

Research Paper

Celebrity, Animal, and Hybrid Endorsers: A Synthesis and Contingency Framework for Endorser-Product Fit

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ABSTRACT

Celebrity endorsement has been studied extensively, but little research compares its effectiveness to that of animal and hybrid endorsers, or examines which endorser type works best for which product. This paper addresses that gap by reviewing the literature on celebrity, animal, and hybrid endorsers and explaining the psychological mechanisms behind each — including attention, cultural meaning transfer, and anthropomorphism — along with the conditions under which each mechanism breaks down. Building on this review, the paper's main contribution is a contingency framework showing that celebrities are most effective for luxury, beauty, and fitness products, animals for everyday and durable goods, and hybrid endorsers for food, pet, and children's products. This framework offers researchers a more integrated view of endorser effectiveness and gives marketers practical guidance for choosing the right type of endorser for a given product.

Keywords: *Celebrity endorsement, Animal endorsers, Hybrid endorsers, Anthropomorphism, Endorser-product fit, Product match-up hypothesis, Source credibility/attractiveness, Brand attitude, Purchase intention, Elaboration Likelihood Model, Reputational risk, Brand equity, Contingency framework*

The volume of promotional messages competing for consumer attention continues to grow, pushing marketers to seek increasingly distinctive ways of capturing and retaining consumer notice. Endorser-based advertising has long served as one of the most effective tools for this purpose, with firms investing substantial resources in identifying spokespeople who can command attention, build credibility, and drive favourable brand outcomes. The scale of this investment is evident in the growth of celebrity-endorsed advertising alone, which rose from 17% of commercials in the late 1970s to 25% by the early 2000s (Shimp, 2003). Celebrities are widely used because their fame generates attention, lends prestige to brands, and improves message recall relative to non-celebrity endorsers (Erdogan, 1999; Tom et al., 1992). More recently, however, advertisers have increasingly turned to animal endorsers (Phillips, 1996; Stewart & Furse, 1986) and hybrid endorsers that combine human and animal characteristics (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007; Spears, Mowen, & Chakraborty, 1996), each offering distinct advantages over traditional celebrity endorsement.

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Celebrity, Animal, and Hybrid Endorsers: A Synthesis and Contingency Framework for Endorser-Product Fit

Despite the growing prevalence of these alternative endorser types, the endorsement literature has developed largely along parallel, disconnected tracks. Celebrity endorsement has been studied extensively, with well-established theoretical foundations including the source attractiveness model (Singer, 1983), source credibility model (Ohanian, 1991), and identification-based persuasion processes rooted in social identity theory (Kelman, 1961; Levy, 1959). Animal endorsement research, by contrast, draws on a distinct set of theoretical traditions, including the symbolic communications model (Spears, Mowen, & Chakraborty, 1996) and dual-process accounts of consumer cognition (Kahneman, 2011), which explain how animals transfer cultural and symbolic meaning to products through largely heuristic, low-effort processing (Lancendorfer, Atkin, & Reece, 2007). Hybrid endorsement, meanwhile, has been theorized primarily through the lens of anthropomorphism (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011) and the product match-up hypothesis (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till, 1998). While each of these literatures offers valuable insight into its respective endorser type, few studies have brought them into a single comparative framework, and fewer still have systematically examined how the effectiveness of celebrity, animal, and hybrid endorsers varies across product categories. This fragmentation limits both theoretical integration and practical guidance for advertisers seeking to match endorser type to product type.

This paper addresses this gap by reviewing and synthesizing the literature on celebrity, animal, and hybrid endorsers, with attention to two questions: (1) how does each endorser type influence brand attitude and purchase intentions, and through what psychological mechanisms; and (2) how does the interaction between endorser type and product type shape endorsement effectiveness. In doing so, the paper makes two primary contributions. First, it consolidates fragmented findings across three distinct endorser literatures into a unified comparative analysis, clarifying the distinct mechanisms — source attractiveness and identification for celebrities, symbolic meaning transfers and heuristic processing for animals, and anthropomorphism-driven relevance and trust for hybrids — through which each endorser type generates brand outcomes. Second, and more centrally, it advances a product-endorser fit typology, synthesizing prior findings (e.g., Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Spears, Mowen, & Chakraborty, 1996) to propose that celebrities are best suited to luxury and beauty products, animals to durable and non-durable goods, and hybrid endorsers to food and beverages, pet food, and services. By moving beyond the singular focus on celebrity endorsement that dominates prior research, this paper offers researchers a more integrated theoretical account of endorser effectiveness and offers practitioners a structured, product-specific framework for endorser selection.

The paper is organized into four sections. The first section reviews the use of celebrity endorsers in current advertising practice, along with the benefits and drawbacks associated with their use. The second section examines animal endorsers, focusing on their growing role in advertising and the transfer of symbolic and cultural meaning from the endorser to the endorsed product. The third section examines hybrid endorsers, highlighting how this endorser type can help overcome challenges associated with celebrity and animal endorsement individually. The final section synthesizes these strands by examining product type as a boundary condition for endorser effectiveness, proposing that the optimal choice of endorser is contingent on the category of product being advertised.

Celebrity Endorsers: Mechanisms and Boundary Conditions

The use of celebrities as endorsers dates back to the late nineteenth century, and the prominence of celebrity-endorsed advertising has continued to grow since then. This growth is evident in the increasing share of celebrity-endorsed commercials, which rose from 17% in the late 1970s to 25% by the early 2000s (Shimp, 2003).

The increasing prevalence of celebrity-endorsed commercials can be attributed to the positive outcomes such endorsements generate for brands. Celebrities, owing to their fame, create attention and bring prestige to brands, and may encourage higher recall relative to non-celebrity endorsers (Erdogan, 1999; Tom et al., 1992).

Proposition 1: *Celebrity endorsers will generate greater consumer attention and brand recall than non-celebrity endorsers, owing to their fame and pre-existing public recognition.*

McCracken (1989) defined a celebrity endorser as any individual who enjoys public recognition and uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement. According to McCracken, the value of celebrity endorsement is rooted in the culturally related meanings celebrities bring to the commercial, irrespective of the specific promotional role required. Beyond this, celebrity endorsers offer several additional benefits. First, they help create and maintain consumer attention, improving the effectiveness of promotion by cutting through advertising clutter (Sherman, 1985). Second, celebrities with worldwide popularity serve as a powerful device for entering foreign markets, helping brands overcome common roadblocks in global marketing. Third, popular celebrity endorsers enable image polishing when a company's reputation has been tarnished (Erdogan, 1999). Celebrity endorsers have also proven beneficial for brand introduction and brand repositioning (Erdogan, 1999).

Consistent with the source attractiveness model (McGuire, 1985), the decision to hire celebrity endorsers is also driven by the dual effects of celebrity status and physical appeal (Singer, 1983). Consumers tend to form positive impressions of attractive people, and attractive endorsers have been shown to be more successful in changing beliefs (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Chaiken, 1979; Debevec & Kernan, 1984) and generating purchase intentions (Friedman, Termini, & Washington, 1976; Petroschius & Crocker, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1980).

Proposition 2: *The physical attractiveness of a celebrity endorser will be positively associated with consumers' purchase intentions, mediated by the favourability of the impression formed about the endorser.*

Kelman (1961) proposed that social influence processes can produce attitude change when individuals adopt the attitudes advocated by an influencing agent. One such process, identification, occurs when individuals conform to the attitudes or behaviours of another person because they derive satisfaction from believing they are similar to that person. Identification is closely related to likeableness and attractiveness, and may therefore be the process underlying persuasion by celebrity endorsers (Friedman & Friedman, 1979). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) lends further support to this mechanism: because celebrities possess well-constructed self-images, they function as exemplars and inspirational figures for consumers, who seek to enhance their self-concept and self-esteem by behaving in ways consistent with these models (Levy, 1959). Consumers further

reinforce such identities by purchasing goods that the celebrity symbolically represents (Batra, Myers, & Aaker, 1996).

Proposition 3: *Consumer identification with a celebrity endorser, driven by the consumer's desire to enhance self-concept and self-esteem, will be positively associated with brand attitude and purchase behaviour.*

Despite these merits, celebrity endorsement is associated with several drawbacks. First, while celebrities can capture consumer attention and generate positive effects on brand awareness, message recall, and brand attitude, they often direct consumer attention toward the celebrity rather than the brand being promoted (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). This shift in attentional focus can be understood through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which distinguishes between central route processing, where consumers are motivated to carefully evaluate product-relevant arguments, and peripheral route processing, where consumers rely on peripheral cues — such as source attractiveness or fame — to form judgments with minimal cognitive elaboration. When a celebrity endorser becomes the focal point of an advertisement, consumers are more likely to engage in peripheral rather than central processing, basing their evaluations on the celebrity as a heuristic cue rather than on the merits of the product itself. As Cooper (1984) observed, in the advertising situation, the product — not the celebrity — must be the star.

Proposition 4a: *Celebrity endorsement will shift consumer attention toward the endorser and away from the endorsed product, resulting in weaker product-focused cognitive processing than non-celebrity endorsement.*

Second, celebrities frequently endorse multiple products, weakening the strength of any single celebrity-brand association. This effect can be understood through the principle of classical conditioning (Pavlov, 1927), wherein a celebrity endorser (acting as a conditioned stimulus, owing to the pre-existing associations and meanings tied to their public persona) is repeatedly and exclusively paired with a specific brand until the brand comes to elicit similar associations as the celebrity (Till, 1998; Till, Stanley, & Priluck, 2008). When this pairing is exclusive and consistent, it can generate a strong learned association: for instance, decades of exclusive pairing between Michael Jordan and Nike have created an association so strong that the mere sight of the celebrity elicits immediate recall of the brand, even in the absence of the product itself (Branscombe & Baron, 2016, p. 168). However, this conditioning process is severely weakened when a celebrity endorses multiple, unrelated products rather than being selective (e.g., Amitabh Bachchan has endorsed Cadbury, Dabur, Maruti, and Parker, among other brands). Repeated pairing with a diverse range of conditioned stimuli dilutes the strength of any single celebrity-brand association, reducing its distinctiveness (Mowen & Brown, 1981) and hampering advertising effectiveness.

Proposition 4b: *The strength of the classically conditioned celebrity-brand association, and consequently the effectiveness of the endorsement, will be negatively associated with the number of other brands the celebrity endorses.*

Third, a celebrity's involvement in public controversy may tarnish the endorsed brand's image and undermine the campaign, and fourth, hiring celebrities is expensive, often representing a substantial cost to the endorsing company. Underlying each of these drawbacks is a common thread: once a brand ties its identity to a celebrity, the fate of the

campaign becomes contingent on factors the company cannot fully control — the celebrity's public conduct, their availability, and their asking price.

This lack of control stands in contrast to what non-celebrity endorsers offer. Because non-celebrity endorsers are created and shaped by the company itself, they afford far greater control over the endorser's characteristics, allowing firms to construct an image consistent with the brand and ensure the endorser promotes only a single product (Tom, Clark, Elmer-DeWitt, Steinberg, & Effler, 1992). This same control extends to where consumer attention is directed. Since a non-celebrity endorser carries no independent fame or pre-existing persona to serve as a peripheral cue, consumers have little basis on which to engage in peripheral route processing; instead, they are pushed toward central route processing, in which they attend more directly to the merits of the brand and product itself (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Consistent with this, research shows that cognitive responses generated under non-celebrity conditions focus more heavily on the brand and its features (Mehta, 1994).

Proposition 5: *Non-celebrity endorsers will generate stronger brand- and feature-focused cognitive responses than celebrity endorsers, due to the absence of competing attention toward the endorser's persona.*

Finally, an important consideration in the endorsement literature is that positive feelings toward advertising and products do not always translate into actual purchase behaviour. The theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) offers a useful lens for understanding this gap: while a favourable attitude toward the brand is a necessary input to purchase intention, intention is also shaped by subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, and its translation into actual behaviour can be further disrupted by situational factors such as price, product availability, budget constraints, and competing offers at the point of purchase. A consumer may hold a highly favourable attitude toward a brand as a result of celebrity endorsement, yet fail to act on it if these situational conditions are unfavourable. This suggests that even when celebrity endorsement succeeds in shaping cognitive and affective responses, its influence may weaken considerably by the time a purchase decision is made, since attitude alone accounts for only part of the variance in behaviour. Consistent with this view, prior research indicates that while celebrity endorsements may be effective at the cognitive and affective level, their effectiveness at the behavioural level remains questionable (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Friedman & Friedman, 1979).

Proposition 6: *Celebrity endorsement will have a stronger positive effect on the cognitive and affective components of consumer response (e.g., awareness, attitude) than on the behavioural component (e.g., actual purchase behaviour), consistent with the attitude-behaviour gap predicted by the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).*

Animal Endorsers: Mechanisms and Comparative Advantages

The advertising industry has increasingly relied on animal trade characters to promote brands and enhance the effectiveness of communication. Trade characters are fictional, animate beings or animated objects created for the promotion of a product, service, or idea (Phillips, 1996). Commercials featuring trade characters have been shown to change brand preference (Stewart & Furse, 1986) and function as an effective communication tool, owing to their ability to attract attention, enhance identification of and memory for a product, and achieve promotional continuity (Phillips, 1996).

The credibility of animal endorsers rests on their capacity to embody cultural meanings widely shared by consumers. Animals have long served as symbols of human qualities — an owl signals wisdom, a lamb signals gentleness, a lion signals bravery, a bee signals industriousness, and a fox signals cunning (Robin, 1932). Advertisers can leverage this shared cultural understanding by linking an animal's established symbolic meaning to a product. Drawing on the model of classical conditioning (Pavlov, 1927), an animal endorser paired repeatedly with a product allows consumers to associate the product with the animal, such that the product comes to acquire the animal's culturally attributed characteristics (McCracken, 1986). Budweiser's "Puppy Love" campaign illustrates this transfer in practice, pairing its beer brand with a puppy to evoke warmth, loyalty, and companionship, while Friskies' long-running use of cats leverages the culturally understood independence and playfulness of the animal to reinforce its brand identity as an attentive, trusted choice for cat owners.

Proposition 7: *The strength of the symbolic association between an animal endorser and a brand will be positively associated with brand attitude, mediated by the transfer of the animal's culturally established meaning to the endorsed product.*

The symbolic transfer described above does not operate as an isolated, one-off association — it is sustained by a broader psychological tendency of consumers to anthropomorphize non-human objects and to embrace brands with strong, human-like personalities (Freling, Crosno, & Henard, 2010). Building on this tendency, Spears, Mowen, and Chakraborty (1996) proposed a symbolic communications model, which views the use of animal endorsers as part of a culturally constituted process in which meanings are assigned to animals by humans and transferred to products through an iterative, largely unconscious process. Repeated over time, this process fosters a source-consumer attachment — an emotional bond that forms mostly below conscious awareness (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Sternthal, Dholakia, & Leavitt, 1978) — through which the animal's cultural meaning becomes embedded in the brand itself, rather than merely borrowed for a single campaign. Once activated in this way, cultural schemas associated with an animal symbol continue to operate implicitly (Hong, Chiu, & Kung, 1997; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000), strengthening the brand's ability to leverage brand equity (Torelli & Ahluwalia, 2012) and fostering the brand engagement and involvement that underlie it (Lloyd & Woodside, 2013). This pathway is consistent with the customer-based brand equity model, which holds that strong, favorable, and unique brand associations held in consumer memory are a central driver of brand equity (Keller, 1993) — associations that an animal endorser's cultural symbolism is well positioned to supply. Moreover, because a recurring animal symbol reinforces recall of a brand's attributes each time it is encountered, such symbolism also contributes to the cohesion of a brand's identity (Aaker, 1995).

Proposition 8: *The activation of cultural schema through an animal endorser's symbolic meaning will be positively associated with brand equity, mediated by increased brand engagement and involvement.*

The distinct persuasive power of animal endorsers can also be understood through the cognitive processes they engage. Drawing on the heuristic-systematic model of persuasion (Chaiken, 1980), Lancendorfer, Atkin, and Reece (2007) proposed that animal trade characters activate heuristic processing — the use of mental shortcuts in place of issue-

relevant elaboration — unless consumer involvement with the message is high enough to prompt a shift toward more systematic processing. This account aligns with dual-process theories of cognition more broadly. System 1 processing operates automatically, quickly, and effortlessly, drawing on associative, holistic thinking shared even with non-human animals (Evans, 2008; Kahneman, 2011), whereas System 2 processing is deliberate, effortful, and associated with conscious choice and concentration (Kahneman, 2011). Because animal endorsers rely on quickly recognized cultural symbols rather than argument-based persuasion, they are well positioned to engage System 1 processing.

Proposition 9: *Advertisements employing animal endorsers will predominantly engage System 1 (heuristic) processing among consumers, resulting in brand judgments formed through mental shortcuts rather than issue-relevant elaboration.*

A further advantage of animal endorsers lies in their comparative immunity to the reputational risk associated with celebrity endorsers. A substantial body of research has documented how negative publicity involving a celebrity endorser can produce spillover effects that lower consumer evaluations of the endorsed brand itself (Till & Shimp, 1998). These effects are not merely perceptual but have measurable financial consequences: firms have been shown to experience significant declines in stock returns in the weeks following a celebrity endorser's negative publicity (Knittel & Stango, 2014; Louie, Kulik, & Jacobson, 2001), and such scandals can even generate a contagion effect, depressing the stock returns of competing firms in the same product category (Roehm & Tybout, 2006). A widely cited example is Tiger Woods, whose sponsors collectively lost more than 2% of their market value in the three weeks following the disclosure of his 2009 personal scandal (Knittel & Stango, 2014). Animals, by contrast, cannot generate the kind of personal scandal that jeopardizes a campaign in this way — they cannot make controversial public statements, become embroiled in scandal, or otherwise act in ways inconsistent with the brand's image, insulating the endorsement from this entire class of reputational and financial risk.

Proposition 10: *Brand equity built through animal endorsement will be more resistant to reputational damage than brand equity built through celebrity endorsement, owing to the absence of independent, uncontrollable public conduct on the part of the endorser.*

Hybrid Endorsers: Mechanisms and Persona Control

Hybrid endorsers are defined as endorsers sharing characteristics of both animals and humans. The use of hybrid endorsers are increasingly common in advertising practice. Examples include Toyota's Octopus, Fiat's panda riding a Fiat 500, and Queen Bee Waxing's "without clothes cat." This use of hybrid endorsers draws on anthropomorphism: the attribution of human-like characteristics to non-human agents or objects (Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007; Mitchell, Thompson, & Miles, 1997). By allowing consumers to attribute human features such as intelligence and emotion to an animal or product, anthropomorphism has been shown to improve product evaluations (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011) and increase intentions to retain the product (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010). This practice builds on a long-standing cultural tradition: nearly every culture has used animals to illustrate dimensions of human character (Robin, 1977), and hybrid endorsers extend this tradition by rendering the animal explicitly human-like — through clothing, expressions, or gestures — rather than relying on symbolic association alone (Spears, Mowen, & Chakraborty, 1996).

Anthropomorphism offers several distinct advantages over both celebrity and purely animal endorsement. First, rendering a product or animal character in human form makes it easier for consumers to process (Schwarz et al., 1991). This preference for fluent, easily processed stimuli is well established in the literature, and is associated with more favourable evaluations (Bornstein & D'Agostino, 1992; Zajonc, 1968) and more positive attitudes toward the advertisement (Labroo, Dhar, & Schwarz, 2007; Lee & Labroo, 2004). In the context of animal endorsers specifically, attributing human characteristics allows consumers to interpret the character within their most familiar frame of reference — humanity itself — thereby making sense of the endorser more readily than would be possible with a non-anthropomorphized animal (Delbaere et al., 2011).

Proposition 11: *Anthropomorphized (hybrid) endorsers will generate more favourable brand attitudes than non-anthropomorphized animal endorsers, mediated by the greater ease with which consumers process human-like stimuli.*

Second, anthropomorphism affords advertisers a greater degree of control over the endorser's image than either celebrity or purely animal endorsement allows, since the traits and qualities of a hybrid endorser can be deliberately constructed to align with the product or brand (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002). This controllability is consistent with the product match-up hypothesis, which holds that advertising is more effective when there is high perceived relevance, or fit, between the endorser and the product (Kamins, 1990; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till, 1998). Kahle and Homer (1985) offer further theoretical grounding for this fit-based logic through a social adaptation perspective, arguing that an endorser's physical attractiveness is persuasive to the extent that it is relevant and useful to the receiver in their own adaptation to their social environment, rather than being universally persuasive regardless of context. Because hybrid endorsers are created and controlled entirely by the advertiser, firms can engineer this fit directly rather than relying on a pre-existing celebrity or animal persona. Consistent with this logic, research has found that higher relevance between a hybrid endorser and the product favourably affects consumer trust in the endorser (Garretson & Niedrich, 2013), which in turn favourably affects brand attitude. This same controllability also allows hybrid endorsers to sidestep several of the risks associated with celebrity endorsement discussed earlier, including negative publicity and the dilution of a single, exclusive brand association (Stafford, Stafford, & Day, 2002).

Proposition 12: *The perceived fit between a hybrid endorser and the endorsed product will be positively associated with consumer trust in the endorser, which will in turn be positively associated with brand attitude.*

Third, consumers are prone to perceive hybrid endorsers as experts in their domain (Callcott & Alvey, 1991; Callcott & Lee, 1994; McGinnies & Ward, 1980), a perception that fosters both credibility and trust. Drawing on the source credibility model (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951), which holds that a message source's persuasive power depends on the perceived expertise and trustworthiness attributed to it, such perceived expertise positions hybrid endorsers as credible sources capable of generating positive brand outcomes. Consistent with Friedman and Friedman's (1979) account of expert endorsers, this credibility is likely to operate through the social process of internalization (Kelman, 1961), whereby consumers adopt the endorsed attitude or behavior because it is congruent with their own value system, rather than merely to identify with or defer to the source. Relatedly, Kyung, Kwon, and Sung (2010) found that hybrid endorsers displaying traits of competence

and sincerity were most likely to enhance perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.

Proposition 13: *The perceived expertise of a hybrid endorser will be positively associated with brand attitude and purchase intention, mediated by the internalization of the endorser's implied product attitudes.*

Finally, anthropomorphism offers advertisers a creative tool for transforming culturally unappealing animals into likable, marketable characters (Spears, Mowen, & Chakraborty, 1996). A real tiger eating cereal would strike most consumers as incongruous or even unappealing; an anthropomorphized version of the same animal, such as Tony the Tiger, is widely embraced (Kyung, Kwon, & Sung, 2010). This reshaping effect is consistent with schema-congruity theory, which holds that the degree of congruity between an object and an activated cognitive schema shapes the affective response it generates (Mandler, 1982), and which has since been extended to explain why moderately incongruent products or characters can be evaluated even more favourably than strictly congruent ones, provided the incongruity can be resolved with only modest cognitive effort (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). Applied to anthropomorphized animal characters specifically, this suggests that human-like attributes help resolve, rather than deepen, the incongruity between an animal and the brand's intended image, resulting in more favourable evaluations (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). This suggests that anthropomorphism does not merely transfer an animal's existing cultural meaning, as with purely animal endorsers, but can actively reshape that meaning to serve the brand's purposes.

This capacity for reshaping meaning, however, is not without its own risks. Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto (2013) found that anthropomorphized brands are judged more harshly than non-anthropomorphized brands when they are later associated with negative publicity, particularly among consumers who believe personality traits are fixed rather than malleable. This suggests that while anthropomorphism can manufacture likability where none previously existed, it may also import a degree of the same reputational vulnerability associated with celebrity endorsement, since consumers begin to hold a humanized character to human standards of consistency and character.

Proposition 14: *Anthropomorphism will be positively associated with the likability of an endorser whose non-anthropomorphized cultural meaning would otherwise be incongruent with the brand, by enabling advertisers to reshape the endorser's perceived traits; however, this benefit will be attenuated when the anthropomorphized endorser is subsequently associated with negative publicity.*

Endorser–Product Fit: A Contingency Framework

Given the distinct cognitive and behavioural responses generated by celebrity, animal, and hybrid endorsers, it is reasonable to assume that no single endorser type is equally effective across all product categories. Thus, this paper synthesizes the mechanisms established in the preceding sections into a contingency framework linking endorser type to product type.

With respect to celebrities, Friedman and Friedman (1979) suggested that advertisements for products that signal good taste, or its absence, yield the highest returns when endorsed by a celebrity rather than a non-celebrity. The authors further suggested that celebrity endorsers are more effective when the endorsed product carries social risk (the chance that product use

will affect how others perceive the consumer) or psychological risk (the chance that the product will not fit the consumer's self-image) — a pattern the authors observed in their study of costume jewellery. Actors and models, in particular, tend to be more successful than other endorser types in promoting beauty products and luxury goods. This follows from the source credibility model, which holds that a message's persuasive power depends on the perceived expertise and trustworthiness of its source (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1991; Solomon, 1996): because actors and models are habitually associated with beauty, glamour, and fashion, they function as credible experts in these domains. Celebrity endorsement of luxury goods is further reinforced by social identity theory and consumers' status and esteem needs. Athletes follow a parallel logic, being repeatedly deployed to endorse products associated with health, fitness, and sport — as seen in Nike's long-standing use of athletes such as Roger Federer, LeBron James, and Serena Williams.

Proposition 15: *Celebrity endorsement will be more effective than non-celebrity endorsement for products high in social or psychological risk, and particularly for luxury, beauty, and fitness-related products, where celebrity expertise and status confer credibility relevant to the product category.*

In the examples above, such as the actors endorsing beauty products, athletes endorsing sportswear, hint at a broader principle; That is, celebrity effectiveness is not simply a function of fame, but of how well the celebrity's own image aligns with the product category. This principle is formalized in the product match-up hypothesis, which holds that the persuasive impact of a celebrity endorsement depends on the perceived congruence between the celebrity's image and the brand's attributes (Forkan, 1980; Kamins, 1990; Misra & Beatty, 1990). When this fit is absent, consumers may instead conclude that the celebrity was simply paid to appear with the product, undermining the credibility of the endorsement (Erdogan, 1999).

Proposition 16: *The effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement on brand attitude and purchase intention will be positively associated with the perceived congruence between the celebrity's image and the brand's attributes, and negatively associated with consumer attributions that the endorsement was purely financially motivated.*

Animal endorsers follow a different logic, rooted in the type of cognitive processing they engage (see Proposition 9) rather than in perceived expertise. Because mundane, everyday goods do not require elaborate evaluation and are more readily processed heuristically, animal endorsers are particularly well suited to this category. The repeated exposure to the animal-brand pairing produces higher brand recall through conditioning, while the positive attitudes associated with the animal's characteristics transfer to the product itself. Beyond everyday goods, luxury brands have also begun to draw on animal archetypes to carve out distinctive positioning. For instance, Ferrari's use of the wild mustang to convey power and boldness, and Jaguar's use of its namesake animal to reinforce perceptions of speed and quality, illustrate this alternative application of animal symbolism.

Proposition 17: *Animal endorsement will be more effective than celebrity or hybrid endorsement for low-involvement, everyday goods, owing to the heuristic (System 1) processing such products typically elicit.*

The specific type of animal used further interacts with product category. Spears, Mowen, and Chakraborty (1996) found that dogs were the most commonly used animal for durables and non-durables, consistent with the dog's cultural association with warmth and companionship — qualities well suited to products purchased for personal or family use. Horses, by contrast, were most frequently used for alcohol and tobacco products, reflecting their symbolic association with virility, strength, and Vigor. Wild animals were found to be most frequently associated with services and, to a lesser extent, with durables rather than non-durables; the authors suggest this reflects durable products' closer link to consumers' self-concept, which the untamed, exotic connotations of wild animals are well positioned to reinforce.

Proposition 18: *The cultural meaning of the specific animal used as an endorser (e.g., warmth for dogs, virility for horses, exoticism for wild animals) will interact with product category, such that endorsement effectiveness is maximized when the animal's symbolic meaning is congruent with the product's core value proposition.*

Hybrid endorsers, meanwhile, have been used extensively for food and beverages, pet food, and services. Their prevalence in pet food follows directly from consumers' tendency to view pets as family members and attribute human qualities to them, a tendency that a hybrid endorser's human-animal characteristics directly symbolize (Spears, Mowen, & Chakraborty, 1996). By contrast, the use of anthropomorphized animals has been minimal in the durable product category, plausibly because the frivolity often associated with hybrid endorsers is inconsistent with the seriousness and high involvement that durable purchases typically demand. Within hybrid endorsement, wild anthropomorphized animals (e.g., Camel Cigarettes' "Joe Camel") have historically been used far more frequently than domesticated ones, and hybrid endorsers have also been disproportionately used in categories such as alcohol and tobacco, where human endorsers are less commonly featured. Hybrid endorsers additionally hold particular power with children's products, since children's early and repeated exposure to talking animals through storybooks, movies, and toys makes them especially receptive to hybrid characters (Kyung, Kwon, & Sung, 2010).

Proposition 19: *Hybrid endorsement will be more effective than either celebrity or purely animal endorsement for food and beverage, pet food, and service categories, but less effective than animal or celebrity endorsement for durable goods, owing to the mismatch between the perceived frivolity of hybrid endorsers and the high involvement associated with durable purchases.*

The same qualities that limit hybrid endorsers in high-involvement, adult-oriented categories, that is, their inherent playfulness and departure from realism is what become a distinct advantage when the target audience is children rather than adults. From an early age, children are consistently exposed to talking, humanized animals through storybooks, cartoons, and toys, building a deep and lasting familiarity with anthropomorphized characters well before they encounter them in advertising (Kyung, Kwon, & Sung, 2010). This familiarity means that, unlike adult consumers who may perceive a hybrid endorser as frivolous or incongruent with a serious purchase decision, children are primed to find such characters engaging, trustworthy, and easy to relate to. As a result, the very anthropomorphic qualities that constrain hybrid endorsers' effectiveness for durable goods make them especially well-suited to products marketed toward children.

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Proposition 20: *Hybrid endorsement will be more effective for products marketed to children than for those marketed to adults, owing to children's greater cumulative exposure to, and familiarity with, anthropomorphized animal characters.*

Table 1 Endorser–Product Contingency Framework

Proposition	Endorser type	Product category	Rationale	Examples
P15	Celebrity	Luxury, beauty, and fitness products; products with high social/psychological risk	Perceived expertise and status confer credibility relevant to these categories	Nike's use of Roger Federer, LeBron James, Serena Williams
P16	Celebrity	Applies across categories (boundary condition)	Effectiveness depends on perceived celebrity–brand congruence; fails when consumers attribute the endorsement to payment alone	-
P17	Animal	Low-involvement, everyday goods	Heuristic (System 1) processing suits low-elaboration purchase decisions	Budweiser's "Puppy Love" campaign; Friskies' use of cats
P18	Animal	Durables/non-durables (dogs), alcohol/tobacco (horses), services/durables (wild animals)	Specific animal symbolism must be congruent with the product's core value proposition	Ferrari's wild mustang; Jaguar's namesake animal
P19	Hybrid	Food and beverages, pet food, services; less effective for durable goods	Hybrid endorsers' inherent playfulness suits low-involvement categories but conflicts with the seriousness of durable purchases	Toyota's Octopus; Fiat's panda; Camel Cigarettes' "Joe Camel"; the "Lounge-Lizard" iguana
P20	Hybrid	Products marketed to children	Children's cumulative exposure to anthropomorphized characters increases receptivity	Tony the Tiger

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This paper set out to address a gap in the endorsement literature: while celebrity, animal, and hybrid endorsement have each been studied extensively in isolation, the field has lacked an integrated framework explaining both the distinct mechanisms underlying each endorser type and the conditions under which each is most effective. In response, this paper has synthesized these three literatures and advanced twenty propositions spanning the psychological mechanisms of endorsement (Propositions 1–14) and the contingent fit between endorser type and product category (Propositions 15–20).

Three broad conclusions emerge from this synthesis. First, each endorser type operates through a distinct dominant mechanism: celebrity endorsement draws primarily on source attractiveness, identification, and classically conditioned brand associations, but is vulnerable to attentional dilution, multiple-endorsement effects, and a well-documented attitude-behavior gap (Propositions 1–6). Animal endorsement, by contrast, operates chiefly

through the cultural transfer of symbolic meaning and heuristic, low-elaboration processing, and carries a structural advantage in its immunity to the reputational risk that accompanies human endorsers (Propositions 7–10). Hybrid endorsement occupies a distinctive middle ground: it combines the processing fluency and reduced financial cost of a constructed persona with a genuine capacity to reshape, rather than merely borrow, an endorser's cultural meaning — though this capacity introduces its own reputational vulnerability once a hybrid character is established (Propositions 11–14).

Second, and central to this paper's contribution, endorser effectiveness is not uniform across product categories but is instead contingent on the fit between the endorser's underlying mechanism and the cognitive or symbolic demands of the product. Celebrities are best suited to products involving social or psychological risk, particularly luxury, beauty, and fitness categories, where perceived expertise and status confer credibility. Animals are best suited to low-involvement, everyday goods that are processed heuristically, with the specific animal chosen (e.g., dogs, horses, wild animals) further interacting with product category to reinforce particular symbolic associations. Hybrid endorsers are best suited to food and beverages, pet food, services, and products marketed to children, but are comparatively poorly suited to durable goods, where the seriousness of the purchase decision conflicts with the endorser's inherent playfulness (Propositions 15–20).

Third, this paper's propositions collectively suggest that the choice of endorser is not merely a creative or budgetary decision, but a strategic one with testable, theory-driven implications for brand attitude, purchase intention, and long-term brand equity. By making these mechanisms and contingencies explicit, this paper offers marketers a more structured basis for endorser selection than has previously been available in a single, integrated source.

Implications for Practice

For practitioners, this framework suggests that endorser selection decisions should proceed from an explicit assessment of two factors: the level of risk and involvement associated with the product category, and the specific psychological mechanism the campaign intends to activate (e.g., expertise-based credibility, heuristic recall, or symbolic meaning transfer). Firms operating in high-risk, high-involvement categories such as luxury or durable goods may find celebrity or animal endorsement, respectively, more defensible than hybrid endorsement, while firms targeting low-involvement or child-oriented markets may find hybrid endorsers a more cost-effective and reputationally durable choice than celebrities.

Limitations and Future Research

This paper's scope carries several limitations that also point toward productive avenues for future research. First, consistent with the original scope of this review, the analysis of animal endorsers was restricted to naturally occurring animals and did not address the broader landscape of anthropomorphized characters, including animated spokes-characters, cartoon mascots, and anthropomorphized products or objects. Future research could extend the present framework to these additional endorser categories and empirically compare their effectiveness against the celebrity, animal, and hybrid types addressed here.

Second, the propositions advanced in this paper compare endorser effectiveness primarily across product types; effectiveness may also vary systematically across target audience segments. Future research should examine how demographic and psychographic factors — such as age, cultural background, and involvement with the product category — moderate

the effects proposed here, particularly given the audience-specific claim advanced in Proposition 20 regarding children's markets.

Third, while this paper's propositions are grounded in established theory and prior empirical findings, they have not been tested within a single, unified empirical study. Future research should prioritize empirical validation of the proposed endorser-product fit typology, ideally through experimental designs that manipulate endorser type and product category factorially, allowing for direct comparison of effect sizes across the conditions proposed here.

Finally, the reputational risk asymmetry identified between endorser types (Propositions 10 and 14) merits further investigation in an increasingly volatile media environment. As celebrities and, increasingly, hybrid or virtual endorsers operate under greater public scrutiny via social media, future research should examine whether the resilience advantage attributed to animal endorsers in this paper persists, or whether new categories of endorser risk — such as the entity-versus-incremental personality beliefs shown to moderate reactions to anthropomorphized brand crises — are emerging as a distinct third axis of endorsement risk, alongside the celebrity-scandal and hybrid-inconsistency risks identified here.

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Conflict of Interest

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