Lynn Sudbury

Peter Simcock

Rachel Sinclair

Liverpool John Moores University

98 Mount Pleasant

Liverpool L3 5UZ

United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)151 231 3671

Email: l.sudbury@ljmu.ac.uk

p.j.simcock@ljmu.ac.uk

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE LOOKING AT? CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT, COGNITIVE AGE, AND THE OLDER FEMALE CONSUMER

Abstract

The well documented ageing of the population is providing organisations with a range of practical marketing opportunities, many of which are under-explored. Moreover, although there is a growing body of empirically based research into the behaviours of older adults, much of this is American, and there are still major research gaps. This paper reports a work in progress of an empirical study designed to examine one such research gap: that of older adults' (50+) attitudes toward celebrity endorsement, with a focus on self-perceived, rather than solely chronological, age.

Key Words

Older Consumers; Self-Perceived Age; Cognitive Age; Celebrity Endorsement

Introduction

Possibly the greatest challenge facing the nations of the developed world is the ageing of their populations. This is a global phenomenon, unprecedented in human history, and probably irreversible (United Nations 2005). Although it is predicted that an ageing population will have profound structural effects on western societies and economies in the second half of the 21st century (McKinsey 2007), in the short to medium term they represent a major opportunity to marketers across a range of industries. Increasingly, if a little belatedly, many organisations are becoming aware

of, and exploiting, these opportunities, and there is also increasing interest amongst marketing academics in this demographic as a whole (Hanks 2001). This 'new old' segment, first predicted by Neugarten in 1974, defies all the negative stereotypes of poverty, ill-health and social isolation historically associated with older people, and for many – practitioners and marketing academics alike – the demographic remains very much *terra incognita*. Although there is a growing corpus of empirically based work from marketing academics, especially in the United States, much more needs to be done in order to gain valuable insights into all aspects of their consumer behaviour. The study proposed here, the first of its kind in the Anglophone world, will contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to older consumers by examining the effects of celebrity endorsement on females aged over 50 in the United Kingdom.

Celebrity Endorsement

Although there is nothing new about celebrity endorsement, with Kaikati (1987) having traced it back to as early as 1864, its use has become increasingly common, with around one in five advertisements in the UK and the USA employing celebrities to communicate the advertisers' message (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995; Mintel 2005). The topic has proven to be fertile ground for academic research, attracting two major literature reviews (Kaikati 1987; Erdogan 1999) and although there still remains room for discussion and disagreement, there is at least a consensus on the research agenda. This section provides a brief overview of that agenda.

The first question, somewhat obviously, is why do so many companies resort to celebrity endorsement as a major advertising strategy? The short answer, of course, is - when done correctly - it works, gaining audience attention, achieving high rates of recall, improving attitudes towards the brand and intention to purchase, and impacting positively on profits (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995; Atkin and Block 1983; Farrell et al 2000; Friedman and Friedman 1979; Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983). This in turn gives rise to the second question, which is, how, exactly, does successful celebrity endorsement 'work'?

Kelman (1961) was one of the earliest writers on the power of the endorser generally, and his model provides a basis for understanding the influence of the celebrity in advertising. He proposed that endorser effectiveness lay in the attributes of credibility (knowledge, expertise, objectivity), attractiveness (similarity, familiarity, physical attractiveness, likeability), and power (authority, the ability to reward or punish), which lead to internalization, identification and – admittedly somewhat rarely - compliance in the mind of the target audience. Although Kelman's work is still important for much of what we know about celebrity endorsement, later writers have focused more on the meaning of celebrity itself to explain its effectiveness in advertising. For example, after an extensive review of the literature, Langmeyer and Walker (1991) concluded that "…celebrity endorsers embody symbolic meanings; meanings elicited by a person, place or thing that go beyond those directly contained in themselves… (they)…pass on their symbolic meanings and acquired associations to the products they endorse… (these)…symbolic meanings are passed on to the consumer; the product is uniquely differentiated and its perceived value is infinitely advanced" (p. 364).

However, celebrity *per se* is not enough to guarantee a successful advertising campaign, as the numerous failures documented in the literature attest (Byrne, Whitehead and Breen 2003; Till and Busler 1998). Indeed, Walker, Langmeyer and Langmeyer (1992) explicitly warn that celebrities and products are both complex entities that have many attributes, and thus there is always a risk of "the transference of unintended meanings to a product through a celebrity endorsement" (p. 41). Therefore much research into celebrity endorsement has focused on what cognitive and affective cues viewers take from such an advertisement, and how these are processed (for example, Kahle and Homer 1985; McCracken 1989; Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983; Till 1998). One model to emerge from this research is the 'match-up hypothesis', first postulated by Kanungo and Pang (1973) in an experiment using non-celebrity endorsers. The match-up hypothesis suggests that to be effective, the message communicated by a celebrity's image should match the message about the product. The model has been given theoretical underpinnings in social adaptation theory (Kahle and Homer, 1985), meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989) and associative learning (Till 1998), and has since become the dominant paradigm in

much of the subsequent empirical research into celebrity endorsement (for example Till and Busler 1998; Walker, Langmeyer and Langmeyer 1992).

The match-up hypothesis is clearly demonstrated in Farrell et al's (2000) case study of three of Tiger Woods' endorsements – Fortune Brands, parent company of Titleist, the golf equipment manufacturer, American Express, and Nike. They found no significant relationship between the golfer's match performance and Fortune Brands' and American Express' overall market performance. The former they attribute to Titleist being a small contributor to Fortune Brands' overall cash flow; the latter, they suggest, illustrates Tiger Woods' lack of credibility as an endorser of financial services. However, they found a positive and significant impact on Nike's excess returns when Woods performed well, clearly indicating his authority and expertise in the eyes of the consumer when it came to endorsing sporting apparel.

Farrell et al's (2000) work highlights another aspect of celebrity endorsement that remains unresolved and still attracts much research in the area, and that is what specific attribute – attractiveness or credibility – provides the opportunity for a better fit between endorser and product? As McCracken (1989, p. 310) observed '…the source credibility and the source attractiveness models inform research and reflection on the topic of celebrity endorsement', and almost twenty years later this is still very much the case, with a consensus nowhere nearer today than it was when McCracken wrote.

This brief overview of the celebrity endorsement literature is not the place to consider the merits of the two camps in any great detail, nor the subtleties of their respective arguments. However, to summarise the two models as succinctly as possible, proponents of source credibility (for example, Till 1998; Till and Busler 1998) maintain that the impact of an advertisement is effectively a function of the celebrity endorser's expertise (particular knowledge, experience, and skills) and trustworthiness (honesty, integrity and believability). On the other hand, champions of source attractiveness (Brumbaugh 1993; Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990) contend that it is an endorser's attractiveness (construed as similarity between the source and receiver, familiarity through media exposure, likeability, and physical attractiveness) that creates advertising effectiveness. The source attractiveness model has sometimes been reduced to the simplistic notion that 'beauty sells', but even physical beauty has

been shown to be a complex, multi-faceted phenomena (Brumbaugh 1993; Langmeyer and Shank 1995). In sum, then, it might be concluded that the exact 'mechanism' of celebrity endorsement is still imperfectly understood, with the equivocal findings from research into both source credibility and attractiveness providing fertile ground for debate into the foreseeable future.

Celebrity endorsement and the older consumer

One area largely absent from the research agenda on celebrity endorsement is how it might impact on the older consumer. The vast majority of empirical studies in the area show that overwhelmingly the participants in the research were young (i.e. under thirty years of age) and often, although not invariably, college students. This is not to criticise such studies in any way. Indeed, given that the majority of advertising in the Anglophone world is aimed at younger consumers, with older models in general and older female models in particular vastly under-represented in both print and television advertising (Simcock and Sudbury, 2006), the use of younger participants in research makes perfect sense. This is best articulated by O'Donohoe (1997, p. 239) who observes that '(t)he challenge which this sophisticated, cynical and important age-group poses to advertisers are (*sic*) well documented…The relationship between young adults and advertising is also interesting for social and cultural reasons. Advertising deals in images of self-identity and social relationships…and these themes echo the serious concerns of many young adults at a time often associated with great personal, social and occupational upheaval.' Although this is undoubtedly the case, marketers ignore the older consumer at their peril, given their increasing levels of personal disposable income, and their willingness to spend it.

There are some exceptions to this youth orientation. Dubow (1995) made age a central focus of his study when testing relative recall rates by younger and older consumers for a non-celebrity endorsed, age neutral, confectionery product. His research showed that both recall rates and recognition declined with age, and he further presented secondary industry data showing that in some cases the under-18 age group had almost twice the advertising recognition rates than those in the 55 plus age range, which arguably only reinforced advertisers' antipathy towards older consumers. Atkin

and Block's (1983) study of celebrity endorsement showed that although the use of a celebrity to endorse alcohol was highly effective on teenagers (who made up 71% of respondents) it had less impact on the remaining respondents, whose ages ranged from 22 to 77 years old. Tantalising as both these studies are, the inferences that can be drawn from them in regard to this study are limited. Much still remains to be discovered relating to the attitudes of older consumers towards advertising in general and, given its ubiquity, celebrity endorsement in particular. Moreover, any understanding of this segment will be all the more insightful if the focus is on self-perceived, and not merely chronological, age.

Self-perceived Age

Over a quarter of a century ago, Barak and Schiffman (1981) observed that chronological age is the most frequently used of all demographic variables to describe consumer behaviour research and segment consumer markets. Remarkably, this is still the case, despite the limitations of chronological age having long been acknowledged (Adams 1971; Heron and Chown 1967). Although chronological age may be a useful indicator of performance during early life (Jarvik 1975), ageing *per se* does not exactly coincide with chronological age (Bell 1972), and consequently homogeneity in individual lifestyles and conditions among age groups cannot be assumed. This is acknowledged in western culture in everyday parlance that recognises a number of different types of age – 'she looks young for her age', 'he's very young at heart' - and there is also a significant body of empirical work to show that the number of years one has lived is a poor indicator of ones values, attitudes, and consumer behaviour (for example, Chua, Cote and Leong 1990; Van Auken, Barry and Anderson 1993).

American studies into cognitive age among older individuals typically report differences between actual and self-perceived age to be between 8 and 12 years (Barak 1998; Barak and Rahtz 1999; Sherman, Schiffman and Mathur 2001; Van Auken and Barry 1995), and recent research has found this to be true also for older UK consumers (Sudbury 2004), although there are a number of studies conducted elsewhere that show the bias toward a youthful self-perceived age to be less pronounced (Chua, Cote and Leong 1990; Togonu-Bickerstech 1986; Uotinen 1998).

In addition to the utility of self-perceived age for segmentation and targeting (Sudbury and Simcock 2006), it is also associated with a range of consumer behaviour variables, including propensity to try new brands (Stephens 1991), fashion consciousness (Wilkes 1992), satisfaction with complaint outcomes (Dolinsky 1997), media usage (Barak and Gould 1985; Johnson 1993), and, although somewhat dated still significant for this study, attitudes to advertising (Smith and Moschis 1984). However, self-perceived age, and specifically cognitive age, and celebrity endorsement have never been brought together in empirical research.

This research therefore aims to fill a small but important gap by comparing the attitudes of consumers of different ages toward potential celebrity endorsers of different ages. In so doing, the actual and self-perceived ages of respondents will be taken into account.

Proposed Method

Six female celebrities, all of whom star in a well-know television soap opera, will be selected on the basis of their age (one from each age decade ranging from the youngest in her twenties and the oldest in her seventies) and lack of previous endorsements. Six fictitious brands, all of which are age-neural (coffee, a supermarket, pasta sauce, a high-street chemist, a car-breakdown service and a chocolate bar) will be selected. .

A self-complete questionnaire will be distributed to an age-based quota sample of females between the ages of 20 and 80. Females are chosen because, despite older female models being consistently under-represented in mainstream advertising, a disproportionate amount of celebrity endorsement in the UK centres on female orientated goods and services. Moreover, focusing solely on females will eliminate possible gender effects.

Respondents will be asked to give their perceptions of the celebrities using the Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness Scale, developed by Ohanian in 1990. This measurement tool was chosen on the basis that it

is a multi-dimensional measure that incorporates both credibility and attractiveness, and because its development closely adhered to recommended scaling procedures (Bearden and Netemeyer 1999). Respondents will also be asked to choose the celebrity they feel best matches each product, and open-ended questions will invite them to explain the rationale for their choices.

Although a variety of techniques to measure self-perceived age have evolved over the years it is the cognitive age scale (Barak and Schiffman 1981) that has had the greatest impact for marketing research, and is therefore the method chosen here. Moreover, the cognitive age scale is superior to other available instruments on the basis that it is easy to administer, easy to understand by respondents (Stephens 1991), is multidimensional, and has been shown to be a valid instrument (Van Auken, Barry and Anderson 1993; Van Auken and Barry 1995). Additionally, respondents will be asked to state their actual age, in years.

Proposed Data Analysis

The quantitative data will be analysed using SPSS for windows, whilst the qualitative data will be analysed using NuDist Nvivo. Specifically, older (50+) consumers' perceptions of the celebrity endorsers will be compared to younger (under 50) on the basis of both chronological and cognitive age, whilst the qualitative data will be examined specifically for age-related comments which can be used to shed light on the quantitative findings. Whether or not age (self-perceived or actual) has anything to do with celebrity endorsement preferences is an interesting research question, but the research project will not be worthless even if it is found that age is not an important factor. Rather, whether age-related or not, those underlying reasons for older consumers' celebrity choices will add potentially valuable and useful knowledge on how to reach this important market segment with a popular advertising strategy.

References

Adams, D. L. (1971) 'Correlates of Satisfaction Among the Elderly.' *The Gerontologist,* 11 (II) 64-68

Agrawal, J. and Kamakura, W. A., (1995) 'The economic worth of celebrity endorsements: an event study analysis.' *Journal of Marketing,* 59 (3) 56-62

Atkin, C. and Block, M., (1983) 'Effectiveness of celebrity endorsers.' *Journal of Advertising Research,* 23 (2) 57-61

Barak, B. (1998) 'Inner-Ages Of Middle-Aged Prime-Lifers.' *International Journal of Aging and Human Development,* 46 (3) 189-228

Barak, B. and Gould, S. (1985) 'Alternative Age Measures: A Research Agenda.' In E. C. Hirschman & M. B. Holbrook (Eds.) *Advances in Consumer Research,* 12, 53-58

Barak, B. and Rahtz, D. R. (1999) 'Perceived Youth: Appraisal And Characterization.' *International Journal of Aging and Human Development,* 49 (3), 231-257

Barak, B. and Schiffman, L. G. (1981) 'Cognitive Age: A Nonchronological Age Variable.' In K. Monroe (Ed.). *Advances in Consumer Research,* 8, 602-606

Bearden, W. O. and R. G. Netemeyer (1999) *Handbook of Marketing Scales,* Sage in co-operation with the Association for Consumer Research, CA

Bell, B. (1972) 'Significance of Functional Age for Interdisciplinary and Longitudinal Research.' *Aging and Human Development,* 3 (2) 145-147

Brumbaugh, A., (1993) 'Physical attractiveness and personality in advertising: more than just a pretty face?' In L. McAlister and M. L. Rothschild (Eds). *Advances in Consumer Research,* 159-64

Byrne, A., Whitehead, M. and Breen, S. (2003) 'The naked truth of celebrity endorsement.' *British Food Journal,* 105 (4/5) 288-96

Chua, C., Cote, J. A. and Leong, S. M. (1990) 'The Antecedents of Cognitive Age' In M. E. Goldberg, G. Gorn & R. W. Pollay (Eds.) *Advances in Consumer Research,* 17, 880-885

Dolinsky, A. L. (1997) 'Elderly Patients' Satisfaction with the Outcome of Their Health Care Complaints,' *Health Care Management Review,* 22 (2) 33-40

Dubow, J. (1995) 'Advertising recognition and recall by age – including teens.' *Journal of Advertising Research,* Sept/Oct, 55-60

Erdogan, Z. B. (1999) 'Celebrity endorsement: a literature review.' *Journal of Marketing Management,* 15 (4) 291-314

Erdogan, Z. B. and Baker, M. J. (2000) 'Towards a practioner based model of selecting celebrity endorsers', *Journal of Advertising Research,* 19, 25-43

Farrell, K., Karels, G., Montfort, K. and McClatchey, C. (2000) 'Celebrity performance and endorsement value: the case of Tiger Woods.' *Managerial Finance,* 26 (7) 1-15

Friedman, H. and Friedman, L. (1979) 'Endorser effectiveness by product type.' *Journal of Advertising Research,* 19 (5) 63-71

Heron, A. and S. Chown (1967) *Age and Function,* London: J. & A. Churchill, Ltd.

Jarvik, L. F. (1975) 'Thoughts on the Psychobiology of Aging.' *American Psychologist,* 30 (May) 576-583

Johnson, R. L. (1993) 'Age and Social Activity as Correlates of Television Orientation: A Replication and Extension.' In L. McAlister and M. L. Rothschild (Eds). *Advances in Consumer Research,* 20, 257-261

Kahle, L. and Homer, P. (1985) 'Physical attractiveness of celebrity endorser: a social adaptation perspective.' *Journal of Consumer Research,* 11 (4) 954-61

Kaikati, J. (1987) 'Celebrity advertising: a review and synthesis', *International Journal of Advertising,* 6 (2) 93-105

Kamins, M. (1990) 'An investigation into the match-up-hypothesis in celebrity advertising: when beauty may be only skin deep.' *Journal of Advertising,* 19 (1) 4-13

Kanungo, R. N. and Pang, S. (1973) 'Effects of human models on perceived product quality', *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 57, 172-8

Kelman, H. (1961) 'Process of opinion change', *Public Opinion Quarterly,* 24, Winter, 57-78

Langmeyer, L. and Walker, M. (1991) 'A first step to identify the meaning in celebrity endorsers.' In R. R. Holman and M. R. Solomon (Eds.) A*dvances in Consumer Research,* 18, pp.364-71

Langmeyer, L. and Shank, M., (1994) 'Managing beauty – products and people', *Journal of Product and Brand Management,* 3 (3) 27-38

McCracken, G. (1989) 'Who is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process' *Journal of Consumer Research* 20, 536-40

Mintel (2005) *Celebrity Endorsement,* UK

McKinsey Quarterly (2007) *The Wealth of Aging Nations,* www.mckinseyquarterly.com/newsletters/chartfocus/2007_04.htm accessed 18/04/2007

Neugarten, B. L. (1974) 'Age Groups in American Society and the Rise of the Young-Old', *American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 187 (September) 187-198

O'Donohoe, S. (1997) 'Raiding the postmodern pantry: advertising intertextuality and the young adult audience.' *European Journal of Marketing,* 31 (3/4) 234-253

Ohanian, R. (1991) 'The impact of celebrity spokespersons' perceived image on consumers' intention to purchase.' *Journal of Advertising Research,* 31 (1) 46-54

Petty, R. E., J. T. Cacioppo and D. Schumann (1983) 'Central and Peripheral Routes to Advertising Effectiveness: The Moderating Role of Involvement.' *Journal of Consumer Research,* 10, 135-146

Sherman, E., Schiffman, L. G. and Mathur, A. (2001) 'The Influence of Gender on the New-Age Elderly's Consumption Orientation' *Psychology and Marketing,* 18 (10) 1073-1089

Simcock, P. and Sudbury, L. (2006) 'The Invisible Majority? Older Models in UK Television Advertising', *International Journal of Advertising*, 25 (1) 87-106

Stephens, N. (1991) 'Cognitive Age: A Useful Concept for Advertising?' *Journal of Advertising.* 20 (4) 37-48

Sudbury, Lynn (2004) 'Subjective Age Perceptions In The UK: An Empirical Study', *Quality in Ageing, Policy, Practice and Research,* 5 (1) 4-13

Sudbury, L. & Simcock, P. (2006) 'A Multivariate Segmentation Model Of The Older UK Consumer Market.' In G. Fitzsimons & V. Morwitz (Eds.) *Advances in Consumer Research*, 34, 286-287

Smith, R. B. and G. P. Moschis (1984) 'Consumer Socialization of the Elderly: An Exploratory Study' In: T. C. Kennear (Ed.) *Advances in Consumer Research,* 2, 548-52

Till, B. (1998) 'Using celebrity endorsers effectively: lessons from associative learning', *Journal of Product and Brand Management,* 7 (5) 400-09

Till, B. and Busler, M. (1998) 'Matching products with endorsers: attractiveness versus expertise', *Journal of Consumer Marketing,* 15 (6) 576-86

United Nations (2005) *World Population Ageing: 1950-2050,* www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldageing19502050/index.htm accessed 10/11/2005

Uotinen, V. (1998) 'Age Identification: A Comparison Between Finnish and North-American Cultures' *International Journal of Aging and Human Development,* 46 (2) 10-124

Van Auken, S. and Barry, T. E. (1995) 'An Assessment of the Trait Validity of Cognitive Age Measures.' *Journal of Consumer Psychology,* 4 (2) 107-132

Van Auken, S., Barry, T. E. and Anderson, R. L. (1993) 'Towards The Internal Validation of Cognitive Age Measures in Advertising Research.' *Journal of Advertising Research,* May/June, 82-84.

Walker, M., Langmeyer, L. and Langmeyer, D., (1992) 'Celebrity endorsers: do you get what you pay for?' *Journal of Services Marketing,* 6 (4) 35-42

Wilkes, R. E. (1992) 'A Structural Modeling Approach to the Measurement and Meaning of Cognitive Age.' *Journal of Consumer Research,* 19 (September) 292-301.