

**Investigating the celebrity effect: the influence of well-liked celebrities on adults' implicit and explicit responses to brands**

Martin Rowley<sup>1</sup>, Hayley Gilman<sup>1</sup> and Susan Mary Sherman<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Psychology

Keele University

Keele, ST5 5BG, U.K.

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In 2010 it was estimated that advertisements using celebrities as endorsers accounted for one-sixth of all global advertising (Shimp, 2010; Mishra, 2015) and the use of celebrity endorsement in advertising continues to rise, even though the financial costs can be high (Boeing & Marcon, 2013). There may be a number of benefits to using celebrity endorsements in advertising. Erdogan (1999) reports that celebrities can impact positively on attitudes towards brands, purchase intentions, and ad believability. Furthermore, celebrities are used across a wide range of media to help advertisements to “stand out” from competitors (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001). Research also suggests that advertisements which include celebrity endorsement can persuade consumers of the benefits of products (Cialdini, 2001) particularly when the celebrity is seen as attractive, when the celebrity's credibility is high in relation to the product (La Ferle & Choi, 2005), or both (Eisend & Langner, 2010; Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011). Historically, there seems to have been little doubt about the positive impact celebrity endorsement has on financial returns for companies (Mathur, Mathur, & Rangan, 1997) and this view continues to be shared by those charged with administering advertising budgets. Therefore, although there has been some debate about the effect of celebrity endorsement on actual purchase behaviour (Erdogan et al., 2001) companies continue to employ celebrity endorsers in an attempt to maximise profit.

The widespread use of celebrity endorsement has not been matched in the research literature by findings which explain its impact upon psychological processes nor how individual differences, for example in scepticism about advertising, might influence consumers' responses to the celebrity effect. The aim of the current study is to explore how

pairing well-liked celebrities with brands influences young adults' self-reported (explicit) and associational (implicit) attitudes to the brands. The study also examines how different forms of advertising scepticism: accuracy-based scepticism (beliefs about the accuracy and truthfulness of ads) and affect-based scepticism (general negative feelings about ads) are related to individuals' explicit and implicit responses to celebrity-paired brands.

In a recent review of international research on celebrity endorsement Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) note that celebrity attractiveness and expertise, or congruence with the brand or product being advertised, are important 'source' factors associated with effective celebrity endorsement. A number of studies have shown that attitudes towards the brand are likely to be enhanced and purchase intention increased when a celebrity is considered to be attractive and / or a good match or credible endorser for the brand (Eisend & Langner, 2010; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000; La Ferle & Choi, 2005; Till & Busler, 2000). On the other hand, findings from the limited research which has looked at the effects of celebrity liking appear mixed with positive, neutral and even negative effects of liking being reported (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). This is somewhat surprising given the assumption that most celebrities are selected for endorsement on the basis that they are well-liked by many people.

### **Psychological mechanisms underlying celebrity endorsement**

There seems to be consensus in the literature that a key process involved in celebrity endorsement is evaluative conditioning. Evaluative conditioning has been described as a form of cognitive processing through which responses to one stimulus come to be associated with a target stimulus following pairing (Fennis & Stroebe, 2015). Till and Shimp (1998) describe how, in celebrity endorsement, it is expected that consumers' positive feelings toward a celebrity will transfer automatically to the endorsed brand through a process that has been

called 'affect infusion' (Forehand & Perkins, 2005). Research has shown that repeated pairing of celebrities with brands can increase liking for the brand (Till, Stanley, & Priluck, 2008).

An important feature of this process is that its effects can be seen under conditions involving little cognitive effort. According to Kang and Herr's (2006) communication source effects model, factors associated with a celebrity are more likely lead to positive brand evaluations where consumers' motivation to process information is low. Where motivation to process information is high and consumers cannot see a relevant link between celebrity and brand they may overcorrect against perceived source bias leading to negative brand evaluations. Heath (2012) has also argued that when the potential for conscious cognitive elaboration of advertising material is high, consumers are much more likely to process material critically and therefore advertising may be less effective. Conscious reflection upon celebrity endorsement could lead consumers to become more alert to the possibility that their feelings are being manipulated by the use of a celebrity, recognise the irrelevance of the celebrity to an objective evaluation of the product, and resist the intentions of the advertiser. Overall, this would fit with findings suggesting that the use of celebrities is more effective under conditions of low involvement, where consumers have little interest or motivation to engage in deep processing of ad information. This highlights the key role of implicit (as opposed to explicit) evaluations in influencing consumers' responses to celebrity endorsement.

According to Greenwald and Banaji (1995) implicit cognitions are derived from past experiences which are unavailable for self-report or introspection, but which can have a strong influence over our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. We may not be aware of our implicit attitudes, but they are important in mediating how we feel and think about the world. Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2011) distinguish between implicit and explicit processing by

proposing that implicit evaluations are based upon the activation of simple associations in memory which result in positive or negative affective responses ('gut reaction', p62). Explicit evaluations, on the other hand, are based upon propositional processes and involve the validation of information through the application of conscious thought and logic, meaning that a high level of cognitive resource may be needed. It seems likely that the celebrity effect in advertising results mainly from the triggering of implicit, associative evaluations. If Heath's (2012) view is correct, therefore, it may be that to some degree the success of celebrity endorsement also rests upon not encouraging consumers to engage in explicit propositional evaluation of advertisements where celebrity endorsement occurs.

Research by Forehand and Perkins (2005) has shown how conscious reflection upon advertising can impact upon young adults' self-reported judgments about celebrity endorsed brands. These researchers used celebrity voiceovers in ads to check brand preferences when participants did or did not recognise the celebrity in the ad. For participants who were unable to identify the celebrity voice, their implicit and explicit brand preferences were consistent with their attitude to the celebrity (i.e. positive attitudes to the celebrity were linked to more positive explicit and implicit attitudes to the brand). In contrast, when participants recognised the celebrity voice in the ad their implicit responses to the brands were in line with their celebrity preference, but their explicit brand evaluations did not become more positive when paired with liked celebrities. Forehand and Perkins argue that participants who recognised the celebrity also recognised that the celebrity was being used to manipulate their brand judgment and as a consequence appeared to consciously 'reset' their explicit response to the brand in a negative direction. Importantly however, there was no such resetting effect for implicit judgments and implicit preferences remained in line with participants' attitude to the celebrity. These findings suggest that although conscious propositional processing might

enable adults to resist the effect of celebrity endorsement in their explicit judgments, protecting against its implicit associational effects could be far more difficult.

Recent research has suggested that in circumstances where consumers have a strong attachment to celebrities, they may not guard against the celebrity effect even in their explicit self-reported judgments. Ilicic and Webster (2014) examined the phenomenon of celebrity 'eclipsing'; situations where celebrity is the main focus of an ad to such an extent that their presence overshadows the brand itself. They found that, regardless of 'fit' between celebrity and brand, when the celebrity was the focus of the ad, participants with a weak attachment to the celebrity endorser reported more negative brand evaluations. In contrast, where participants had a strong attachment to a celebrity their brand attitudes were more positive. This suggests that even in consumers' explicit judgments of endorsed products and brands, strong liking for a celebrity can override concerns about being manipulated by advertising and suppress resistance to the celebrity effect. Therefore, we presented young adults with a series of neutrally-rated brands paired with well-liked celebrities or non-celebrities in order to test whether they resist the influence of well-liked celebrities in their explicit and implicit brand judgments and brand choices. We formulated the following hypotheses:

*H1: Participants will report more positive explicit and implicit attitudes to brands paired with well-liked liked celebrities compared with brands paired with non-celebrities.*

*H2: Participants' explicit attitudes to brands will become more positive after pairing with well-liked celebrities but not when paired with non-celebrities.*

*H3: When asked to choose their preferred brand, participants will be more likely to choose a brand previously paired with a well-liked celebrity than a brand paired with a non-celebrity.*

### **Advertising literacy and scepticism about ads**

The term advertising literacy has been used to describe the set of knowledge and skills individuals possess which allow them to guard against any unwanted effects of advertising (Boush, Friestad, & Rose, 1994). Oprea and Rozendaal (2015) have referred to this knowledge set as 'conceptual advertising literacy' (i.e. knowledge about how advertising works). Research has tended to focus upon understanding the various facets of advertising literacy and identifying how it develops in children and adolescents (e.g. Kunkel, 2010; Rozendaal, Buijzen, & Valkenberg, 2011). Traditionally there has been consensus in the literature that adult-like conceptual advertising literacy is usually achieved by the age of around 12 years. However, recent research has suggested that understanding of advertising that is embedded within non-advertising content (e.g. advergames, some web advertising) may occur later than for more distinct forms of advertising such as TV ads (Nairn & Fine, 2008; Ali, Blades, Oates, & Blumberg, 2009).

Despite the importance of conceptual understanding, Rozendaal, Oprea and Buijzen (2014) have argued that 'attitudinal advertising literacy' is more relevant in determining how individuals respond to advertising. According to these researchers attitudinal advertising literacy consists of two components: general scepticism about advertising and general affective response to advertising. Scepticism refers to the extent to which an individual accepts the accuracy and believability of advertising claims, with lower trust in the accuracy of advertising being predictive of a greater resistance to unwanted advertising effects. Research with adults (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachen, 2005), has provided some evidence that higher *accuracy-based scepticism* is related to less positive responses to advertising amongst adults, particularly for ads making informational appeals (i.e. where information is provided about the product). Consumers'

general affective response to advertising is linked to *affect-based scepticism* which refers to the extent to which an individual holds a general negative orientation towards advertising with higher negative orientation also predicting greater resistance to the influence of ads. Previous research has suggested that an individual's affective response to a specific advertising event can influence brand attitudes and purchase intention (Batra & Ray, 1986). Given the nature of contemporary advertising, much of which provides little or no product or brand information, it seems reasonable to suggest that general affect-based scepticism plays an important role in filtering its effects. There is currently no research which has examined how accuracy- and affect-based scepticism are related to explicit and implicit attitudes to brands and brand choice. This led to Research Question 1:

*RQ1: What is the relationship between accuracy-based and affect-based scepticism and explicit and implicit brand attitudes and how does this impact on brand choice when well-liked celebrities are paired with brands?*

## **Method**

### **Sample**

Participants were undergraduate psychology students from a UK university who took part in the study in return for course credit. There were 72 participants (59 female) with a mean age of 19.37 years ( $SD = 6.09$ , range 18 – 68 years).

### **Pilot Study**

To determine the celebrities to be used in the program, 17 young adults were asked to write down their favourite celebrities, with the most popular 15 celebrities across the lists then

being used in the main study. There was no preference shown to indicate that men and women like different celebrities. Although experimental stages of the study only include the four celebrities that the individual participant rates as well-liked, it was considered important to ensure that all 15 celebrities included in the study were generally considered to be well-liked, to ensure that at least four of these would be rated highly by participants. There is no clear agreement in the literature when determining how many participants are suitable for inclusion in a pilot study. Hertzog (2008) states that for piloting the appropriateness of materials to be used (e.g. assessing clarity of instructions or item wording) then a sample of 10 participants is sufficient, with Lackey and Wingate (1998) proposing that 10% of the final study size should be achieved. This study used a sample of 17 young adults to generate the materials for the study, and as such exceeds the recommendations of many papers.

## Materials

All experimental tasks were presented on a PC using a custom-built computer program. The program was custom built to incorporate an IAT designed to the parameters set by Greenwald, Nosek and Banaji (2003) and with the other (e.g. explicit, brand choice) built around it in order to automate and individualise the selection of celebrities, non-celebrities and brands. Head and shoulder images of 15 celebrities and 15 non-celebrities and fifteen colour logos for existing brands were presented at Stage 1. All images measured 75mm x 75mm. The celebrity images were selected on the basis of being those which were most popular with a pilot sample of young adults (n=17) and non-celebrity images were then matched in terms of age, gender, and facial expression. Existing brands were selected on the basis that they were likely to be familiar to UK participants without being market leaders in their field.

To assess participants' level of accuracy-based and affect-based advertising scepticism the authors adapted the short version of Rozendaal et al's. (2014) Attitudinal Literacy Scale for Children (ALS-c) to use with the sample of young adults. The scale consists of two subcomponents looking at conceptual and attitudinal advertising literacy. We expected our undergraduate participants to have adult-like conceptual understanding of advertising but wished to trial a pilot version of the conceptual advertising literacy subscale adapted for adults. However, the reliability of the scale proved to be very low (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .37$ ) and therefore no results from this scale are reported here.

We were mainly interested in the attitudinal advertising literacy component of the scale from which we presented 6 items. Three items formed the accuracy-based scepticism scale: 'How often do you think that what you see in advertisements is like things are in reality?', 'How often do you think advertisements are truthful?', 'How often do you think you can believe advertisements?' (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .68$ ). Three items were also included in the affect-based scepticism scale: 'How often do you think advertisements are stupid?', 'How often do you think advertisements are irritating?' 'How often do you think advertisements are boring?' but the latter item was subsequently omitted from the analysis to improve reliability of the scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ). Therefore, the reliability of both scepticism scales reached an acceptable level (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

#### Procedure and measures

Prior to data collection this research project was approved by the University Ethical Review Panel. Before taking part in the experimental procedure each participant completed a questionnaire assessing their level of accuracy-based and affect-based advertising scepticism. All items were scored on a four-point scale (1 = Never; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Often; 4 = Very

often) (Rozendaal et al., 2014). In the experiment itself participants were presented with brand logos simply paired with images of celebrities without overt endorsement in order to ensure they had a good chance of recognising the irrelevance of the celebrity to their brand evaluation and potentially recognise an attempt to manipulate their brand judgment. The aim, therefore, was to set up conditions where resistance to the celebrity effect was likely to occur. The procedure consisted of six stages:

**S1) Initial evaluation.** Participants were presented with images of 15 popular celebrities, 15 non-celebrities and 26 brands (10 real, 16 fake – to ensure participants were engaging with the brands and not assuming all were known) and were asked to rate their liking of each celebrity / brand on a nine-point scale (1 = dislike a lot; 9 = Like a lot). The presentations of images were randomized before the final eight pairs were used for further testing, and each image remained on screen until a response was made by the participant.

**S2) Presentation of celebrity/non-celebrity brand pairs.** Following initial evaluations, for each individual the computer selected the four celebrities they liked the best (i.e. score 9, 8, 7) and the four non-celebrities most neutrally rated (5, then 4, 6) alongside the eight brands that were most neutrally rated (5, then 4, 6). For each participant, the four celebrities and four non-celebrities were then randomly paired with the eight brands for the remainder of the experiment.

**S3) Post-pairing explicit brand evaluation.** Participants were presented with the eight brands one at a time and asked to rate their liking of each brand using the same scale as in S1).

**S4) Explicit brand evaluation justification.** The program automatically generated the participant's total mean celebrity brand score and their total mean non-celebrity brand score, and the participant was asked to provide a justification for the scores.

**S5) Implicit brand evaluation.** Participants carried out a brand Implicit Association Test. The procedure for the IAT test was developed by Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003) and Nosek, Greenwald and Banaji (2005). The assumption behind the test is that individuals will respond more quickly in identifying categories when presented with concepts they already associate together compared with those they do not associate. Participants were presented items in four categories: images of the four brands they had seen paired with their best-liked celebrities ('celebrity brands'), the four brands they had seen paired with neutrally-rated non-celebrities ('non-celebrity brands'), 'good' attributes (e.g. happy, nice) and 'bad' attributes (e.g. sad, nasty). The ten 'good' and ten 'bad' attributes used in this study were adapted from those used by Nosek et al.

Participants were instructed to use the 'Z' and 'M' keys to categorize each item quickly while making as few errors as possible. The IAT ran in five stages with two initial familiarisation trials (images and attributes), followed by the first set of test trials where the concept categories 'celebrity' and 'good' were combined on one key (either 'Z' or 'M') and 'non-celebrity' and 'bad' were combined on the opposite key (either 'Z' or 'M'). The key pairings depended on the participant number, with even participant numbers responding differently to participants with an odd participant number. This was controlled for to avoid results from motor speed. The concept category pairings were then reversed on the two keys for a further set of familiarisation trials and following this the second set of test trials ran with the reversed key orientation. The calculation of IAT scores using the *D*-algorithm also followed the recommendations of Greenwald et al. and Nosek et al. Positive *D* scores indicated an implicit preference for celebrity brands.

**S6) Brand choice.** Images of all eight brands were presented and participants were asked to choose their favourite three brands. Participants were awarded a score of one for each

celebrity brand chosen (Min 0 – Max 3) and the frequency of selecting a celebrity or non-celebrity brand as first choice was also recorded.

## Results

### *Explicit preferences, implicit preferences and brand choices*

Four participants were omitted from the analysis as they did not fully complete the advertising scepticism assessment. Following pairing of the brands we found that there was a significant explicit preference for the brands paired with well-liked celebrities ( $M = 5.62$ ;  $SD = 1.05$ ) over those paired with non-celebrities ( $M = 5.04$ ;  $SD = .68$ ):  $t(67) = 3.834$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .19$ . Furthermore, compared with initial brand preference ( $M = 5.12$ ;  $SD = .49$ ), the explicit preference for real brands was significantly higher after pairing with the celebrities ( $t [67] = 4.288$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .22$ ) whereas there was no significant difference in brand preference after pairing with non-celebrities ( $t [67] = 1.133$ ,  $p = .261$ ,  $d = .02$ ). Therefore, no evidence of resistance to the celebrity effect was seen in explicit brand attitudes. The justifications provided by participants for their relative preference for brands which had been paired with celebrities or non-celebrities indicate that, in many cases, the presence of a celebrity was a main driver when considering rankings of the brands.

As expected, the results from the IAT also showed a strong implicit preference for the celebrity-paired brands compared with non-celebrity paired brands ( $D = 0.74$ ):  $t (67) = 8.362$ ,  $p < .001$ . Therefore, in both their explicit and implicit responses participants demonstrated a preference for celebrity brands which was consistent with both Hypotheses 1 and 2. When making their brand choices participants selected their three favourite brands from the eight they were presented with and placed them in order of preference. Exploring first choices only, 48 participants chose a celebrity brand as their first choice and 19 participants chose a non-celebrity brand (one participant made no selections), indicating a strong first preference for

celebrity brands: (Binomial  $p < .001$ ). Brand choice scores awarded for participants' three favourite brands also showed a significant preference for celebrity-paired brands ( $M = 1.85$ ;  $SD = .78$ ;  $t [66] = 3.665$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results supported Hypothesis 3.

*Advertising scepticism, preferences and brand choice*

To investigate the impact of explicit and implicit celebrity brand preference and advertising scepticism on brand choice, we carried out a multiple linear regression analysis with explicit celebrity brand preference change, implicit brand preference, accuracy-based scepticism and affect-based scepticism as the four predictor variables and brand choice as the dependent variable (See Table 1).

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Table 1 here (see below)

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Using the enter method it was found that the regression model predicted a significant amount of variance in brand choice:  $F (4, 66) = 3.254$ ,  $p = .017$ ,  $R^2 = .17$ ,  $R^2_{Adjusted} = .12$ . The analysis showed that brand choice was predicted by explicit celebrity brand preference change scores ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $t (63) = 2.92$ ,  $p = .005$ ) and implicit brand preference scores ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $t (63) = 2.41$ ,  $p = .019$ ) but not by accuracy-based or affect-based scepticism scores.

However, there was a significant negative correlation between accuracy-based scepticism and explicit brand preference change ( $r = -.216$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and a significant negative correlation between affect-based scepticism and implicit brand preference ( $r = -.232$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This suggests that higher accuracy-based scepticism was linked to lower explicit

celebrity brand preference and higher affect-based scepticism was linked to lower implicit celebrity brand preference but there was no direct link between advertising scepticism and brand choice.

### **Discussion**

In this study well-liked celebrities were randomly paired with neutrally-rated brands. There was no overt endorsement of the brands and the celebrities were not matched with brands in terms of being credible or expert endorsers. However, the celebrities paired with brands were all ones that the participant had identified as well-liked. We were interested to see whether young adults presented with this simple pairing procedure would resist the effect of these well-liked celebrities in their brand preferences and brand choices. They did not. Instead, explicit brand preference was higher after pairing with well-liked celebrities and, when asked to select their favourite brand, participants were more likely to choose a celebrity-paired brand. As expected, there was also an implicit preference for celebrity-paired brands over those paired with non-celebrities. In their recent review of research on celebrity endorsement Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) point to mixed findings from studies looking into the effects of well-liked celebrities, with both positive, neutral and even negative effects being reported from the limited range of studies carried out. However, the results from this study are clear. Participants showed no resistance to the celebrity effect. Simple pairing with a well-liked celebrity was enough to bias participants' explicit and implicit brand evaluations and their brand choices in favour of the brands paired with a celebrity they liked.

Prior to presenting our brands we tested participants' general level of accuracy-based and affect-based scepticism. Although scepticism was not found to be a direct predictor of brand choice we found that high accuracy-based scepticism was linked to less positive explicit

celebrity brand attitudes and high affect-based scepticism was associated with less positive implicit celebrity brand attitudes. The latter finding is particularly notable as it is the first time, to our knowledge, that such a link has been identified between general affect-based scepticism and implicit brand responses. The pattern of relationships uncovered here fits with Gawronski and Bodenhausen's (2011) dual process account of cognition and suggests that accuracy-based scepticism is based upon explicit propositional processes (i.e. involving reflection upon the truth status and accuracy of advertising claims) whereas affect-based scepticism is based upon associational processes which connect more strongly with implicit attitudes. Overall, these results suggest that general scepticism may have a moderating effect upon brand attitudes which in turn directly predict brand choice.

### **Resisting the celebrity effect: feeling manipulated by the ad**

Why did we not see resistance to the celebrity effect in this study? Previous research had suggested that resistance might be seen in explicit responses to brands where participants were able to consciously reflect upon the presence of the celebrity image as an attempt to manipulate their brand judgment. In Forehand and Perkins' (2005) study participants were played audio recordings of celebrity voiceovers in radio ads and it was the brand evaluations of the participants who recognised the celebrity which tended to become less positive. Recognition of the 'hidden' celebrities in the radio ads could have triggered a sense of being manipulated in these participants which then led to resistance. In contrast, in the study reported here the identity of the celebrities was known and for each participant the celebrities paired with brands were those that they had identified as being well-liked. In the current research, therefore, there was no hidden manipulation for participants to detect and visual presentation of the liked celebrity alongside a brand was enough to demonstrate the

effect of evaluative conditioning. Including a well-liked celebrity brought about more positive evaluations of the brand.

It could be that the general effect of associating well-liked celebrities with brands is to create positive explicit and implicit evaluations of the brand (as, presumably, is assumed by those employing celebrity endorsement as a marketing strategy). An exception to this could be where consumers feel directly that they are being manipulated in some way which then sets in motion a resistance response. Some evidence for this can be found in research looking at product placement which, at least notionally, involves covert advertising. Gibson, Redker and Zimmerman (2014) found that for brands presented covertly in a popular TV show, when participants recalled seeing the brand they tended to report positive explicit brand attitudes. However, when participants were primed to expect persuasion to occur those who recalled the brand reported more negative explicit brand attitudes. These researchers explain their results in terms of propositional reasoning engaged in by participants who were alerted to the manipulation attempt and which led them to provide more negative responses.

### **Resisting the celebrity effect: general advertising scepticism**

Whilst recognising a manipulation attempt and consciously reflecting upon it may be one route to resisting the celebrity effect which is dependent upon aspects of the specific context in which the ad is presented, the results from this study also suggest general advertising scepticism as an alternative basis for resistance. We expected the young adults to have a reasonably high level of scepticism and that this would be associated with resistance to the celebrity effect. We did not find high scepticism across the sample as a whole but we did find the relationship where the high scepticism was present. The relationship identified here between higher scepticism and lower explicit brand preferences has been seen previously in

research with both children (Rozendaal et al., 2014) and adults (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998; Obermiller et al., 2005). Obermiller et al. (2005) found that for individuals demonstrating high accuracy-based advertising scepticism, advertising with greater informational content is less persuasive than advertising based on an emotional appeal. This would fit with the view that accuracy-based scepticism involves propositional defensive reasoning which can be effective in resisting the informational content of ads. In contrast, accuracy-based scepticism may not be so useful when dealing with advertisements which contain very little information, or which carry emotional appeals aimed at producing an implicit, affective response in consumers. Here, it could be affect-based scepticism that is linked to resistance.

It was notable that in the current study, where participants were responding to brands paired with well-liked celebrities, we found a negative association between affect-based scepticism and implicit responses to the celebrity brands. This suggests that general affect-based scepticism could be involved in resistance to emotional advertising appeals. This should not be too surprising. Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2011) propose that the (positive or negative) valence of implicit associations previously stored in memory will influence affective responses to a specific target item. If the overall affective response felt by an individual towards advertising is negative, then this 'gut reaction' to advertising may influence their implicit responses to specific advertising events. However, where the individual has strong positive feelings about that event, for example where the advertisement itself evokes strong positive emotions or where the ad involves a well-liked celebrity, these immediate affective responses could override any general affect-based advertising scepticism they feel. This would be in line with findings from research into celebrity eclipsing of ads where, despite celebrity overshadowing of brands in advertisements, participants who have a strong

attachment to a celebrity display more positive brand attitudes (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). More research is needed to investigate the relationship between advertising scepticism and explicit and implicit responses to advertising and to examine the relationship between propositional and affective responses to advertising in different advertising contexts.

### **Limitations and future work**

Some limitations of the current study need to be considered. First, our study only focused on well-liked celebrities whereas in our everyday lives we are mostly exposed to advertising which contains celebrities for whom we have no strong feelings. In that sense, therefore, our participants were presented with an atypical situation. We assume, however, that celebrities are, at least in part, selected to endorse brands on the basis that they are liked (rather than disliked) and therefore it would not be unusual for some consumers to have a strong liking for specific celebrities. The previously reported findings on the effects of well-liked celebrities are mixed (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016) but our findings add to those which suggest that pairing a well-liked celebrity with a brand can lead to positive outcomes for the brand. Future work might usefully compare the effect of scepticism in moderating the impact of well-liked and neutrally-rated celebrities on brand attitudes and purchase behaviours. Second, our findings only demonstrate the immediate effect of well-liked celebrities and it would be useful to explore whether these effects persist or whether they are rapidly extinguished. Third, in our study we simply paired brand logos with celebrity images. We did this because we expected that adults would realise that the celebrity images had no bearing on their evaluation of the brand and that the pairing was an attempt to manipulate their brand judgments. We believed that this would lead to evidence of resistance to the presence of the celebrity in brand judgments. This was not the case, however. Heath (2012) has suggested that in order for

cognitive defences against advertising to be engaged adults need to be able to recognise that they are being subjected to an attempt to persuade them. Future work might usefully vary the extent to which the celebrity is clearly involved in a persuasion attempt in order to investigate whether and how feelings of being manipulated influence consumers' brand judgments and whether strong liking for celebrities can override such feelings.

### **Conclusions**

The findings reported here clearly demonstrate that pairing well-liked celebrities with brands can have a robust positive effect upon individuals' explicit and implicit brand evaluations and brand choices. We found no evidence in this study to suggest that participants consciously resisted the effects of well-liked celebrities in their explicit judgments. There was some evidence to indicate that accuracy- and affect-based scepticism may play different roles in moderating explicit and implicit attitudes to brands. In this study, however, strong liking for the celebrity appeared to override participants' scepticism about advertising in their brand judgments. Future research could be fruitfully directed to exploring the exact nature of the processes involved.

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Table 1. Multiple regression: relationship between Brand Choice (DV) and predictor variables with means, *SD*, and correlations.

Variable						$\beta$	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
	BC ( <i>dv</i> )	ECBPC	IBP	ACC	AFF			
BC ( <i>dv</i> )	-							
ECBPC	.292**	-				.348**	.097	2.918
IBP	.238*	-.090	-			.289*	.128	2.407
ACC	.025	-.216*	-.141	-		.140	.239	1.125
AFF	-.050	-.080	-.232*	.306**	-	.002	.134	.015
Mean	1.85	0.50	0.74	2.99	2.96			
<i>SD</i>	0.78	0.96	0.73	0.41	0.72			

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Note: Brand Choice score (BC); Explicit Celebrity Brand Preference Change score (ECBPC); Implicit Brand Preference score (IBP); Accuracy-based scepticism score (ACC); Affect-based scepticism score (AFF).