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## **Perception of advertisements with celebrity endorsement among mature consumers**

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## **Perception of advertisements with celebrity endorsement among mature consumers**

### **1. Introduction**

Aging is a global trend. The percentage of the population aged 65 or above will increase from 18 percent in 2018 to 27 percent in 2050 for developed countries, and from 7 percent in 2018 to 14 percent in 2050 for less developed countries (Population Reference Bureau 2018). Many countries have been experiencing an increase in their elderly populations in recent years, including Hong Kong. Hong Kong is listed as a city with one of the world's longest-lived populations, with a life expectancy of over 84 years in 2019 (United Nations 2019). The population of those aged 65 or above is projected to rise significantly from 16 percent in 2016 to 33 percent in 2050 (Census and Statistics Department 2017a). In other words, one in every three persons will be a senior.

The mature population provides opportunities for marketers. The mature market has available free time, relative wealth, and discretionary income (Kim and Jang 2019). They are healthier and wealthier than similar-aged populations in earlier cohorts (Dann 2007). However, studies have found that mature consumers are under-represented in advertising in terms of proportions of the population in the United States as well as in South Korea (Lee, Kim, and Han 2006) and Japan (Prieler et al. 2009), and there are stereotypes in their portrayal. In advertisements, mature adults are often portrayed negatively as weak and incapable. A study of over one thousand online brand promotion materials found that close to 70 percent of the images examined showed senior people as being in need of help (Thayer and Skufca 2019). Marketers and advertisers should avoid stereotypes and instead obtain accurate information regarding senior consumers in the current market situation (Kim and Jang 2019). Recently, marketers found that more mature consumers were interested in luxury brands and purchasing online (Beer 2019). This market segment is considered to possess more probity than others and expects brands to provide educational and informative content (Beer 2019). There is a danger in adopting generational attitudes when communicating to them as some of the

advertising appeals contradict their personal values — for instance, a bank advertiser portraying older consumers who “spend the kids’ inheritance” by borrowing money to use on personal enjoyment was not well received (Dann 2007).

Given the growth of aging populations and the difficulties in communicating with them, it is worth studying how to engage the mature market through advertising. According to our observations, celebrities are often used in advertisements in Hong Kong for product categories that target mature consumers, including health-related food and beverages, skincare products, and pharmaceuticals. However, there are very few studies that explore how to use celebrity appeal effectively to engage the mature market. To fill this gap in research, a study was conducted to explore celebrity product endorsement among mature adult consumers.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 Portrayal of mature consumers in advertising*

Despite the huge potential consuming power of mature consumers, not many marketers pay attention to their particular needs and consumption preferences (Quester et al. 2014). Studies found that older consumers are under-represented in advertising (Kessler, Rakoczy, and Staudinger 2004; Simcock and Sudbury 2006; Fon and Kitchen 2008). Older consumers seldom feature in advertising and when they do their roles are restricted. Some advertisements portray them negatively as inept, weak, ill, disorientated, or unfriendly (Smythe 1996). Some portray them positively but stereotypically as perfect grandparents, adventurous, or economically productive (Miller et al. 1999; Miller, Leyell, and Mazachek 2004). Older consumers are portrayed more positively in Asian countries. For example, Korean advertisements are more likely to depict them positively than American advertisements (Lee, Kim, and Han 2006). A study of TV advertising in Malaysia found that mature adults are portrayed as active, happy, and exhibiting different roles (Idris 2016).

Did advertisers choose to ignore this market segment? Probably not. Advertisers find it difficult to communicate with older consumers for a number of reasons. First, older consumers represent a heterogeneous market segmented by many factors including life age, self-perceived age, marital status, health conditions, and wealth (Sudbury and Simcock 2009). As a result, it can be hard to find a message that resonates with them. Second, marketers and advertising agency people are often young and do not know how to relate to older consumers in a meaningful way. Some brand managers worry that associating the brand with mature consumers would have a negative impact on the purchase intentions of younger consumers (Quester et al. 2014). Furthermore, there is a difference between the self-perceived age and the life age among mature consumers (Yoon and Powell 2012). Many mature consumers perceive themselves as being much younger than their chronological age (Bradley and Longino 2001). Marketers and advertisers, therefore, believe that older characters in advertisements would not be appealing to mature consumers. As a result, marketers prefer to employ younger models to appeal to mature consumers, especially for products related to beauty and self-image (Moschis and Mathur 2007).

The mature consumer market segment has several characteristics in terms of consumption decision making processes and responses to advertising. Studies indicate that mature consumers tend to prefer choosing between fewer alternatives (Reed, Mikels and Simon 2008) and collecting less information before making purchase decisions (Lambert-Pandraud and Laurent 2010). Mature adults demonstrate a higher appreciation and recall of emotional advertising appeal (Williams and Drolet 2005). This may indicate a shrinkage of the decision-making process with age as the ability to process information deteriorates (Le Serre and Chevalier 2012). Perceptions of physical, psychological and economic health play a role in consumers' choice and information processing. A study found that healthy and positive senior respondents tend to consider more options when dining out (Kim and Jang 2019).

Most of the studies on mature consumers' purchase behaviors and responses to advertising focus on a selected product category, such as pharmaceuticals, tourism and hospitality, restaurants, or clothing. A qualitative study among US seniors found that informants consider direct-to-consumer (DTC) pharmaceutical advertisements useful in informing them about new brands of drugs. Informants distinguished between sources on the dimension of credibility. The perceived credibility of DTC ads on television and print was low. The seniors disliked DTC advertising on the Internet and perceived these ads to be intrusive and irritating (DeLorme, Huh and Reid 2007).

## *2.2 Celebrity appeal in advertising*

Celebrity appeal has been commonly featured in advertising storytelling, particularly for product categories that target adolescents (Chan 2010). Marketers frequently use celebrity endorsement to attract consumers' attention and encourage purchase decisions. Bergkvist and Zhou's study (2016) found that celebrity appeal is more often used in the Asian market than in Western countries.

Celebrity endorsement is about engaging famous people like artists and sports celebrities to personally endorse a brand or product (Bergkvist and Zhou 2016). Most celebrity appeal studies employ four theoretical models, including the source attractiveness model, the source credibility model, the meaning transfer model, and the celebrity-brand fit model. A recent study proposed a process-transfer endorser effect model that the evaluation process activated by evaluating an endorser itself would be transferred to the evaluation of the endorsed product. This effect was not associated with either positive or negative valence of the endorser (Wong, Fock, and Ho, 2020). However, the research findings are not consistent and sometimes even contradictory.

The source attractiveness model refers to three celebrity traits facilitating celebrities in drawing the audience's attention: source similarity, source familiarity and source likeability (McGuire 1985). Some studies found that it is easy to develop resonance between celebrities and audience if both of them share something in common (Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019). Familiarity is important

and is related to media exposure. High media exposure is required to familiarize audiences with celebrities. Source likeability refers to the emotional link between the source and the audience. Although existing studies put greater emphasis on source similarity and familiarity than source likeability (Bergkvist and Zhou 2016), and there is inconsistency on the significant positive impact of source attractiveness on the enhancement of purchase intention (Erdogan 1999), overall, source attractiveness contributes significantly to the positive evaluation of endorsed brands (Erdogan 1999; Liu and Brock 2011).

Source credibility focuses on how credible the source (e.g., the celebrity) is in terms of trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland, Janis and Kelley 1953). However, there is no consensus on whether trustworthiness and expertise should be treated as two separate variables or should be considered as one combined construct (Bergkvist and Zhou 2016). Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell's (2011) experiment study found that the perceived credibility of the endorser is transferred to the perceived credibility of the endorsed brand. If consumers perceive celebrities as credible endorsers who are knowledgeable and unbiased, they find endorsed messages from brands to be more trustworthy (Ohanian 1990).

The meaning transfer model discusses how symbolic meanings associated with celebrities are transferred to endorsed products and brands (McCracken 1989). The meaning transfer model is less frequently tested when compared with the other three models (Roy 2016). There is evidence illustrating that meaning transfer occurs between celebrities and endorsed brands (Roy 2016; Miller and Allen 2012). For example, Campbell and Warren (2012) found that both positive meanings, such as smartness and intelligence, and negative meanings, such as conceitedness and arrogance, were transferred from celebrities to endorsed products and brands.

The celebrity-brand fit model refers to the image congruency between the celebrity source and the endorsed brand (Bergkvist and Zhou 2016; Till and Busler 1998). It indicates the high relevance

between a celebrity endorser's characteristics and brand attributes (Misra and Beatty 1990). This model lays down the boundary conditions for celebrity endorsements to work. Many studies have supported the impact of celebrity fit on consumers' perceptions and evaluations of endorsed brands (Choi and Rifon 2012; Kirmani and Shiv 1998; Lee and Thorson 2008). A survey among approximately 450 adult consumers found that brand and celebrity congruence have a positive impact on respondents' attitudes toward the endorsed brand and their purchasing intention (Pradhan, Duraipandian, and Sethi 2016). In a qualitative study of perception of celebrity endorsement in advertising among adolescents, source attractiveness and the celebrity fit model were found to be more important than the source credibility model in driving communication effects (K. Chan, Ng, and Luk 2013).

Despite the existence of a large number of studies about celebrity appeal as a source-related attribute, very few studies on celebrity advertising focus on a specific consumer segment. Available studies on celebrity advertising appeal and mature consumers use discourse analysis and case studies. To the best of our knowledge, no study on mature consumers' perceptions of advertising using celebrity endorsement has been carried out. This exploratory study was conducted to fill this research gap.

### *2.3 Hong Kong context*

There is no statutory retirement age in Hong Kong. Human resources experts estimate that more than 70 percent of private companies set an age limit of 60 (Chiu, 2019). In June 2015, the government changed the mandatory retirement age for newly appointed civil servants from 60 to 65, and for staff in disciplined services from 55 to 60. As the city's largest employer with more than 160,000 staff, the government's move has had an impact on government subvented organizations. For example, The Hospital Authority, which manages all public hospitals, raised the retirement age for new recruits from 60 to 65 accordingly (Chiu, 2019). According to official statistics, the labor participation rate for persons aged 55 to 64 is 57.9 percent, and that for persons aged 65 or above is



11.2 percent (Census and Statistics Department, 2017b). The government has introduced some measures to encourage the private sector to employ older staff, such as providing employers who hire persons aged 60 or above and provide on-the-job training with a subsidy of up to 500 US dollars a month per employee for a year (Chiu, 2019). Based on the current statutory minimum wage, all full-time employees earn at least 1,200 US dollars a month.

### **3. Research objectives**

To enhance the effectiveness of celebrity product endorsement among mature adult consumers, marketers should have an accurate understanding of mature adults' perceptions of celebrity appeal. This study was developed and aimed at answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What attributes of celebrity endorsers and advertising executions make an advertisement memorable among mature adults?

RQ2: What factors do mature consumers consider important when marketers select celebrity endorsers?

RQ3: What are the perceived effects of advertisements using celebrity endorsement?

### **4. Methodology**

Since our study was exploratory in nature, qualitative methodology was adopted. It aims to achieve insights into mature adult consumers and to discover relevant variables to facilitate the systematic study of celebrity endorsement in the future. In this study, mature adults are defined as persons aged 50-64.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the authors' affiliations. The study was conducted in Chinese in October 2018. Interviewees were recruited through social networks and interviewed by trained student moderators enrolling in an advertising course at a university in Hong Kong. A quota sampling method was used. Quota was set on employment status.

Students were asked to recruit equal numbers of interviewees aged 50-64 who were working or retired. The interviews were conducted in public spaces as well as interviewees' households.

Interviewees were informed of the objectives of the study and the voluntary nature of participation before data collection. Interviewees were audio-recorded and the recordings transcribed. The average length of the interviews was 20 minutes.

A visual prompt was used as a warm-up. A 30-second television commercial for a health supplement with one female and one male celebrity aged 60 or above was shown. The commercial has been broadcast on prime-time television for over two years. Interviewees were asked to identify the celebrities' names. After that, interviewers were asked to conduct a face-to-face interview following an interview protocol (see Appendix 1). Interviewers could ask follow-up questions for clarification. This interview format empowers interviewees to share more thoughts about the subject on which they are interviewed (Freeman and Mathison 2009).

After reading all interview transcripts and getting familiar with the interview details, constant comparison and contrast were applied to find similarities and differences among conceptual actions within interview transcripts (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Both open coding and axial coding methods were used to prepare a coding book and conduct textual data analysis (Corbin and Strauss 1990). The second author conducted open coding in the initial stage to build concepts and organize all relevant textual data. Then, axial coding was employed to explore the potential relationship among open codes. Take "advertising execution" as an example. When reading the interview transcripts, key words such as creative execution, advertising frequency, advertising recency, positive advertising message, and so on were extracted in the initial stage of open coding. Based on the extracted key words, axial coding followed to identify the relationship among the extracted open codes, and then develop the significant and relevant theme representing these key words, namely advertising execution. The first author went over the coding. Disagreement was discussed. Representative quotes were selected and translated to English.

## 5. Results

Altogether 38 interviews were conducted. Among them, 28 interviewees were aged 50-54, six were aged 55-59, and four were aged 60-64. Twenty-one were females and 17 were males. Half of the sample had full time jobs while the remaining half were retired.

Interviewees were asked to recall a memorable advertisement that made use of celebrity appeal and the products endorsed by the celebrity. Altogether 24 different celebrities were recalled 44 times (some interviewees recalled more than one advertisement). The majority of recalled celebrities were from the local entertainment industry and included singers, actors and actresses. Only two celebrities were athletes (footballer David Beckham and professional windsurfer Lee Lai-Shan).

Actor-singer Andy Lau and actor Eric Chi Wai Tsang were the two most frequently recalled celebrities. Both of them are Hong Kong male artists from the same age group as our interviewees. The most recalled brands were Osim massage chair and Tao Ti tea drink for Andy Lau and Kee Wah moon cake for Eric Tsang.

Based on the data analysis of the interviewing protocol, the following themes were identified.

Theme 1: The source attractiveness model and the celebrity-brand fit model were more often cited than the source credibility model and the meaning transfer model in explaining advertising effect.

When interviewees elaborated what made an advertisement with celebrity endorsement memorable, they more often cited variables in either the source attractiveness model (reported 53 times) or the celebrity-brand fit model (reported 18 times). The source credibility model (reported 5 times) and meaning transfer variables (reported 5 times) were seldom mentioned. Among source similarity, familiarity, and likeability, source likeability (reported 33 times) was the most frequently mentioned.

The following three quotes are selected to represent source likeability, similarity, and familiarity respectively:

“When I was young, I liked Andy Lau a lot. I used to watch his films and attend his music concerts. Since I always keep an eye on him, the advertisement with his endorsement leaves me with a deep impression.” (Male, aged 55-59, retired)

“Whoo cosmetic products invite (South Korean actress) Lee Young-ae to promote its brand, because it wants to attract the attention of middle-aged ladies like me. Lee Young-ae and I are from the same age group. She claims that her skin condition improves after using this brand. I believe that the same thing will happen to ladies like me.” (Female, aged 50-54, working)

“I remembered the advertisement with (actor) Kenneth Tsang as an endorser. When I was a child, I always watched Cantonese TV dramas featuring Kenneth Tsang. Hence, I was familiar with him.” (Male, aged 50-54, working)

Apart from source attractiveness, celebrity-brand congruency (reported 18 times) was often cited, too. These participants claimed that the image congruence between celebrity endorser and brand made the advertisement impressive and memorable. Besides, being a brand ambassador for an extended period of time also enhanced the advertising recall. Here are two representative quotes:

“I remember the advertisement clearly because Andy Lau’s image matched well with Osim’s product image. Osim’s massage chair was named Heavenly King chair, while Andy Lau is widely recognized as one of the Four Heavenly Kings in Hong Kong. Therefore, it’s the best choice to ask Andy Lau to endorse this product. (Female, aged 50-54, retired)

“I like (diva and actress) Liza Wang Ming Chuen because the mattress brand (Sea Horse) is a luxurious brand and she gives people an upscale image. She won’t be a good endorser for an average brand.” (Female, aged 55-60, working)

In the quote above, the interviewee was able to differentiate between celebrities with different images and articulate whether a celebrity's image is congruent with that of the brand represented. Source credibility was not that important when compared with the other two models. Only five interviewees mentioned source credibility as the reason for the advertisement to be memorable.

Theme 2: High advertising frequency is needed to make an advertisement memorable

For the most memorable celebrity-endorsed advertisements, advertising execution does not play an important role. Instead, advertising frequency is the single advertising attribute that accounts for recall. Altogether 21 participants reported that their most memorable advertisement was the one they watched most frequently on TV. Advertising frequency is more significant than advertising message strategy and advertising creativity itself. This might be related to depreciation in cognitive ability and memory among the interviewees. We expected that working interviewees, who are likely to retain better cognitive capacity, should exhibit different reactions as compared to those who are retired. This is exactly what we found. Altogether, eight retired interviewees and five working interviewees reported that advertising frequency would influence advertising recall. For the elderly, they could recall things that they encountered often. Advertising repetition is therefore essential to build memory, especially among retirees. Here is a selected quote:

“This celebrity has been endorsing the brand for a long time. I can memorize it because it is frequently broadcasted on TV.” (Male, aged 60-64, retired)

Theme 3: Source attractiveness and civic responsibility perceived as important factors considered by brands in selecting celebrity endorsers

Interviewees were asked to identify factors that brands should consider when choosing celebrity endorsers. Two factors, source attractiveness and civic responsibility (reported 34 times and 32 times respectively) were most frequently cited. As for source attractiveness, source familiarity and

likeability were often brought up. Familiarity is related to whether the celebrity is well-known and popular among the target audience. Here are two representative quotes:

“It is of utmost importance that the celebrity is well known. If no one knows the endorser, it will be hard to attract consumers’ attention to watch the advertisement. For example, I am frequently exposed to outdoor advertisements featuring celebrity endorsers when I take the subway. However, most of them are unknown to me. Therefore, it’s really hard for me to memorize those advertisements.” (Female, aged 50-54, working)

Another quote from one male interviewee also elaborated on the significance of source attractiveness, particularly source familiarity.

“Take Dayo Wong Tze Wah, a Hong Kong stand-up comedian, for example. I think he is a celebrity that most Hong Kong people know. His popularity in the local market is quite high. If he endorses any brands, consumers will continue watching the advertisement.” (Male, aged 55-59, retired)

The civic responsibility model was considered as important as the source attractiveness model because almost the same number of responses were recorded for these two variables, 32 times for the civic responsibility model and 34 times for the source attractiveness model. The civic responsibility model refers to a source’s moral behavior in public, ethical decisions, and caring for the well-being of others. In line with this explanation of the civic responsibility model, interviewees reported that the endorsing celebrity should not get involved in sex-related scandals or drug-taking. He or she should contribute to the societal good by engaging in charity, philanthropy, and humanitarian activities. Two representative quotes pointing out the importance of the civic responsibility model in selecting a celebrity brand endorser are given below:

“The selected celebrity should have a positive and honest image at personal level. In other words, he or she should not be the subject of any rumors or scandals related to sex. The

celebrity should give people an optimistic feeling. If the celebrity endorser has a poor public image, I would have a negative evaluation of the endorsed brand. I know his or her image has nothing to do with the endorsed brand. However, unethical behavior gives me a feeling that he or she is not reliable. As a result, I will lose interest in the endorsed products.” (Female, aged 50-54, retired)

“In my view, the most important factor is that there is no negative news associated with the celebrity endorser. If he or she has a healthy lifestyle and is a positive public figure, the public would see him or her as trustworthy. For instance, several celebrities were involved in sex and drug scandals in China recently. It makes me disappointed. The first one is Li Daimo, a famous male singer. At the beginning, people liked him a lot because of his singing talent. However, after he was reported to take drugs, his public image was destroyed. The other one is Chinese actor Wu Xiubo. He used to have a ‘Mr. Good’ public image. However, his image collapsed when journalists discovered that he had two mistresses ...” (Female, aged 50-54, retired)

In both quotes, the celebrity’s reputation and integrity are linked to his or her credibility. In the second quote, the interviewee explains how personal shortfall brought disappointment to consumers. The disappointment was eventually transferred to the brands.

The civic responsibility variable can be interpreted as a specific condition of the meaning transfer model, with interviewees repeatedly mentioning that negative news related to the celebrities would “contaminate” the brand, indicating a transfer of meaning taking place. From another angle, the civic responsibility variable can also be interpreted using the source credibility model. A celebrity with improper civic behavior will lose credibility among the interviewees.

Theme 4: Perceived effects of celebrity endorsement are more influential at the cognitive level than at affective and behavioral levels

When asked about the perceived effectiveness of celebrity endorsement, participants, in general, admitted that advertisements with celebrity endorsement work well on drawing audience attention and brand identification. They also reported that these advertisements build positive feeling toward the endorsed brand. Altogether 20 interviewees mentioned that advertisements with celebrity credibility would enhance purchase confidence or purchase intention. However, none of them mentioned explicitly that these advertisements would influence purchase behavior, even though they reported that advertising with celebrity endorsement would contribute to sales performance. An interesting observation was that interviewees worried about increasing product prices because of the high cost of engaging celebrity endorsers. Here is a typical quote:

“When Osim uses (Chinese actress) Fan Bingbing and Andy Lau for advertisements, it means I, as a consumer, am going to pay an extra HK\$10,000 for the chair without a reason... Last time when another massage chair brand used (singer and actor) Julian Cheung as an endorser, it cost the brand almost four million in advertising dollars. If so, how much more would that be using Andy Lau? You can do simple mathematics to find out how much more an Osim chair will cost us. That’s why I really hope the brand doesn’t use famous celebrities. If they have to do so, they should use lesser-known celebrities rather than top celebrities.” (Male, aged 50-54, working)

#### Theme 5: Third-person effect in celebrity endorsement

When interviewees were asked which group of people was more easily affected by celebrity endorsement, most interviewees believed that advertisements with celebrity endorsement were effective among youth. They perceived themselves as more resistant to persuasion by celebrity endorsers. The phenomenon of people perceiving media effect on others but not themselves was labeled as the “third-person effect” by communication scholars (Davison 1983).



Interviewees perceived that youngsters are easily influenced by celebrity endorsement because they love popular cultures and they tend to imitate their idols. A total of 18 participants also perceived that youngsters who are obsessed with idols would buy the products endorsed by their favorite idols. In terms of gender difference, 13 interviewees believed that the female was more vulnerable to celebrity endorsement than the male. Here is a representative quote reflecting the third-person effect:

“Many Hong Kong girls love to watch Korean dramas. After watching these TV dramas, young girls attracted by the physical appearance of the actors and actresses will become their fans. When their beloved idols endorse a brand, these young ladies will buy the products as a gesture of support.” (Female, aged 50-54, retired)

Only four interviewees reported that celebrity endorsement is influential among mature consumers. When asked about the reason for such influence, the interviewees reported that this was because senior people, particularly senior females, had a lot of leisure time to watch TV, and were frequently exposed to advertisements with celebrity endorsement. Interviewees also considered senior people less educated and so relied heavily on recommendations from their favorite celebrities.

## **6. Discussion**

This qualitative interview study examines how mature consumers in Hong Kong perceive advertisements with celebrity endorsement. Among the three most commonly used theoretical models in explaining the communication effect of celebrity endorsement, the source attractiveness model and the celebrity-brand congruency model are more useful than the source credibility model. It was found that attitudes toward celebrity endorsers are positive when the selected celebrity endorsers are attractive and demonstrate civic responsible behaviors such as a drug-free lifestyle and philanthropic activities. Advertisements endorsed by such celebrities attract audience attention and enhance message retention. Advertising frequency and celebrity-brand congruency also contribute to

advertising attention and message retention. Specifically, advertising frequency is important among mature adults. One typical symptom of aging is depreciation in cognitive ability and memory. Mature adults have more difficulty in memorizing things than the young. The decline in cognitive abilities and reliance on advertising frequency in processing advertising messages was found more salient among retirees. The human capital framework proposed that retirement may lead to a drop in cognitive ability as individuals lose the market incentive to invest in cognitive repair activities (Grossman, 1972). Analysis of nationally representative data collected from household panel across several European countries supported this hypothesis (Mazzonna and Peracchi, 2012). As for celebrity-brand congruency, interviewees perceived it as an important factor when marketers select celebrity endorsers. It also plays a positive role in strengthening mature consumers' memory of the advertising and its message. When mature consumers pay attention to the advertisement and remember the advertising message, they are able to recognize the endorsed brand and be more receptive to it.

An interesting finding is that mature interviewees adopt different criteria in evaluating celebrity endorsers from consumers' and marketers' perspectives. When interviewees perceive themselves as audience and target consumers, they prefer to watch advertisements featuring celebrities with source attractiveness. However, when participants are asked to think about criteria used to select celebrity endorsers from the perspective of the brand, civic responsibility behaviors become as important as source attractiveness. It was unexpected that the source credibility model is not frequently brought up as a reason for finding an advertisement memorable. Credibility consists of two elements, i.e., expertise and trustworthiness. While expertise refers to the capability of a source to assert valid argument, trustworthiness refers to the level of trust in a message sender's intention to communicate the most valid argument (Tzoumaka, Tsiotsou, and Siomkos 2016). Interviewees' failure to recall source credibility does not necessarily mean the source credibility model is not important. Instead, interviewees may perceive credibility as a basic requirement. That is, an endorser does not pop up in

the “consideration set” of an interviewee’s recall if he or she is not credible. Interviewees talk more about credibility-related behaviors when they take the perspective of a marketer. Interviewees perceive that marketers have to consider more factors from a fundamental level. The dual perspectives suggest that the civic responsibility behavior variable only plays a role when the audience imagines itself as marketer. Further studies using surveys or laboratory experiments are needed to measure the relative importance of the two perspectives in generating advertising and brand communication effects.

The frequent report of the importance of a drug-free lifestyle and avoidance of sex scandals in selecting celebrity endorsers may be related to the strong ethical framework and traditional values of mature adults, particularly family values. Mature adults have strong social and moral obligations. Studies found that they hold themselves responsible for teaching their grandchildren moral values and managing intergenerational relations (King 2003). The perception is that unethical behavior performed by celebrities creates consumer disappointment and distrust of brands. This is consistent with the existing literature. When celebrity endorsers are involved in scandals, consumers are likely to process the celebrity endorsement and associated brands in a negative way (Erdogan 1999; Carrillat and D’Astous 2014). The interviewees in our study did not report anything about offset interaction between the negative influence of celebrity scandals and positive attitude toward the endorsed brand. This is contradictory to the finding that the negative impact of celebrity scandals decreases if consumers have a strong commitment to endorsed brands and high identification with the celebrity endorsers (Um 2016).

Based on the research findings, a conceptual framework was developed as stated in Figure 1. We hypothesize that a celebrity’s attractiveness and his or her citizenship behavior will have an influence on the strength of the celebrity endorsement. This strength, when combined with advertising frequency and a celebrity-brand fit condition, will attract audience attention and enhance message

retention. Attending to both advertising and message retention will in turn influence brand identification and brand acceptance.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The proposed conceptual framework is different from a previously proposed model to explain the communication effect of advertisements with celebrity endorsement among adolescents (Chan, Ng and Luk 2013). Specifically, this study reveals that mature consumers pay little attention to the advertising execution strategy. They are more likely to recall the advertising message delivered by the celebrity than the entertaining performance exhibited by the celebrity in the advertisement. In the previous study among adolescents, it was found that advertising execution tactics related to the performance of the celebrities, such as dancing and funny dialogue, are important in driving advertising recall (Chan, Ng and Luk 2013). This demonstrates that the impact of advertising with celebrity endorsement depends on consumers' demographic characteristics. While the entertainment value of advertising is important to adolescents in Hong Kong, its significance weakens among mature consumers.

The importance of a celebrity's civic responsible behavior in creating advertising effects is similar to the result found by an exploratory study of celebrity endorsement in the context of public services advertising (Chan and Zhang 2019). In that study, interviewees perceived that celebrities in public services advertising are representatives of governments and therefore should uphold high integrity. However, such celebrity civic responsible behavior was not found in other cross-cultural studies (Biswas, Hussain, and O'Donnell, 2009), which might be attributed to cultural differences. In that study, source attractiveness and celebrity-brand congruency were useful to explain respondents' recall of advertising content, which is consistent with our study. However, trustworthiness and credibility based on a celebrity's integrity was not important in Biswas, Hussain and O'Donnell's

(2009) study. Such inconsistent findings might be explained by environmental factors such as cultural values (Biswas, Hussain, and O'Donnell 2009).

The literature shows that mature adults do not like the stereotypes of weakness in the portrayal of seniors in advertising. They dislike advertising that features negative portrayals of seniors (Robinson, Gustafson, and Popovich 2008; Festervand and Lumpkin 1985). Such stereotypical portrayals could well lead to boycotting of the endorsed products (Festervand and Lumpkin 1985). However, none of the mature interviewees complained about this in the study. This can be explained by the differences in the research focus. In the current study, all the celebrities that interviewees recalled are healthy and still physically attractive at their age. It also echoes with the literature that mature adults in advertising are described in a more positive way in Asian markets than in Western countries (Lee, Kim, and Han 2006).

## **7. Conclusion**

Mature consumers represent a promising market segment because of their increasing population age, wealth, and newly found leisure time. This qualitative study finds that source attractiveness and the celebrity-brand fit model carry most relevance when explaining the communication effect of celebrity-endorsed advertising. Civic responsible behavior of the endorsing celebrities is important when interviewees put themselves in the shoes of the marketers. A celebrity's civic responsible behavior represents a way to establish brand credibility through meaning transfer. A proposed theoretical framework on how advertising with celebrity endorsement works among adult consumers can be tested in future using structured equation models.

## **8. Limitations and marketing implications**

The study is a qualitative study with a non-probability sampling. Due to the limited sample size, it is not possible to generalize the results. The study was conducted around the time of the Mid-Autumn-

Festival when Kee Wah Bakery was extensively advertising its moon cake with Eric Tsang as the celebrity endorser. This inevitably raised the chance of him being mentioned in the study. The use of local celebrities as the visual prompt may discourage the recall of sports and international celebrities. The study used self-reported perceptions of the interviewees. The information gathered is often the most salient top-of-mind ideas. It may differ from the information interviewees found important but no salient. This is demonstrated in the discrepancy between the considerations in selecting celebrities as consumers vs. as marketers. This problem may be shared by many qualitative research, and therefore is a limitation of the study.

Although the study is qualitative in nature, its marketing implications are insightful and important. First, this study reminds marketers that there are asymmetrical perceptions between marketers and mature consumers in terms of how advertising works. Even though interviewees did not bring up the importance of source credibility from the consumer perspective, celebrities' credibility-related behaviors played an important role when perceived by interviewees from the marketer's perspective. This suggests that the personal integrity of celebrities permits mature adults to allow themselves to be swayed by advertising persuasiveness. Marketers should therefore scrutinize the moral behavior of potential endorsers. Secondly, marketers should further segment the mature adult market into retirees and working adults, with the latter group retaining higher levels of cognitive capacity. This should guide the direction for complexity of advertising copy and choice of advertising medium. For example, retirees face decrease in cognitive capability and it is necessary to repeat the advertising message many times to enhance message retention. A media strategy implication is to use out-of-home media with less copy or shorter television commercials with high repetition to enhance advertising recall.

Thirdly, as mature adults perceive advertising with celebrity endorsement differently than younger consumers (Chan, Ng and Luk 2013), it is important for marketers to establish a "multi-endorser" system to target consumers at different life stages.

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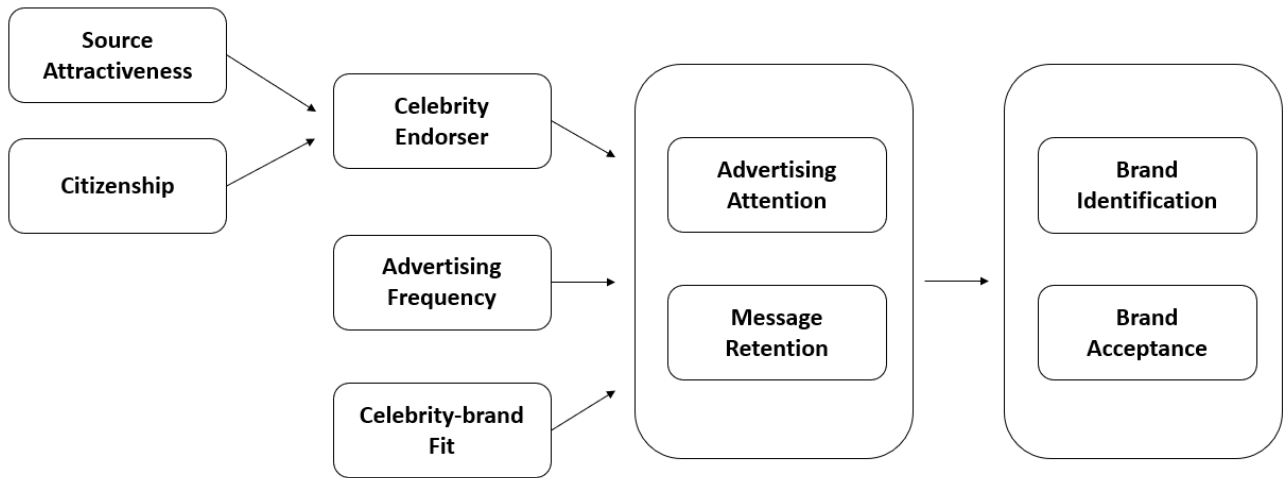
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Figure 1. A proposed model about impact of advertising with celebrity appeal on mature consumers



## **Appendix 1** Questions asked in the interview

1. Warm-up question: What are the names of the two celebrities and the brand they endorsed in the television commercial?
2. Who is your most memorable celebrity endorser? What is the name of the brand he or she endorsed? Why is it memorable?
3. What are the important factors for marketers to consider when selecting a celebrity endorser?
4. What are the impacts of employing a celebrity endorser on the brand?
5. Which consumer segment (e.g. age or sex) is most susceptible to the influence of celebrity endorsers in advertisements? Why?