

Celebrity poses and consumer attitudes in endorsement advertisements

Celebrity poses
and consumer
attitudes

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of celebrity's poses on consumer attitudes towards the endorsement advertisement by drawing from perceptual fluency hypotheses.

Design/methodology/approach – Study 1 used a single-factor, two-condition (distinctive pose and casual pose) between-subject design. Both Study 2a and Study 2b employed a single-factor, two-condition (distinctive pose, casual pose) between-subject design and tested the mediator of pose matchiness. Study 3 employed a 2 (pose condition: distinctive, casual) \times 2 (cognitive capacity: no load, load) between-subject design to test the moderator. All data were sourced from more than 600 respondents in China.

Findings – Study 1 illustrated that the existence of a distinctive pose can lead to higher consumer attitudes regarding advertising stimuli and the endorsed brands as well as more positive behavioural intentions towards endorsed products. Study 2a and Study 2b replicated such finding and demonstrated that the feeling of pose matchiness mediates the relationship between celebrities' pose and endorsement outcomes. Study 3 further revealed that the cognitive capacity moderates such a relationship, that is, that the effect of a distinctive pose is stronger (lesser) when audiences' cognitive capacity is loaded (not loaded).

Originality/value – Research efforts to date examining the nature of celebrity advertisement have been limited to celebrity's faces and facial expressions. Little investigation in the marketing domain has considered the consequences of celebrities' poses. This study takes the first step in revealing the positive effect of distinctive celebrity poses in product endorsement.

Keywords Endorsement, Advertising, Marketing communications, Consumer attitude, Cognitive load, Celebrity endorsement, Celebrity poses

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

To date, the number of celebrities worldwide has been progressively rising, and their influence is substantial and undeniable (Furedi, 2010). Celebrities are playing an increasingly vital role in the current intense marketing environment because it is becoming considerably difficult to differentiate products technologically from one another. The use of celebrities in marketing activities can cost the endorsed company a substantial amount of money (Liu and Brock, 2011). For example, LeBron James earned approximately \$13m per year from his endorsements of Nike alone (Badenhausen, 2016). Therefore, academic research is particularly interested in the effectiveness of the use of celebrity endorsers. However, at this time, most relevant investigations have focussed on traditional source characteristics such as expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1991) or on the match between a product and an endorser (i.e. the celebrity match-up hypothesis) (Kahle and Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990).

Since faces are arguably the most important visual stimuli produced by endorsers, recent studies on endorser effectiveness focussed on the automatic evaluation of the construction and configuration of faces (Wang *et al.*, 2016; Tanner and Maeng, 2012) and facial expressions (Kulczynski *et al.*, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2016). However, these studies have



systematically overlooked the body and posture, which are also important facets of the endorser. In most cases, people simultaneously see faces and bodies in advertisements, and yet few studies have explored the visual processing of the full person and the influence of such in marketing. Recent trademark dispute between Michael Jordan and a China-based sportswear company Qiaodan may shed some light on the importance of celebrity's famous pose. By using the JORDAN mark in Chinese characters along with a silhouette of a leaping basketball player, the company misled consumers about its ties to him, and became a highly successful franchise which operated some 6,000 stores in China (Zhang, 2016). In fact, many celebrities have true signature poses, such as Michael Jackson's moonwalk pose, Jack Chan's kungfu pose, etc. However, according to our best knowledge, no study so far has examined the role of distinctive pose in celebrity endorsement advertisement. Given the emerging neuropsychological evidence that suggests that faces and bodies are processed as a single unit (Aviezer *et al.*, 2012; Willems *et al.*, 2014), marketing scholars should devote more attention to conducting research on the automatic processing of celebrities' poses. Therefore, the present study aims to answer two questions that are important for both researchers and practitioners; specifically do the poses of a celebrity affect how a viewer reacts to an advertisement with regard to the metrics that advertisers care about and if poses do have an effect, how should advertisers go about selecting them when constructing print advertisements?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, we review existing findings from psychological and marketing literature, which reveal that the perceptual fluency of celebrity poses influences how much the endorsement advertisement is liked. Second, the authors present four experiments that explore the effects of celebrity outlines. The results of these experiments will provide evidence for the following claims: that a distinctive celebrity pose can increase major advertising outcome measures such as attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand and purchase intention (PI) (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989); that the feelings of pose matchiness play a mediation role in the relationship between the celebrity pose and endorsement outcomes; that the cognitive capacity of audiences moderates the effects of celebrities' poses on endorsement outcomes; and that the effect of distinctive poses is stronger (lesser) when audiences' cognitive capacity is loaded (not loaded). The findings of this study are expected to provide strategic insights for researchers and practitioners in the area of celebrity endorsement.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 *Celebrity endorsement and consumer attitude*

Ample research has proven that celebrity endorsements can benefit brands in terms of improved consumer attitude (Erdogan, 1999). Researchers have proposed various theories and models to uncover the reasons why consumers are influenced by celebrity endorsements. The Source Attractiveness Model and Source Credibility Model, for example, assumes that the effectiveness of the advertisement depends on the characteristics of the source such that a celebrity spokesperson's attractiveness or credibility has a positive impact on attitude towards the brand and purchasing intention (e.g. Joseph, 1982; Kahle and Homer, 1985; Kapitan and Silvera, 2016). The Product Match-up Hypothesis was subsequently proposed which claimed that the celebrity's image and the product should match with one another for effective advertising (Kamins, 1990; Misra and Beatty, 1990; Wright, 2016). The Match-up Hypothesis makes up for some of the pitfalls of the Source Credibility Model and Source Attractiveness Model, however, it still disregards the impact of a celebrity endorser's cultural meanings in endorsements (Erdogan, 1999). Separately, McCracken (1989) extended the Match-up Hypothesis and proposed the Meaning Transfer Model, which states that the endorsement is effective when a consumer appropriates the meaning associated with the celebrity. Knoll *et al.* (2017) confirmed the assumed

meaning transfer effect and found out that the effects appear to be substantially stronger after about a week.

To sum up, it seems that the prior research in celebrity endorsement is generally linked to source characteristics, matching with the brand, or meaning. However, the current study argues that even with the same endorser, the effectiveness of an endorsement varies depending on the perceptual fluency of their posture. The conceptual framework of our arguments will be discussed in the next section.

2.2 *Perceptual fluency and consumer attitude*

The overarching conceptual framework is based on Epstein's (1985, 2003) cognitive experiential self-theory. According to that, people have dual process systems of judgment and behaviour, namely, the experiential system and the rational system. The experiential system, or System 1, is characterised as being intuitive, automatic and affective; whereas the rational system, or System 2, is characterised by effortful, analytic and conscious processing (Fazio, 2007; Gawronski and Bodenhausen, 2006). The processing styles of the two systems differ considerably. System 1 occurs passively in an automatic, effortless manner, whereas System 2 requires working memory and its processes are sequential, capacity limited and relatively slow (Evans, 2006). Using the conceptual framework, this study provides a theoretical account for the effect of endorser's distinctive pose on consumer attitude within System 1. Specifically, it is proposed that endorser's distinctive pose can affect consumer attitude due to perceptual fluency. In addition, it is predicted that the cognitive load moderates the effect of endorser's distinctive pose on consumer attitude; that is, system 1 processes are more likely when cognitive load is high.

Perceptual fluency is defined as the ease with which a person perceives the physical characteristics of a stimulus (Lee and Labroo, 2004). Prior evidence suggests that perceptual fluency plays a vital role in human judgments, as people tend to generate reasonable, parsimonious explanations of their experience (ease or difficulty) after processing a stimulus (Chang, 2013). For example, Reber *et al.* (1998) demonstrated that variables that facilitate perceptual fluency also enhance the evaluations of objects. Fluency attribution models are used to explain such an effect and argue that people misattribute the feelings of fluency to liking (Bornstein and D'Agostino, 1994).

A majority of earlier studies conducted on endorsements, which follow the rationale of conceptual fluency on information processing (i.e. "the ease with which instances or associations come to mind"), have focussed on the celebrity-product match-up (Misra and Beatty, 1990; Wright, 2016; McCormick, 2016). Contrarily, the present study focuses on perceptual fluency, a variable that may be especially important for real-life advertising experiences. Empirical evidence reported in the existing advertising literature demonstrates the positive effects of perceptual fluency on the evaluations of overall products. For example, the ability of consumers to process product information was better when it appeared in an easy-to-read font, which led them to exhibit less choice deferral (Novemsky *et al.*, 2007). Further, a different study found that the prior exposure of consumers to a storyboard for a product commercial generated more favourable consumer evaluations upon the presentation of the finished advertisement for that product (Lee and Labroo, 2004). Pieters and Wedel (2012) additionally surmised that brief exposures of consumers to typical advertisements, rather than the atypical ones, trigger an immediate interest due to their better gist performance in adverse exposure conditions.

As far as potential explanations for preferences concerning celebrities' distinctive poses are concerned, the reality is that, since the invention of the television, most consumers are repeatedly exposed to celebrities' performance images rather than daily-life images, and, as such, the positive perceptions that tend to accrue regarding distinctive pose images could potentially be explained by the increased perceptual fluency.

2.3 Hypothesis development

The present study argues that the pose distinctiveness of a celebrity can enhance the perceptual fluency of the endorsement advertisement because the former improves with greater prior exposure to the celebrity (Reber *et al.*, 1998). Consequently, consumers will have a better attitude towards the endorsement in a high-distinctive condition than in a low-distinctive condition. Recent empirical evidence also suggested that perceptual fluency can lead to enhanced consumer attitude and PI towards the product and the brand. For example, adopting a fluency perspective, Kelting *et al.* (2017) showed that when copycat private labels are included in a shelf set, consumers with high knowledge of the category experience greater choice ease and subsequently evaluate their chosen product more favourably. Gomez *et al.* (2017) found that providing consumers with easier-to-process nutrition information increased their PIs for food products. Such effect occurs not only for healthy food but also for unhealthy food products. Thus, it is proposed that:

H1. As compared with a less distinctive pose, a distinctive celebrity pose evokes more positive attitudes towards the advertisement (A_a) and towards the brand (A_b), as well as a higher degree of PI.

According to Claypool *et al.* (2007), the processing of a familiar source is said to be much easier to do as compared with the processing of an unfamiliar stimulus. This discrepancy is due to the fact that the characteristics of a previously seen source generally match information already stored about the stimulus, which simplifies subsequent processing. Meanwhile, the assessment of a new (or previously unseen) source requires effort to extract and decode many pieces of information, thus requiring a new mental representation, which is more effortful to create than one from a familiar source (Claypool *et al.*, 2007). As far as celebrities' poses are concerned, since a distinctive pose can be easily matched with previously stored images, it is expected that a distinctive pose can generate more feelings of "pose-match", which lead to more positive attitudes. As such, it is hypothesised that:

H2. As compared with a less distinctive pose, the existence of a distinctive celebrity pose evokes more feelings of "pose matchiness".

H3. The degree of "pose matchiness" mediates the relationship between the distinctiveness of celebrities' poses and A_a , A_b , and PI.

According to the dual-processing framework, rational processes (System 2) are employed when consumers have sufficient opportunity and motivation to process information, whereas experiential processes (System 1) do not require this resource. Previous research suggested that high cognitive load will reduce the ability to process information (Barrouillet *et al.*, 2007) and encourage a spontaneous attitude-behaviour process (Fazio, 2007). Therefore, it is expected that consumers under cognitive load are more likely to process information via System 1. In other words, under cognitive load, people tend to rely on heuristics, cues and affinity with the information source (Petty *et al.*, 1983). Misattribution of fluency to liking is, thus, more possible to happen under the cognitive load condition than the no load condition. Thus, we propose that:

H4. Cognitive capacity moderates the effect of distinctive pose on A_a , A_b and PI; that the effect of a distinctive pose is stronger (lesser) when audiences' cognitive capacity is loaded (not loaded).

In Study 1, we show how pose conditions (distinctive vs casual) in celebrity endorsement advertisements can affect consumers' A_a , A_b and PI. In Study 2a and Study 2b, we used both a domestic celebrity and an international celebrity to reveal the underlying mechanism of

the celebrity pose effect by examining the mediating role of pose matchiness. Finally, in Study 3, we introduced cognitive load as a moderator for the impact of pose conditions on consumers' A_a , A_b and PI.

3. Study 1: distinctive pose and favourable attitude

3.1 Methods

Study 1 examines the effects of the endorser's poses on consumer attitudes and behaviour intentions. An online survey was conducted through a popular online survey platform in China (Sojump). The survey platform possesses more than 2.6m sample resources from different cities in China, including those with diverse demographic backgrounds. Each valid respondent was to be rewarded with points, which they could redeem for money in their online payment account. In this study, the cover story informed participants that they needed to carefully assess an endorsement advertisement and be able to provide advice on the subject afterwards. A total of 216 Chinese participants (107 males, $M_{age} = 32.5$ years, 80.1 per cent had a bachelor's degree or higher) were randomly assigned to a distinctive-pose condition or a casual-pose condition as part of a single-factor, between-subjects investigation. The stimuli of Study 1 displayed an endorsement situation in which the celebrity was paired with a beer brand. Participants in the distinctive-pose condition viewed the original Jet Li (a well-known Chinese martial artist in Hollywood who was on the cover of *TIME* magazine) in a pose from his famous Kung Fu style, whereas participants in the casual-pose condition viewed an advertisement with Li in a casual pose.

3.1.1 Pretest. A separate pretest assessed the identification rate of the different poses under a high-coarseness condition. This was done because, under the aforementioned high-coarseness condition, the degree of detail (i.e. facial elements) that can be extracted from the scene is deteriorated and audiences instead must rely on the global properties of scenes (i.e. pose) to identify the celebrity endorser (Pieters and Wedel, 2012). A total of 60 people were recruited through the same online survey platform (Sojump) as participants for this test. They were randomly stratified into either a distinctive-pose condition group or a casual-pose condition group and asked to identify the person in the image. Results show that 20 participants (66.7 per cent) identified Jet Li in the distinctive-pose condition, whereas only ten participants (33.3 per cent; $\chi^2(1, 60) = 6.67, p = 0.01$) identified Li in the casual-pose condition. The results indicate that the pose of the endorser in the distinctive-pose condition is significantly more distinctive as compared with that of the endorser in the casual-pose condition.

3.1.2 Measures and procedures. Participants were shown a print advertisement that illustrated an endorsement situation and displayed the endorser's image next to a beer brand. Participants were first instructed to rate the endorser according to the aspects of trustworthiness, likeness, competence and attractiveness based on a ten-point scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$) (Tanner and Maeng, 2012). Subsequently, they were asked to share their A_a , A_b and PI scores. The rating of their A_a was drawn from Mitchell and Olson's (1981) seven-point semantic differential scale, which includes "this advertisement is: bad/good, disliked/liked, and uninteresting/interesting" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$). The rating of their A_b was based on Carrilat *et al.*'s (2014) model, which includes "For the beer brand: I have a negative opinion about/I have a positive opinion about it, I do not like/I like it, it is untrustworthy/is trustworthy, and it is inferior to other brands/is superior to other brands" (seven-point scale; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$). For the rating of their PI, methodology drawn from Choi and Rifon (2012) was used via the proposal of the question, "How likely is it that you would consider the advertised brand next time you purchase beer?" (seven-point scale). Finally, participants reported their simple demographic information (i.e. gender, age and education).

3.2 Results

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. As we expected, the ratings of the same endorser differ among various conditions of poses ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 7.03$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 6.30$; $F(1, 215) = 8.77$, $p < 0.005$), with the existence of a distinctive pose leading to more positive ratings of the endorser as compared with a casual pose. We next conducted a similar analysis with A_a , A_b and PI as the dependent variables. As was anticipated, there was a significant impact of endorser pose on A_a ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.22$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.78$; $F(1, 215) = 5.23$, $p < 0.03$), A_b ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.26$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.86$; $F(1, 215) = 6.59$, $p < 0.02$) and PI ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.26$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.85$; $F(1, 215) = 4.07$, $p < 0.05$), with distinctive pose leading to more favourable attitudes vs the casual pose. Thus, *H1* was supported.

In summary, Study 1 supports our primary hypothesis (*H1*), showing the consequential impact of a celebrity's pose conditions on evaluative measures; in this investigation, the distinctive pose of a Kung Fu star increased favourable attitudes towards the A_a , A_b and PI. However, there is an alternative explanation for the results of Study 1. Cian *et al.* (2014) previously found that the perception of movement in static images by the viewer affects the level of consumer engagement and consumer attitude. To rule out this alternative explanation, Study 2a and Study 2b were carried out. In these studies, we focussed on the process behind this effect and tested whether pose matchiness mediates the effects of celebrities' pose conditions (*H2* and *H3*).

4. Study 2: mediation role of pose matchiness

Study 2 extends Study 1 in two ways. First, it measured the feelings of "pose matchiness" and tested this concept's mediation role in the relationship between pose conditions and enhanced consumer attitudes. Second, to increase the external validity of the study, various categories of celebrities such as pop star and comedian were used as the stimuli.

4.1 Study 2a: a domestic pop star and a green tea brand

4.1.1 Methods. Study 2a tried to replicate the findings of Study 1 and further test the mechanism of celebrity pose effect. Jay Chou was chosen as the celebrity endorser for Study 2a because he was a *TIME* magazine cover figure and is one of the most well-known pop stars in China. The stimuli displayed an endorsement situation, pairing the celebrity with a green tea brand.

Similar to as was done in previous experiments, the present study included the performance of a pretest to check for prominent perceptions of the poses. A total of 63 people were recruited through an online panel provider (Sojump) as participants for this test. As in Study 1, the celebrity's images were treated with high coarseness such that their face was not recognisable; participants were subsequently asked to decide whether the person they were viewing was a celebrity. Results show that 54 participants (85.7 per cent) identified the person in the image as a celebrity in the distinctive-pose condition, whereas 28 participants (44.4 per cent; $\chi^2(1, 60) = 23.61$, $p < 0.001$) reported that they saw a celebrity in the casual-pose condition. These results indicate that the pose of the endorser in the distinctive-pose condition was significantly more distinct as compared with that of the endorser in the casual-pose condition.

For the main study, a total of 130 (58 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 29.2$ years, 66.9 per cent had a bachelor's degree or higher) Chinese participants were recruited through the same survey platform (Sojump) and randomly assigned to either a distinctive-pose condition group or a casual pose condition group. Participants in the distinctive-pose condition group viewed Chou in his famous pose, whereas participants in the casual-pose condition group saw him in a casual pose. Participants were first instructed to report their A_a (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$), A_b (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$) and PI immediately after viewing the advertisement to avoid the

halo effect of celebrity endorsers and then subsequently rate their perceptions of the endorser in terms of trustworthiness, likeness, competence and attractiveness on ten-point scales (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$). Next, participants were instructed to answer whether they were familiar with the celebrity or not and to write the celebrity's name. Finally, they were instructed to report their feelings of pose matchiness according to a seven-point scale.

4.1.2 Results of Study 2a. All the participants in this study were able to identify the celebrity and write his name correctly. An ANOVA was conducted to test the difference of celebrity ratings among two conditions; it did not yield any significant results regarding trustworthiness, likeness, competence or attractiveness (all $p > 0.1$). The results of the ANOVA further revealed significant variations regarding A_a ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 4.67$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 3.98$; $F(1, 129) = 7.23$, $p < 0.01$) and PI ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 4.64$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 3.97$; $F(1, 129) = 5.65$, $p < 0.02$) and a marginally significant difference regarding A_b ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 4.75$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.37$; $F(1, 129) = 3.37$, $p < 0.07$), respectively. Our findings, therefore, validate *H1*. In addition, the results showed that the feeling of pose matchiness was significant higher in the distinctive-pose condition ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.50$) vs in the casual-pose condition ($M_{\text{casual}} = 4.58$; $F(1, 129) = 9.15$, $p < 0.02$). Thus, our *H2* is also supported.

To investigate whether feelings of pose matchiness (i.e. perceptual fluency) mediated the relationship between the prominent celebrity pose and the positive evaluation of the advertisement and the brand, the PROCESS macro bootstrapping procedure ($n = 10,000$, model 4) was employed (Preacher *et al.*, 2007). Since the independent variable was categorical, we dummy coded the conditions and assigned 1 to the distinctive-pose condition and 0 to the casual-pose condition. The results of this test indicated that the prominent celebrity pose produced significant feelings of pose matchiness and that pose matchiness was a significant predictor of A_a , A_b and PI (Table I). Further, the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect of pose conditions on the dependent variables through the mediator, pose matchiness, did not include zero (A_a : $\beta = 0.35$, 95% CI = 0.13–0.67; A_b : $\beta = 0.25$, 95% CI = 0.09–0.50; PI: $\beta = 0.28$, 95% CI = 0.09–0.60). The results, therefore, support *H3*.

The findings of Study 2a, thus, demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between the extent of salience of a celebrity's pose and consumers' attitude and that the perception of pose matchiness seems to mediate this relationship.

4.2 Study 2b: an international comedian and a pudding brand

Study 2b extended Study 1 and Study 2a in two ways. First, the celebrities used in Study 1 and Study 2a were all celebrities with domestic status, as they were of Chinese origin and

	β	Study 2a <i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β	Study 2b <i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Pose matchiness</i>						
Pose conditions (X)	0.92	3.03	0.003	1.47	4.43	< 0.001
<i>Attitude toward ad</i>						
Pose matchiness (M)	0.38	5.67	< 0.001	0.15	1.89	0.062
Pose conditions (X)	0.34	1.43	0.155	0.52	1.98	0.052
<i>Attitude towards brand</i>						
Pose matchiness (M)	0.28	4.96	< 0.001	0.12	1.69	0.095
Pose conditions (X)	0.13	0.65	0.518	0.29	1.23	0.221
<i>Purchase intention</i>						
Pose matchiness (M)	0.3	3.89	< 0.001	0.12	1.26	0.211
Pose conditions (X)	0.39	1.41	0.160	0.54	1.72	0.090

Table I.
Regression results
in Study 2

the targeted population was Chinese individuals. In Study 2b, however, we instead used a foreigner–European comedian Rowan Atkinson, who is well-known internationally for his acting as Mr Bean. Second, the measurement of pose matchiness was operationalized as three seven-scale items to reduce measurement error.

4.2.1 Methods. Study 2b included an online survey conducted using the same platform (Sojump) as that used in previous studies. Participants were recruited based on whether they had seen Mr Bean before or not. A total of 81 Chinese individuals (46 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 32.5$ years, 84.0 per cent had a bachelor's degree or higher) were recruited and randomly assigned to either a distinctive-pose condition group or a casual-pose condition group as part of a single-factor, between-subjects study. Participants in the distinctive-pose condition group viewed Rowan Atkinson with his famous high leg pose, whereas participants in the casual-pose condition viewed the celebrity with a casual pose. As in previous studies, they were first asked to report their perceptions of the endorser (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$) and their A_a (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$), A_b (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$), and PI scores. Subsequently, the stimuli in both conditions were shown to them to make a between-group comparison. During this, they were instructed to cover the celebrity's face by putting a finger on the screen and rate their level of agreement on the following three statements about celebrity's pose: "I can identify the celebrity in the photo without seeing his face," "this pose matches his image in my mind," and "even without face, I would not misidentify the celebrity with somebody else" (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$). The data were aggregated and labelled as pose matchiness for the following analysis.

4.2.2 Results of Study 2b. ANOVA was performed to test the variation of ratings of the celebrity between the distinctive-pose condition and the casual-pose condition. The results showed that there were no significant differences regarding trustworthiness, likeness, competence and attractiveness (all $p > 0.1$). However, significant variations were found regarding A_a ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.67$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.94$; $F(1, 80) = 9.63$, $p < 0.004$), A_b ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.52$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 5.05$; $F(1, 80) = 4.81$, $p < 0.04$), and PI ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.67$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.94$; $F(1, 80) = 6.4$, $p < 0.02$). Thus, our results here replicated the findings of Study 1 and Study 2a and further support *H1*. In addition, the feeling of pose matchiness was found to be significantly higher in the distinctive-pose condition ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 4.60$) than in the casual-pose condition ($M_{\text{casual}} = 3.14$; $F(1, 80) = 19.64$, $p < 0.001$). *H2* is, therefore, also reinforced.

The PROCESS macro bootstrapping procedure ($n = 10,000$, model 4) was performed to test the mediation role of pose matchiness in the relationship between the pose conditions and positive endorsement outcomes (Preacher *et al.*, 2007). Pose conditions were dummy coded (1 = distinctive pose, 0 = causal-pose) as the independent variable. The results partially replicated our findings in Study 2a, which illustrated that the distinctive celebrity pose produced significant feelings of pose matchiness and that pose matchiness was a significant predictor of A_a and a marginally significant one for A_b (Table I). The 95% bootstrapped CI further confirmed that the indirect effect of pose matchiness was significant (A_a : $\beta = 0.22$, 95% CI = 0.03–0.54; A_b : $\beta = 0.18$, 95% CI = 0.002–0.45). Our results here, therefore, partially support *H3*.

In sum, the findings of Study 2a and Study 2b further demonstrate that the distinctiveness of a celebrity's pose can have a positive effect on consumers' evaluation of the endorsement advertisement and the endorsed brand and also enhance their purchase intentions. The underlying mechanism of distinctive pose effect is tested in Study 2a and Study 2b. The results reveal that the perception of pose matchiness seems to mediate the relationship between the distinct celebrity pose and the positive endorsement outcomes.

5. Study 3: a beauty and a clothing brand

Study 3 extended the previous studies in two ways. First, drawing on the fluency attribution theory, this study introduced the cognitive constrain as an experimental factor

to test its moderation effect. Second, to enhance the external validity of distinctive pose effect, Study 3 used a female endorser to test the pose conditions on endorsement outcomes.

5.1 Methods

Fan Bingbing (a cover figure of *TIME* magazine) was chosen as the celebrity endorser to be considered in Study 3 because of her status as one of the most famous actresses in China. A professionally designed advertisement for a women clothing brand was used that showed her as the celebrity endorser. In this study, a 2 (pose conditions: distinct, casual) \times 2 (cognitive capacity: no load, load) between-subjects design was employed to assess the occurrence of a distinctive pose effect (*H1*) and the moderation role of cognitive capacity (*H4*).

5.1.1 Pretest. The study included a pretest to check for the perceptions of pose matchiness of the celebrity poses. A total of 54 people were recruited through an online panel provider (Sojump) as participants for this test. Participants were shown stimuli from both conditions and asked to rate their feelings of pose matchiness for each stimulus. Results of paired-samples *t*-testing show that the rating of pose matchiness was significantly higher in the high-pose condition ($M=5.85$) than that in the casual-pose condition ($M=4.37$; $t(53)=6.97$, $p < 0.001$).

5.1.2 Measures and procedures. To ensure the validity of the target group, a representative online sample of female participants was solicited through the same online panel provider (Sojump). A total of 156 ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.6$ years, 79.5 per cent had a bachelor's degree or higher) Chinese female participants were recruited and randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Participants in the cognitive load condition were first asked to memorise a seven-digit number prior to exposure to the print advertisement, whereas participants in the no load condition did not complete this task. Participants were then shown a constructed print advertisement featuring Fan Bingbing as the celebrity endorser in either a distinctive pose (a typical Queen-like elegant pose) or a casual pose (a normal young female pose). Consistent with studies 1 and 2, participants were asked to rate their attitude towards the celebrity (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$) and provide their A_a (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$), A_b (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$) and PI scores. Finally, the participants reported simple demographic information.

5.2 Results

The study carried out several 2×2 ANOVA tests with pose conditions and cognitive capacity as the independent variables and A_a , A_b and PI as the dependent variables, respectively. A significant main effect of pose condition was found regarding A_a ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.30$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 5.01$; $F(1, 155) = 3.63$, $p < 0.06$), A_b ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.32$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 5.01$; $F(1, 155) = 4.59$, $p < 0.04$) and PI ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.51$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.95$; $F(1, 155) = 8.04$, $p < 0.006$). Such results offered further empirical evidence for our *H1*. The main effect of cognitive capacity was also significant in terms of A_a ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.37$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.93$; $F(1, 155) = 5.64$, $p < 0.02$), A_b ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.30$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 5.01$; $F(1, 155) = 3.63$, $p < 0.06$), and PI ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.41$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 5.05$; $F(1, 155) = 3.65$, $p < 0.06$). More importantly, significant interactions were identified: our results reveal that the interaction between pose condition and cognitive capacity was significant for both A_a ($F(1, 155) = 6.64$, $p < 0.02$) and A_b ($F(1, 155) = 6.88$, $p < 0.02$) but not so for PI ($F < 1$). Planned contrasts also revealed that, within the cognitive load condition, higher pose matchiness led to more favourable endorsement outcomes than did lower pose matchiness regarding A_a ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.77$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.99$; $F(1, 155) = 9.37$, $p < 0.004$), A_b ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.69$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 4.94$; $F(1, 155) = 11.25$, $p < 0.002$), and PI ($M_{\text{distinctive}} = 5.79$, $M_{\text{casual}} = 5.05$; $F(1, 155) = 7.10$, $p < 0.01$). Within the no cognitive load condition, no significant difference was found (all $F < 2$). The results of Study 3, therefore, supported *H4*.

As such, the findings of Study 3 further demonstrate that the distinctiveness of a celebrity's pose can positively impact consumers' attitude towards the endorsed brand. The moderation role of cognitive capacity in the relationship of pose condition and endorsement outcomes was also confirmed; specifically, that the distinctive pose effect tends to be stronger in the cognitive load condition vs in the no cognitive load condition.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The present study provides the first demonstration of the important finding that the poses of celebrities influence endorsement outcomes. Study 1 revealed primary evidence of the existence of a pose distinctiveness effect, wherein a celebrity appearing in his famous Kung Fu pose resulted in more favourable consumer attitudes towards the endorsed product in comparison with him in a casual pose.

Study 2a and Study 2b both replicated the above effect with various categories of celebrities. In Study 2a, participants reported higher ratings of A_a , A_b and PI when a pop star was shown with a "cool style" pose rather than with a casual pose. Study 2b used an internationally known comedian to test the distinctive pose effect and ultimately found the same results. More importantly, the mediation role of pose matchiness is confirmed in both Study 2a and Study 2b. Results show that the distinctive poses of endorsers increase the feeling of pose matchiness, which leads to enhanced positive evaluation of the endorsement. Thus, the alternative explanation of pose-dynamism, which posits that the distinctive pose evokes greater perceived movement and generates more favourable attitudes, can be ruled out (Cian *et al.*, 2014).

Study 3 further demonstrated that the endorsement effect has a positive relationship with the pose distinctiveness of the celebrity, and the effect was also validated in a female celebrity. Drawing on the dual-processing framework, Study 3 illustrated the mechanism of and the boundary conditions for the pose distinctiveness effect. The results suggested that, when consumers have limited cognitive capacities, the effect of distinctive celebrity pose will be stronger since audience members tend to more rely on heuristics and cues, which increases the likelihood of the misattribution of processing ease.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

Across four experiments, the present research provides converging evidence that the distinctive celebrity pose generates more favourable attitude towards the endorsed brand. In doing so, we took a different perspective from previous research by considering the effects of celebrity's physical attractiveness, credibility or meaning *per se* on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. In other words, we turned to fluency effects whereas the previous literature on celebrity endorsement essentially considered the affective and cognitive effects (Fleck *et al.*, 2012).

This study also contributes to the literature concerning how the experience of information processing significantly influences advertisement outcomes (Chang, 2013). Humans have evolved with significant mental capabilities designed solely to facilitate the rapid processing of human pose information (Downing *et al.*, 2001). However, the possible influence of such automatic evaluations in marketing contexts has not yet received sufficient attention. While marketers narrowly focus on manipulating the attractiveness, agreeableness or friendliness of a celebrity endorser (e.g. Wang *et al.*, 2016; Kulczynski *et al.*, 2016), the present study suggests that the manipulation of the familiarity of the endorser can also have a significant influence on consumers. We hope that these initial findings will help to facilitate further marketing research on the holistic and automatic processing of celebrity-related imagery.

This study also contributes to the literature regarding how celebrities in printed advertisements are processed. There is a surprisingly limited amount of research on the impact of celebrity bodies and gestures in marketing. For example, researchers used

celebrities in printed advertisements as stimuli to investigate the celebrity–product match-up hypothesis. Questions posed include does a higher endorsement effect occur as a result of matching a celebrity with a relevant product (the match-up effect), or does it occur as a result of matching a celebrity with his or her distinctive pose (the fluency effect)? The current study suggests that if the fluency factor is not considered in the experiment design of a study on this subject, that it may cause confounding results.

6.2 Implications for practice

The most important implication of this study is that it highlights the need for marketers to pay more attention to how celebrity poses can be used to enhance (or how certain poses may adversely affect) the endorsement effect. With increasing competition ongoing in marketing communications, the automatic and holistic processing of stimuli may influence consumer behaviours in a variety of circumstances and contexts. In the real world, however, celebrities are typically required to show a posture that focussed on their endorsed products. Take, for example, the holding and pointing at the product were frequently used by celebrity endorsement advertisements. The endorsement effect is likely to be successful if the endorser was an athlete and had famous pictures of him/her holding and pointing at a gold medal. On the other hand, if the celebrity had other distinctive poses (such as a Kung Fu style pose), the holding and pointing pose may lead to poorer endorsement effect than the distinctive poses. Given the investments and emphasis that organisations place on their endorsers, more attention in advertisement design is certainly called for. Our research also contributes more specific guidance, with its results differentiating situations when effects of celebrity pose on brand evaluation are more or less likely to emerge. Specifically, when consumers have cognitive load, the distinctive poses of celebrity are more likely to evoke positive attitudes towards the brand than less distinctive poses. Thus, companies are suggested to use easy-to-process endorsement advertisements (with distinctive celebrity poses) when consumers do not have sufficient opportunity and motivation to process information.

The present study also proposes practical methods for the careful selection of celebrity outlines when constructing print advertisements. Marketers can generate blurry images of celebrities by using the Gaussian blur function in Adobe Photoshop (Adobe Systems) or another image editing software and should consider conducting pretests to determine the hairstyle, pose or gesture that suits their printed advertisements. They can also measure various distinct poses of potential endorsers to determine their optimal choice. The empirical evidence from this research indicates that, with all other things being equal (e.g. attractiveness, trustworthiness, likeness and familiarity), the appearance of a celebrity with a more distinctive pose will be more effective in triggering a positive consumer attitude.

6.3 Limitations and directions for future research

One of the major limitations of this study is that only indirect evidence can be used for its conclusions. The results of this study cannot reveal the amount of time that the participants spent on each of the stimulus and/or how their eye moved when processing the stimuli. We predicted that the stimulus with the prominent pose will take less time to process due to the holistic and automatic mechanisms and that participants will pay more attention to the faces when the pose of the visual stimulus is not prominent. Eye-tracking technology could be used to further this research trajectory.

Second, the present study has a bias towards actors and pop stars who display very distinctive poses. Not all celebrities have such prominent outlines; however, they can still be successful endorsers because of their prominent faces. The comparison of a “pose advertisement” with a “face-only advertisement” of the same celebrity to explore the

importance of their pose is absent in this research. Further investigation can be carried out concerning this aspect.

Third, the current research focussed only on the experiential system, or System 1, as all stimuli used in the aforementioned studies contain only heuristic cues such as endorsers. Further research can be conducted to compare the rational system (or System 2) and experiential system of celebrity endorsement advertisement regarding the perceptual fluency aspects.

In line with the rationale of fluency, the current research supports that celebrities with no conceptual overlap with a brand can still be of benefit to the brand through perceptual ease. Our research reveals that the process fluency account has the potential to explain many previous endorsement models, either conceptually fluency or perceptually fluency (Chang, 2013). Conceptual fluency reflects the ease with which instances or associations come to mind (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973). It is thus consistent with the Source Credibility Model, Match-up Hypothesis or Meaning Transfer Model. Perceptual fluency is defined as the ease with which a person perceives the physical characteristics of a stimulus (Lee and Labroo, 2004). Recent findings in neuroscience demonstrate that faces are perceived as being attractive when they approximate a facial configuration close to the population average, and processing fluency underlies preferences for attractive faces (Trujillo *et al.*, 2014). The Source attractiveness model, therefore, can be explained by the perceptual fluency account. It is suggested that more future research in celebrity endorsement domain can be carried out to test the fluency effect.

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Celebrity poses
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