

## **‘Celebrity Image and the Predilection to buy: A Study of Egyptian Consumers’**

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*This paper aims to evaluate Egyptian attitudes toward celebrities in terms of their perceived image, utilizing a framework of physical attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise in relation to Apparel and cosmetics, electronics, and FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) products. This study went about the investigation by quantitative approach. An online survey was sent to Egyptians, from relatively different age groups, and from two of Egypt’s main cities: Cairo and Alexandria, in order to strategically validate the study from an Egyptian context. Participants were selected using probability sampling. Findings validate the overall source credibility effectiveness on Egyptian consumers, in terms of correlations between endorsers’ credibility and their impact on predilection to buy the advocated products. This study made an appropriate contribution to understanding consumer’s perception from a North African perspective.*

**Field of Research:** Advertising

**Keywords:** Endorsement, celebrity, credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness, purchase intention, brands, consumers, perception, advertising, marketing, management, Egypt, apparel, cosmetics, electronics, FMCG

### **1. Introduction**

Endorsement strategies are regarded amongst the most popular communication strategies in the 21st century, where they are considered mostly successful for product categories, like fashion, perfumes and cosmetics, as those are interrelated with one’s image and identity (Raluca, 2012). Gradual growth of the usage of celebrity endorsements till the 21st century illustrates its importance, and effects on marketing (Raluca, 2012; Ohanian, 1991). Celebrity endorsements constitute 25% of advertisements in both the United Kingdom and the United States, and 75% in Korea and Japan (Carroll, 2009; Um and Lee, 2015).

In the midst of the current marketing and media clutter, organizations face harder time getting noticed and as an attempt to stand out they pay celebrities to endorse and promote their products (Freeman and Chen, 2015; Ilicic, Baxter and Kulczynski, 2015). The trending use of celebrity endorsements mainly revolves around their influential impact on consumers’ perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, brand recall, brand recognition and intention to purchase (Kamins, Brand, Hoeke and Moe, 1989; Hsu and McDonald, 2002; Biswas, Biswas and Das, 2006). This is mainly aroused by the identification of the audience with the celebrities, who transfer their image to the product creating a brand persona and enhancing the intention to purchase the brand and act positively towards it (Suki, 2014).

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Consumers aspire to celebrities' lifestyles and image, and hence carefully integrate selected aspects related to their aspired celebrities, in order to reflect their own image (Raluca, 2012; Muda, Musa, Mohamed and Borhan, 2014).

Ilicic and Webster (2015) argue that brand managers and marketers tend to facilitate consumers' decision-making and enhance their purchasing intention by understanding how "consumers acquire personally relevant meanings from brands" and "actively identify personal, social and cultural meaning" in the celebrity images (Ilicic and Webster, 2015, p. 164). These associations are the result of links between consumer experiences with the brand; such as celebrity' featured advertisements, other brands they endorse, and experiences and points of contact with the endorsers themselves; such as social media, autograph signing and fan clubs (Keller, 1993; Ilicic and Webster, 2015). The development of social media and reality TV enabled more communication between consumers and celebrities (Chung and Cho, 2014). Contextually, Egypt is considered a leader in media production amongst the Arab world, which is the reason behind other Arab countries understanding its dialect (Abdulla, 2014). The Egyptian media underwent some major changes after the Arab Spring, and the Revolution in 2011 (Abdulla, 2014; New York Times, 2011). As reported by New York Times (2011), the industry witnessed more freedom and autonomy leading to an introduction of new channels, more programs and advertisements. Concerning advertisements, Keenan and Yeni (2003, p.114) argue that "the Egyptian television practice of airing ads in large blocks, sometimes lasting 15 to 20 min, as opposed to the short commercial breaks of Western TV".

Therefore, the following study aims to examine celebrity image perception and effectiveness according to Ohanian's (1991) framework in the Egyptian context as empirical findings of this context have been extensively carried out in western countries, with a dearth when it comes to Arab countries. The paper tackles the sub elements of the framework: Attractiveness, Trustworthiness and Expertise, and their effectiveness on the Egyptian consumers and their predilection to buy.

## **1.1. Objectives**

- To examine the perceived credibility of endorsers, in terms of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise.
- To examine the effectiveness of endorsements on the consumers predilection to buy the advocated product.
- To examine the effectiveness of Celebrity and Endorsement Characteristics on the predilection to buy.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Defining Celebrity and Celebrity Endorsement**

According to the most recent definitions, by Um and Lee (2015, p. 33) celebrities are “people who command public recognition and possess distinctive attributes such as attractiveness and trustworthiness”. Celebrities are “not only the usual movie and television stars, but also individuals from the world of sport, politics, business, art, and the military” (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). Those in turn represent a defined persona and an identity attached with communicated capabilities, activities and characteristics that help form a specific reputation (Pringle, 2004).

A review of the current literature defines celebrity endorsements as “a partnership between a human brand and a corporate brand to communicate the merits of the corporate brand or its products and foster positive consumer attitudes” (Zamudio, 2015, p. 2-3) where a symbiosis of benefits exists. Thomson (2006) defines a human brand as “any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts.” As celebrity endorsements contribute to the brand equity building, awareness, recall and consumers’ predilection to buy, organisations are expected to offer gifts and amass an exposure to create a matching value (Zamudio, 2015; Thomson, 2006).

In order to add value to the brand communication and impact the consumers, the image transfer process is essential as it reflects the credibility of the endorser, and substantially influences the purchase intention (McCracken, 1989; Ilicic and Webster, 2015).

### **2.2. Ohanian Framework**

The proposed celebrity endorsers’ credibility scale by Ohanian (1991); underpinning expertise, trustworthiness, physical attractiveness of the celebrity; helps form closer connections between some credible popular endorsers and the positive attitudes formed towards the brand (Pornpitakpan, 2003). Consequently, source credibility is “generally positively associated with enhanced brand information recall, and endorsed brand evaluations, as well as consumer-based brand equity” (Dwivedi, Johnson and McDonald, 2015, p. 450). The source credibility model highlights the importance of the endorsers’ positive characteristics in impacting the consumers’ acceptance and trust of the message. However, the more the celebrity is endorsing different products, the less credible consumers perceive him or her (Klaus and Bailey, 2008).

Kamins et al. (1989) suggest that the type of product mediates the overall effectiveness of celebrity endorsements and celebrity spokespersons. In that sense, differentiating between high and low involvement products is essential

(Roozen; 2008, Kizer, 2014). Roozen (2008) argues that labeling products as high or low involving, refers to consumers' risk-perception of the purchase decision, where the more risky, the higher involving. Beauty products are identified as low involvement products and laptops and electronics as high involving (Ibid). This study will closely examine endorsements of both product types; low involvement products such as cosmetics, fast moving consumer goods and fast food, and high involving such as jewelry, electronics and white goods.

This paper examines the validation of Ohanian (1991) conceptualized framework of source credibility, and its three main elements of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness, from an Egyptian stance. Therefore, the next section tackles each element of Ohanian (1991) source credibility model.

### **2.2.1. Expertise**

According to Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953) as cited by Ohanian (1990) and Suki (2014), expertise as a characteristic of credibility towards the brand image, is an indication of how valid the celebrity's knowledge about the product is. The expertise dimension is referred to as "authoritativeness, competence, expertness, or qualification" (McCroskey, 1966; Whitehead, 1968; Applbaum and Anatol, 1972; Berlo, Lemert and Mertz, 1969; as cited by Ohanian 1990, p. 42) and uses adjectives such as "trained-untrained, informed-uninformed, and educated-uneducated" to measure it (Ohanian, 1990, p. 42). Ilicic and Webster, (2015; p. 176) argues that a certain "appropriate 'fit' between the celebrity and product brand" is required in order for consumers to perceive endorsers as experts of the advocated product, and tend to respond to authentic, attractive, successful, and expert celebrities. This results from celebrities reflecting, "a sense of inner harmony, accomplishment and relationship they feel with the brand" (Ilicic and Webster, 2015; p. 180).

### **2.2.2. Trustworthiness**

Ohanian (1991) and Suki (2014) frame the characteristic of trustworthiness around affinity and honesty of celebrities as perceived by the audience. According to Hovland *et al.* (1953), as cited by Muda *et al.* (2014, p. 13), trustworthiness is defined as "the degree of consumer's confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions she or he considers most valid". Lord and Putrevu (2009, p. 3), list the elements of trustworthiness as "dependability, honesty, trust, reliability, and sincerity" and argue its significance in impacting the consumer perception in regards of source credibility. This can be attained by maintaining a positive celebrity image and reputation, and by being credible seen using the advocated brand (Muda *et. al.*, 2014). The advertisement must be "believable and sustained" and "look genuine and not exaggerated" (Muda *et al.*, 2014, p. 18). Ilicic and Webster (2015) suggest that trustworthiness is an outcome of celebrities' success and expertise that leads to making consumers more comfortable in their predilection to buy, as they enable "the creation and formation

of a relationship” and “a sense of accomplishment” (Ilicic and Webster, 2015, p. 177).

### **2.2.3. Physical Attractiveness**

Ohanian (1991) suggests that this attribute is an influential dimension of credibility. Suki (2014) extends on this by listing some underpinnings of attractiveness that help form audience stereotypes or first judgments, which are “weight, height and facial beauty” (Suki, 2014, p. 229). Contextually, Ohanian (1990) argues that, attractiveness could be defined in regards to both, facial and physical contexts. According to consumers’ ratings of the previous attributes, celebrity endorsers get variant labels, such as “the adjectives ‘attractive’, ‘classy’, ‘handsome/beautiful’, ‘elegant’ and ‘sexy’” (Suki, 2014, p. 229). Consequently, more consumers perceive endorsers as attractive, with rising brand image (McCracken, 1989; Seno and Lukas, 2007). However, this correlation is positively related to the presence of Image Fit, and congruence between the product/service and its endorser (Suki, 2014; Pornpitakpan, 2013). According to Kizer (2014) and Raluca (2012) attractive celebrity endorsers tend to be effective for certain product categories, which are attractive and conform with one’s image and identity, such as fashion, perfumes and cosmetics. In that sense, Eisend and Langner (2010) argue that attractiveness’ effectiveness is more associated with transformational products than informational products. Santana and Palacio (2013, p. 145), argue that attractive celebrities are more effective endorsing beauty products than unattractive celebrities, as “the spokesperson’s image is congruent with the image of the product”.

## **3. Methodology**

As the literature suggests adopting a deductive reasoning approach, and as the research aims and objective require measuring the consumers’ responses statistically to validate Ohanian (1991) framework, and based on a pre-defined framework with the purpose to examine its validity in the Egyptian context, a deductive quantitative research strategy is appropriate, employing a positivistic epistemological philosophy, as well as an objective ontological stance, as suggested by Bryman (2012) and Hyde (2000). In that light, the data collection method used was an online questionnaire to statistically measure source credibility’s effectiveness on the predilection to buy.

Participants of the questionnaire were selected using probability sampling, mainly in terms of recent interaction with the examined product categories. Out of 103 participants undertaking the questionnaire, 48 responses are valid, where 25 respondents are females, and 23 are males. Concerning the questionnaire, it follows the framework of Suki (2014) and Ohanian (1991), where the first part includes questions relating to simple biographical data (gender, age, level of education, etc.). The second part pertains questions regarding evaluations of the source’s attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, after exposure to advertisements and participants’ predilection to buy. The multi-item questionnaire

is designed around a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

This research was designed to validate Ohanian's (1991) source credibility framework, in the Egyptian context, in terms of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise and discuss issues concerning the nature of endorsement as well as endorser. Having measured several aspects, via the web questionnaire and SPSS analysis, an interpretation of findings interwoven with theories from the extant literature, acts in line with the validation objective from an Egyptian perspective.

As stated in the literature review, many researchers, Ohanian (1990:91); Suki (2014); Pornpitakpan (2003), highlighted the source credibility effectiveness comprising of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, on consumers' predilection to buy the advocated product. Santana and Palacio (2013) argued that the purchase decision is moderated by a number of factors, which will be illustrated in the following sections, each according to the three components of the source credibility model.

### **4.1. Type of Products**

Overall, the questionnaire examined the consumers' perception of source credibility and their predilection to buy, in terms of three product categories. First, apparel and cosmetics will be discussed, second, FMCG and third, electronics including white goods; which will be broken down according to their function, low versus high-involvement.

#### **A. Low vs. High Involvement Products**

This study found out that, low involvement products such as make up and fast moving consumer goods generate higher frequencies of predilection to buy the advocated product, where a significance of Trustworthiness and Expertise overrides that of attractiveness. The 'Chipsy' crisps advertisement endorsed by Ahmed Helmy, an Egyptian actor and comedian, illustrates the predilection to buy the product to be impacted by Trustworthiness and Expertise, rather than Attractiveness. This supports the findings of Santana and Palacio (2013) that attractiveness alone, does not guarantee effective endorsements and there are a number of moderators for this effectiveness. However, the study implicates that the Make Up endorsement by Scarlett Johansson in terms of the predilection to buy in consequence of attractiveness, generated a frequency of 30.6% agreement, while expertise, generated a frequency of 36.7% agreement. However, conflicting with Santana and Palacio's (2013) argument- that attractive celebrities with an image fit with the endorsed beauty products are more effective

endorsers- attractiveness and the predilection to buy showed a non-significant (2-tailed) Pearson correlation.

## **B. Celebrity and Endorsement Characteristics**

The extant literature shows many angles of celebrity endorsers' effectiveness, some researchers cover the credibility elements, attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise (Ohanian, 1990:91) from a point of view relating to cultural perceptions towards the endorser (Jaikumar and Sahay, 2015; Suki, 2014), reputation, flawed image and scandalous behaviour (Premeaux, 2005; Freeman and Chen, 2015) and other characteristics ranging from nationality, fiction character, and profession.

The latter examined by Klaus and Bailey (2008, p. 54), shows participants favouring athletes in terms of trustworthiness, where they suggest "no significant effect on attractiveness or expertise, but a significant interaction on trustworthiness" In regards to Messi's trustworthiness as an international world athlete, Egyptian participants responded with a frequency of 38.6% neutrality towards its effect on their predilection to buy according to his endorsement for KFC. The reason leading to these results could be the fact that a world athlete is promoting a fast food chain, which is not part of any athlete's diet plan. Furthermore, another cultural element impacting the endorsement's effect is the TV version of the advertisement, where Messi dared to say the slogan in Arabic with a predominant accent, and was joked about amongst young Arab Fans on Social Media (GOL, 2013).

Flawed image effectiveness, in terms of trustworthiness and attractiveness non-significance, in relation to expertise overriding effectiveness on the purchase decision, was to be measured as a research objective. In that sense, the research examined an Egyptian Actor facing a scandal recently, called Ahmed Ezz. Results showed supporting frequencies towards consumers' predilection to buy because of expertise, and not trustworthiness or attractiveness.

Finally, a cultural predilection is noted in this study, where respondents tend to favour Egyptian endorsers, especially those with international success such as Omar Sharif and Omar Samra. Highlighting the case of Omar Sharif, the international Egyptian actor, who recently passed away, and was famous for playing Bridge, the Iphone Application uses him as the endorser and names the application after him, even after his death. Contextually, the results of the questionnaire imply a strong significance amongst all credibility elements and the intention to purchase. The tables portrayed below show the high frequencies in terms of agreement to buy the product in consequence of Sharif's attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. A potential explanation is consumers' engagement in peripheral routes in consequence of their affiliation to successful Egyptian

celebrities, such as Sharif, imbuing cognitive shortcuts, which marketers could benefit from.

**Table 1: Omar Sharif Attractiveness impacting the Predilection to buy  
Frequencies: q42f**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	3	6.1	6.3	6.3
2	7	14.3	14.6	20.8
<b>Valid</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30.6</b>	31.3
	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24.5</b>	25.0
5	11	22.4	22.9	100.0
Total	48	98.0	100.0	
Missing System	1	2.0		
Total	49	100.0		

**Table 2: Omar Sharif Trustworthiness impacting the Predilection to buy  
Frequencies: q43f**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	2	4.1	4.2	4.2
2	6	12.2	12.5	16.7
<b>Valid</b>	3	15	30.6	47.9
	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>32.7</b>	81.3
5	9	18.4	18.8	100.0
Total	48	98.0	100.0	
Missing System	1	2.0		
Total	49	100.0		

**Table 3: Omar Sharif Expertise impacting the Predilection to buy  
Frequencies: q44f**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	3	6.1	6.3	6.3
2	6	12.2	12.5	18.8
<b>Valid</b>	3	12	24.5	43.8
	<b>4</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40.8</b>	85.4
5	7	14.3	14.6	100.0
Total	48	98.0	100.0	
Missing System	1	2.0		
Total	49	100.0		

## **4.2. Type of Endorsement**

Seno and Lukas (2007); and McCracken (1989), suggest that endorsements can be differentiated upon type. Seno and Lukas (2007, p.123), state, "Endorsement types can be explicit ("I endorse this product"), implicit ("I use this product"), imperative ("You should use this product"), or co-presentational (merely appearing with the product)." As the research aimed to explore the endorsement types effectiveness on the predilection to buy, a co-presentational advertisement featuring Richard Gere was examined, and proven to be not effective for Egyptian consumers. However, it is important to highlight the probable generational cohort limitation in regards of this question's response rate.

Another element of endorsements is the confusion of endorsers' overexposure to the audience by multi-endorsement for several brands (Erdogan and Baker, 2000; Zipporah and Mberia; 2014). Contextually, the Lebanese singer Nancy Ajram, endorsing Damas as examined in this study, also endorses Coca Cola, Huawei Mobile Phone, Anlene Milk, and Sony Ericsson. The responses towards Nancy Ajram's endorsement for the Jewelry brand Damas, imply this confusion as frequencies scores are similar however in contrasting directions.

Overall, the correlations between the source credibility of each endorser and its corresponding predilection to buy shows strong significance amongst all, with exception of the overexposing celebrity Nancy Ajram rating a 1 star significant correlation.

## **5. Conclusion and Implications**

The extant literature illustrates the significance of branding strategies adopting advertising strategies such as celebrity endorsements, which represent large amounts of their expenses in order to overcome the media clutter and predominantly get noticed in competition with other brands (Freeman and Chen, 2015). Therefore, in the light of the **practical** importance of this paper, it recommends the careful selection process of celebrity endorsements, and studying the target audience before initiating any endorsement. This is highly advocated as cultural differences have been recorded by Jaikumar and Sahay (2015) and Suki (2014) and evidenced by this research from an Egyptian context. In that sense, issues such as message content, means of communicating the message, and design of the message is important. Contextually, choosing the type of endorsement, the media tool, whether radio, television, magazines, billboards, guerilla advertisements or social media, and the endorser is prevalent for marketers and companies. Areas such as culture, gender differences and responses, and image fit are important in the branding strategy process for companies. Last, celebrity characteristics, like flawed image, reputation, professions, fiction character effect, and multi-endorsements and overexposure, have been evidenced in this study as important factors impacting the purchase

intention. However, concerning the **academic** importance of this paper, the empirical findings of this context have been extensively carried out in western countries, with a dearth when it comes to Arab countries, therefore by validating the Ohanian (1991) source credibility framework fills a gap of the extended literature. Nonetheless, the researcher suggests that further studies might benefit from including larger samples to test their different responses to and endorsers' perceived credibility, and its major elements and the predilection to buy. Given the study's cross-sectional nature, and the dynamic changing media and generation landscapes, longitudinal studies are recommended; as well as qualitative approaches to understand more about consumers' perceptions. To conclude, this study validates the overall source credibility effectiveness on Egyptian consumers, in terms of correlations between endorsers' credibility and their effectiveness on the predilection to buy the advocated products.

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