dishonest). Reliabilities ranged from $\alpha = .90$ to $.95$ in the pretest and $\alpha = .92$ to $.96$ in the posttest. Means and standard deviations for source credibility by celebrity endorsement condition are summarized in Table 2.

Brand Familiarity. Participants completed a 3-item brand familiarity measure for the two products mentioned in their randomly assigned tweets. Brand familiarity or brand awareness was measured using a 7-point semantic differential scale adapted from Yoo and Donthu (2001) by Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell (2011). The statements are as follows: “not familiar/very familiar,” “do not recognize/do recognize, and “have not heard of before/have heard of before” with higher values reflecting greater familiarity.

Product Loyalty. Product loyalty was measured using 3 items from Yoo and Donthu’s (2001) work in brand equity. Sample items include “I feel loyal to [celebrity] when considering the purchase of [associated product category]” and “It is likely that [celebrity] would be my first choice when considering the purchase of [associated product category]” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) with higher values reflecting greater loyalty.

Table 2

Summary of means and standard deviations for key outcome variables by celebrity endorsement conditions.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
PSR Toward Endorser			
Explicit High PSR Endorser	5.11	0.89	87
Implicit High PSR Endorser	5.19	0.83	86
Explicit Low PSR Endorser	3.46	1.09	87
Implicit Low PSR Endorser	3.16	1.11	86
Wishful Identification Toward Endorser			
Explicit High PSR Endorser	4.67	0.87	87
Implicit High PSR Endorser	4.58	0.97	86
Explicit Low PSR Endorser	2.75	1.02	87
Implicit Low PSR Endorser	2.51	1.10	86
Source Credibility			
Explicit High PSR Endorser	5.88	0.67	87
Implicit High PSR Endorser	5.78	0.78	86
Explicit Low PSR Endorser	4.14	0.93	87
Implicit Low PSR Endorser	3.90	1.09	86
Attitude Toward the Endorsed Product			
Explicit High PSR Endorser	4.43	1.02	87
Implicit High PSR Endorser	4.58	1.02	86
Explicit Low PSR Endorser	3.51	1.49	87
Implicit Low PSR Endorser	4.30	1.09	86
Intentions to Purchase Endorsed Product			
Explicit high PSR endorser	2.26	1.27	87
Implicit high PSR endorser	2.93	1.43	86
Explicit low PSR endorser	2.03	1.19	87
Implicit low PSR endorser	2.29	1.49	86

Product Use and Purchase Intentions. Two product use questions asked participants to indicate how often they purchased and used the two products mentioned in

their randomly assigned tweets on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *all the time*) with higher scores indicating greater current use of the product. Participants were also asked to indicate their intent to purchase the product in the next 3 months on a single item measure using a 7-point, Likert scale, with 1 = very unlikely to 7 = very likely, with higher scores reflecting greater intentions to use the product in the next 3 months.

Attitudes Toward Product. The attitudes toward product consisted of six items (useless/useful, unpleasant/pleasant, unenjoyable/enjoyable, ineffective/effective, dull/exciting) from Spangenberg, Voss, and Crowley's (1997) measure of hedonic and utilitarian attitudes toward products. The attitudes were measured using a 7-point semantic differential scale, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes about the product. Table 3 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and reliabilities for brand familiarity, product loyalty, product use, product purchase intentions, and attitudes about the product.

Endorser-Brand Congruence. Till and Busler (2000) found that the fit between a celebrity and an endorsed brand impacted brand attitude and this congruence played a role in endorser effectiveness. Congruence was measured with a 3-item, 7-point semantic differential scale adapted by Spry et al. (2011) from Keller and Aaker's (1992) scale. Statements included, "bad/good fit between [celebrity] and [brand]," "very/not logical for [celebrity] to endorse," and "not/very appropriate for [celebrity] to endorse." Reliabilities ranged from $\alpha = .74$ to .93.

Demographics and Media Use. Participants were asked a series of demographic and media use questions. Specifically, participants reported their age ($M = 19.89$ years, $SD = 1.74$), gender (60.7% females), race, television use (49.4% reporting watching less than 2 hours a day), if they had a Twitter account (71.4% reported having an active account, 11.6% stated they an account, and 17.1% reported not having an account), and Twitter use of those with accounts. For those with an active Twitter account, participants reported daily use, initiating tweets and retweeting about once a week, and replying to others' tweets about 2-3 times a month.

Table 3

Summary of means, standard deviations, and reliabilities for study variables by product.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Brand Familiarity			
Insanity	5.57	0.49	.89
Luna Bar	3.95	0.34	.96
Proactiv	6.26	0.35	.84
Vitamin Water	6.29	0.51	.69
Product Loyalty			
Insanity	2.98	0.43	.69
Luna Bar	2.24	0.07	.75
Proactiv	2.32	0.17	.81
Vitamin Water	2.31	0.10	.81
Product Use			
Insanity	1.55	0.85	0.86
Luna Bar	1.61	0.95	0.95
Proactiv	1.64	1.03	0.92
Vitamin Water	1.97	0.84	0.94
Purchase Intentions			
Insanity	2.12	1.52	N/A
Luna Bar	2.49	1.85	N/A
Proactiv	2.02	1.65	N/A
Vitamin Water	2.91	1.81	N/A
Attitudes Toward the Product			
Insanity	4.69	0.96	.83
Luna Bar	4.09	0.16	.96
Proactiv	4.36	0.40	.92
Vitamin Water	4.38	0.35	.91

RESULTS

Each participant was exposed to celebrity endorsement tweets from two celebrity endorsers (one high PSR, one low PSR) and saw explicit or implicit endorsements for 2 of 4 different products. Therefore, the researchers averaged celebrity endorser-related variables such as level of PSR, wishful identification, and source credibility across the two celebrity endorsers that participants were exposed to. Whereas product-related variables such as attitudes toward the endorsed product, purchasing intent, product loyalty, and product use were averaged across the two products participants viewed within the celebrity endorsement tweets (see Table 2 for means and standard deviations by endorsement conditions).

Manipulation Check

An ANOVA was performed to check if participants exposed to celebrity endorsers thought to have high or low PSR value reported perceiving having high or low perceptions of PSR toward these endorsers respectively following exposure to their tweeted product endorsements. Posttest perception of PSR toward the celebrity endorser was the dependent variable, with celebrity endorser condition (high PSR endorser, low PSR endorser) as the independent factor. The overall model was significant, $F(1, 344) = 290.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .458$. Those who viewed tweets from high PSR celebrity endorsers reported perceiving higher levels of PSR toward the endorser ($M = 5.15$, $SD = .87$) than those exposed to low PSR endorsers ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.11$). Thus, the manipulation was successful.

Test of Hypotheses

A series of multiple regressions and a MANCOVA were conducted to test the different hypotheses in this study. Given that participants' brand/product loyalty and product use frequency likely impact both brand/product attitudes and purchase intentions, brand loyalty and product use frequency were controlled for as covariates in all analyses. Pretest measures for matching posttest outcome measures were also controlled for as covariates. Each hypothesis will now be discussed in turn (see Table 4 at the end of this section for a summary of the results of the hypotheses).

Hypothesis One. Based on previous research examining the impact of various source effects (e.g., attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness) on celebrity endorsement

effectiveness, it was predicted that perceived source credibility of endorsers would be positively related to product attitudes and product purchasing intent. Two regression models were tested, and results overall provide partial support for H1. Attitudes toward the endorsed product (H1a) regressed onto perceived source credibility of the endorser yielded a significant result, $\beta = .20$, $t = 4.16$, $p < .001$, partial $r = .22$. However, purchase intent (H1b) regressed onto perceived source credibility of the endorser was not significant, $\beta = .06$, $t = 1.63$, $p = .10$.

Hypothesis Two. As a test of the match-up hypothesis, it was expected that the greater the level of perceived endorser-product congruence, (a) the more positive the reported attitudes toward the endorsed product, and (b) the greater the intent to purchase the product. Two regression models were tested, and results supported H2a but not H2b. Attitude toward the endorsed product (H2a) was positively predicted by endorser-product congruence, $\beta = .19$, $t = 3.99$, $p < .001$, partial $r = .21$. Product purchase intent (H2b) was not significantly predicted by endorser-product congruence, $\beta = .06$, $t = 1.71$, $p = .09$.

Hypothesis Three. H3 predicted that the stronger individuals felt wishful identification toward the celebrity endorsers they viewed, the greater the endorsers' impact would be on attitudes toward (a) the endorsed products and (b) intent to purchase the endorsed products. Two regression models were tested and the results provide support for both H3a and H3b. Wishful identification toward celebrity endorsers was found to be a significant positive predictor of attitudes toward the endorsed products, $\beta = .12$, $t = 2.40$, $p = .017$, partial $r = .13$, and intent to purchase the endorsed products, $\beta = .11$, $t = 2.98$, $p = .003$, partial $r = .16$.

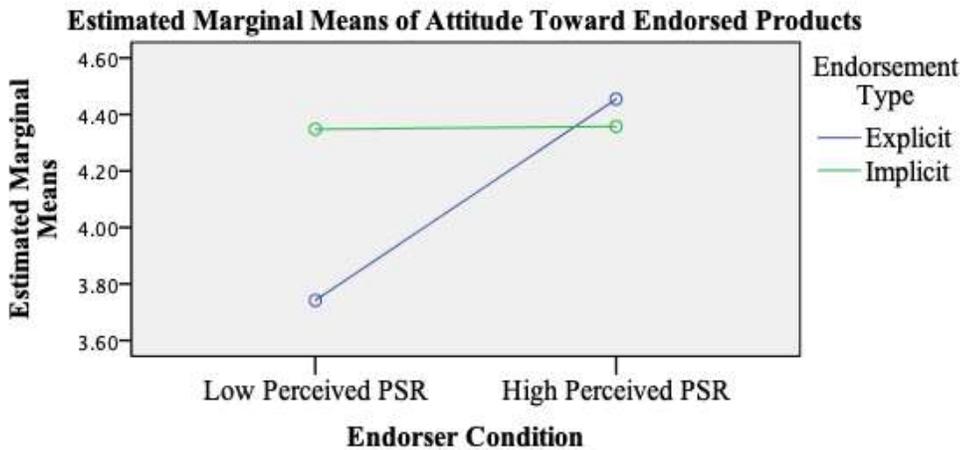
Hypothesis Four. Level of PSR with celebrity endorsers was expected to be positively related to (a) attitudes toward the endorsed product and (b) intent to purchase the endorsed product. Two regression models yielded significant results in support of H4a and H4b. Level of PSR with celebrity endorsers positively predicted participants' attitudes toward the endorsed product, $\beta = .20$, $t = 4.09$, $p < .001$, partial $r = .22$, and intent to purchase the endorsed product, $\beta = .12$, $t = 3.39$, $p = .001$, partial $r = .18$.

Hypothesis Five. An interaction effect was expected between endorser condition (high PSR endorser or low PSR endorser) and endorsement type (explicit or implicit) on (a) attitudes toward the endorsed products and (b) intentions to purchase the endorsed

products. A MANOVA was performed with endorser condition, endorsement type, and the interaction term (endorser condition x endorsement type) as independent factors, and the aforementioned outcomes as the dependent variables. The following variables were treated as covariates: product use frequency, product loyalty, perceived source credibility, endorser-product congruence, and participants' familiarity with the celebrities' Twitter activity (i.e., whether they follow the celebrity on Twitter). The multivariate result for the interaction between endorser condition and endorsement type was significant, Pillai's Trace = .08, $F(3, 336) = 9.43$, $p < .001$.

The univariate F test showed a significant interaction effect between endorser condition and endorsement type on attitudes toward endorsed products, $F(1, 338) = 12.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .026$. Inspection of the estimated marginal means, adjusted for covariates, reveal that attitude toward the endorsed product was most positive when it was explicit endorsements from high PSR celebrity endorsers (adjusted $M = 4.42$, $SE = .13$), and least positive when it was explicit endorsements from low PSR celebrity endorsers (adjusted $M = 3.70$, $SE = .13$) (see Figure 2).

As for intentions to purchase the endorsed product, there was no significant interaction between celebrity endorser condition and endorsement type, $F(1, 338) = 1.03$, $p = .31$. There were also no significant main effects for celebrity endorser condition or endorsement type on reported intentions to purchase the endorsed product. The results provide support for H5a but not H5b.



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Overall frequency of product use = 1.6842, Overall product loyalty = 2.3947, Perceived credibility of endorser = 5.0525, Overall endorser-product congruence = 4.3811, Which of the following celebrities (if any) do you follow on Twitter?-Miley Cyrus = 1.72, Which of the following celebrities do you follow on Twitter?-Jennifer Lawrence = 1.92, Justin Bieber = 1.90, Kim Kardashian = 1.81, Beyoncé = 1.79, Rihanna = 1.88, Justin Timberlake = 1.83, Bradley Cooper = 1.98

Figure 2. Interaction effect of celebrity endorser condition and endorsement type on attitudes toward endorsed products.

Table 4

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Result
H1a Source credibility → product attitudes	Support
H2b Source credibility → purchase intentions	Reject
H1a Endorser product congruence → product attitudes	Support
H2b Endorser product congruence → purchase intentions	Reject
H3a Wishful identification → product attitudes	Support
H3b Wishful identification → purchase intentions	Support
H4a PSR → product attitudes	Support
H4b PSR → purchase intentions	Support
H5a Endorser condition x endorser type → product attitudes	Support
H5b Endorser condition x endorser type → purchase intentions	Reject

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the research on celebrity endorsements by examining how the relationship between the celebrity endorser and his or her target audience and the explicitness of the endorsement impacts attitudes toward the product and intention to purchase. The purpose of this study was threefold. First, it aimed to test if the traditional tenants of marketing hold in a social media context. This goal was pursued in response to Lueck's (2015) call for additional research on whether source credibility research extends to social media advertising. Second, this study examined whether the relationship between a celebrity endorser and his or her audience impacts endorsement effectiveness. Third, this study sought to determine how advertisement disclosure interacted with PSR to see if these variables had an effect on product attitudes and purchase intentions. The study's results offer both theoretical and practical implications for the use of celebrity endorsers on social media.

Theoretical Implications

With respect to the study's first goal, the results are somewhat consistent with much of what has been found regarding the effects of both source credibility and endorser-product congruence on celebrity endorsement effectiveness within the traditional media context. In this study of celebrity endorsements within a social media context, while credibility (H1a) and congruence (H1b) positively and significantly impacted consumers' attitudes toward products; they (H1b and H2b respectively) did not significantly influence intention to purchase the products. In traditional mass media marketing research, source credibility positively influences brand attitudes (e.g., Till, Stanley, & Priluck, 2008) and purchase intentions (Sternthal et al., 1978). Moreover, traditional marketing studies also support the influence of endorser-congruence (i.e., the matchup hypothesis) on attitudes and intentions to purchase products (e.g., Batra & Homer, 2004; Erdogan & Baker, 2000; Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2000). It is worth noting social media research scholars are finding mixed results for traditional models of celebrity endorsement effectiveness. For instance, while some social media studies find support for the source credibility model on attitudes and purchase intentions (Crutchfield, 2010; Wei & Lu, 2013), others, like Gong and Li (2017) reported that celebrity source credibility was not related to attitudes toward

the product or purchase intentions. While, the match-up hypothesis has less research in this area, Phua et al. (2018) found congruence was positively associated with product attitudes and usage intentions.

One explanation why source credibility and endorser-product congruence were significant predictors of product attitudes, but not purchase intentions may be due to our participants' demographics. We recruited college students between 18-25 to participate in this study, and some products featured in our tweets may not be as personally relevant for them compared to other age groups (e.g., Proactiv may be more relevant for adolescents) or be perceived as an unnecessary cost (e.g., students are likely to already have access to sports drinks and workout facilities on campus without having to spend extra money). Additionally, purchase intention is determined by more than just source characteristics or source-product congruence (e.g., need for the product, price, etc.) which may need to be considered when testing purchase intention.

Concerning the second aim, this study demonstrates the potential influence of media-user figure relationships on product attitudes and intentions to purchase endorsed products. Wishful identification positively influenced both attitudes toward (H3a) and intentions to purchase (H3b) the endorsed product. These results fall in line with the limited research on wishful identification and endorsement effectiveness (e.g., Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Importantly, this study provides tentative support of the causal influence of wishful identification on endorsement effectiveness (as most research found in this area was not experimental while this study used an experimental design).

Similar to the wishful identification outcomes, PSR with a celebrity positively impacted attitudes toward (H4a) and intentions to purchase (H4b) the endorsed product. This result builds on previous research that ties parasocial phenomena to effective celebrity endorsement. Parasocial theory argues that PSRs provide a sense of intimacy and trust, like a friendship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The theory has primarily been examined within the context of traditional media (i.e., mainly television), where the bond felt between the audience and the media figure is at a distance, however social media allows users to feel even closer to their favorite celebrities because they get real-time information from a celebrity about his or her daily life. Further, personal self-disclosures made by celebrities often appears in the same social media feed as a consumer's real

friends and family, further blurring the lines between seeing the celebrity as a friend versus a stranger, potentially strengthening that feeling of friendship with the celebrity. So, when a celebrity “friend” shares information about a product, it could feel like eWOM rather than an advertisement.

In regard to the third goal, results found that while the interactive effects of endorser PSR and endorsement type had a positive, significant impact on attitudes toward endorsed products (H5a), they did not significantly influence product purchase intentions (H5b). Examination of the means indicate that overall, purchase intentions were relatively low among all individuals ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.38$ on a 7-point scale), regardless of whether the product endorsements were from high or low PSR celebrity endorsers, or whether the endorsements were implicit or explicit in nature. A potential explanation may be due to the fact that these ads were short (due to the length restriction of Twitter posts) and so it may be difficult to get individuals to act on their positive attitudes toward the endorsed product without the use of more extensive advertising.

The results show that product attitudes are most positive when a consumer has a high PSR with an endorser and an explicit disclosure. Interestingly, explicit disclosures from high PSR celebrities resulted in more positive brand attitudes than implicit disclosures from high PSR celebrities. While, explicit disclosures from low PSR celebrities resulted in more negative brand attitudes than implicit disclosures from low PSR celebrities. These findings are significant in highlighting the important role PSR plays in impacting brand attitudes. The low PSR results support past literature (e.g., Boerman et al., 2017) which found that consumers are more critical and distrusting of celebrities’ posts that have explicit endorsements. Chung and Cho (2017) found that consumers’ quality and depth of relationships with celebrity endorsers impact their perception of trustworthiness. So perhaps, the PSR level and endorsement explicitness interaction results are impacted by this trust between a consumer and celebrity. When a consumer has a high PSR with a celebrity, they trust him or her more and that leads them to overlook negative information (e.g., he or she was paid to talk about a product). Whereas, in a low PSR interaction, that trust is less so an explicit advertisement leads to more critical evaluation and lower product attitudes.

Practical Implications

This study broadens our understanding of celebrity endorsements found within social media, which is rising in popularity among celebrities and marketers as a new venue for brand advertising. Not only are celebrities endorsing different companies' brands or products on their social media feeds, they are also now often found endorsing their own brand or product lines (Lueck, 2015). Social media poses unique advantages because of its niche group of followers, real-time nature, and sense of intimacy celebrities can generate with fans.

In regard to the first aim of the study, the results indicate that the tenets traditional mass media advertising research are partially supported. Source credibility and the match-up hypotheses influence product attitudes (although, in this study, they did not impact purchase intentions). From a practical standpoint, advertisers still need to select endorsers who are perceived as credible by the audience and align with the marketed product. Brands should be selective in choosing the "right" celebrity for their target consumer and promoted product. However, the source for the product promotion is not the only factor marketers should consider.

Concerning the second goal of the study, the results supports that if marketers consider media figure-user relationships when selecting which celebrity to pay to tweet about their products or brand, they could be more effective in their branding objectives. In this study, the bonds between users and celebrities impacted purchase intentions, while source credibility and congruence did not. It is not just about whether a consumer views the celebrity as credible or perceives celebrity-product congruence, but do they either aspire to be like the celebrity (wishful identification) or feel like they are friends with that celebrity (PSR).

Building on the research on PSR and celebrity endorsements on social media, this study's third goal was to understand how PSR and endorsement explicitness impacted attitudes and intentions. The largest effects on participants' responses to celebrity endorsement disclosures were related to the extent to which people reported a high degree of PSR with the celebrity endorser. These effects have important implications for marketers seeking celebrities or influences to help endorse their products or brands. Specifically, marketers need to be wary of using endorsers who are likely to hold low PSR

value (e.g., celebrities that are consumers do not feel an “intimacy with” despite being popular and/or attractive). While marketers may be intrigued by the notoriety and attention such celebrities bring, they can also be detrimental to the image or brand if used as endorsers.

This area of research is important because it can provide practical guidelines to advertisers about how to craft social media endorsement disclosures to maximize persuasiveness while following FTC guidelines. While many celebrities and brands often try to hide that a post is an endorsement by leaving off a disclosure indication, this study’s results indicate that product attitudes are most positive when a consumer has a high PSR with an endorser, an explicit disclosure. So, advertisers should choose a high PSR celebrity as an endorser and make that endorsement explicit and those decisions positively impact product attitudes. Both H4a and H5a indicate that brands who want to enhance attitudes should not choose celebrities with low PSRs as endorsers. However, if brand does use those types of endorsers, the celebrities should make implicit advertisement disclosures as explicit disclosures from low PSR endorsers leads to low product attitudes. However, the authors ultimately discourage this choice as the lack of disclosure does not follow FTC guidelines and can lead to lawsuits.

Limitations and Future Directions

Because this study explored a relatively new area of celebrity endorsements, there are a few limitations worth pointing out. First, it may be the impact of PSR on celebrity endorsement effectiveness only works within the social media environment, but is less impactful in other media contexts involving greater social distance between media users and media figures such as on television or radio. Also, the present study looked at the impact of media figure-user relationships on brand perceptions from a cross-sectional standpoint. Future studies could examine this phenomenon using longitudinal designs (e.g., a study could ask participants to follow a specific celebrity they wishfully identify or have a strong parasocial relationship with for a certain period of time). As time passes, researchers could measure the development of the media figure-user relationship, the celebrity’s actual tweeted endorsements, and celebrity’s persuasive impact on the participant’s recall, perceptions of, and subsequent actions toward the endorsed brand.

Continuing research in the area may validate the potential for highly targeted, marketing/advertising at a relatively inexpensive cost via social media.

Future studies should also consider studying the differences between wishful identification and PSR in the context of celebrity endorsements on social media. While the results of this study found support for their positive impact on product attitudes and purchase intentions, how do they work differently? Future research might want to consider whether the two media-user figure relationships differ in regard to aspirational products or specific audiences.

In closing, this study provides an updated look at the effects of celebrity endorsements on people's attitudes and purchase intentions toward endorsed products, within the social media context rather than the traditional media context (e.g., TV, radio, magazines). The continued growth of different social media platforms such as Tumblr, Instagram, and Snapchat as avenues used by companies to advertise their products to consumers, and build relationships with their audience base through the use of conventional and new media celebrity endorsers mean more research is warranted to be carried out in this area.

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