

# **The impact of celebrity endorsement on wine brands' likeability and purchase intention: A Chinese perspective**

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## ***Abstract:***

*Purpose:* Using a celebrity to draw consumer's attention is a widely use marketing strategy in China, and many studies have proved the positive effect of celebrity endorsement. However, little research has been conducted with regards to examining the celebrity endorsement effects on a wine product using a local (Chinese) and foreign (USA) celebrity.

*Design/methodology/approach:* 4-fictitious scenario manipulating the nationality of the celebrity and the country-of-origin of the wine were created in order to measure respondents' perceptions of the celebrity and their attitudes and purchase intention toward the advertised products. A regression analysis is conducted to evaluate the impact celebrity endorsement has on the brands' likeability and purchase intention.

*Findings:* Physical attractiveness is the principle factor influencing positively brand attitude and purchase intention. In the meantime, trustworthiness and expertise also contribute positively to brand attitude and purchase intention.

*Practical implications:* If the target is about increasing brand likability, a well-liked celebrity can be used. If the marketing objective is about increasing purchase intention, a celebrity demonstrating physical attractiveness with perceived expertise-in-wine would likely win all.

**Keywords:** Celebrity, endorsement, China, wine

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The general belief among advertisers is that brand communication messages delivered by celebrities generate a higher appeal, attention and recall than those executed by non-celebrities (Friedman and Friedman, 1979; Kamins, 1990; McCracken, 1989, Chan et al., 2008, Hung et al., 2011). In the meantime, endorsers having strong creditability source factors, such as expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, can significantly affect consumer purchase intention (Ohanian, 1991). Nowadays, celebrities are frequently used to promote alcoholic products, in the UK (Atkinson et al. 2014) as in many other countries including China: recent examples include Yao Ming (a worldwide renowned Chinese NBA player), who launched his own wine label “Yao Family Wines” in November 2011; and Jackie Chan (a famous Hong Kong movie star) has newly signed up a joint venture agreement with Kweichow Moutai Group to launch “Jackie Chan’s Classical Collection of Moutai” in April 2012.

Foreseeing wine marketers and wine brand owners dedicate much efforts to understand Chinese wine consumer’s purchasing preferences, and strive for the key factors influencing their buying decision. Due to the rise of celebrity cultures, celebrity endorsement in advertising has widely existed as a widespread strategy of marketing communication in China. There are several studies fulfilling Chinese wine consumption patterns in general, though what we know about the perception and purchase intention on Chinese wine consumers towards a celebrity endorsement on wine products is very little. The main aim of this study is to investigate the extent celebrity endorsement would influence Chinese wine consumers towards wine brands’ attitude and purchase intent. Following a brief overview of the Chinese wine market, we present the two theoretical models used in this investigation. The research design follows, and then the key findings.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Overview of the Chinese wine market**

China has 4000 years of history in wine making. Despite this history, wine production and consumption in China has grown very recently. If most Chinese drink Chinese wines, the upper-middle classes are the major imported-wine drinker that stands for about 18.9 million of people in China (Wine Intelligence, 2011). Chinese wine drinkers believe that drinking wine is good for their health (thanks to the Chinese government who promoted wine as a healthy beverage in 2006 and 2007), particularly red wine. Wine became very quickly a symbol of a desirable urban lifestyle, which shows sophistication, vitality and social status in China. Wine drinkers consume premium or expensive wine in order to play wine-smart and to show off their western-cultural intelligence, exhibit their wealth by being able to afford the abnormal and impress their friends. Premium drinking practices are active elements in individual and group identifications, particularly in the social arenas. Wine consumption in China is not solely a personal drinking purpose, it also involved largely at a social level (Li et al., 2011): buying gifts to important friends, associates and valued customers at various occasions, festivals and events. Chinese consumers are more sensitive to foreign brands and it’s important that the brand should be associated with prestige even which correspond with high premium cost. The origin of wines is often perceived as an

indicator of quality (Balestrini and Gamble, 2006). Numbers of researches and studies support a strong perception of origin and the presentation of origin information in a retail environment can have great influence against wine consumers (Hu et al, 2008) particularly that wine as being an “experience good” product (Roth and Romeo 1992; Huber and McCann 1982; Elliot and Cameron 1994). Interestingly, the literature notes that Chinese consumers not only display a preference towards foreign brands/products because of the perceived quality, but also prefer foreign advertising to local advertising (Kwok, Uncles and Huang, 2006; Tai and Pae, 2002).

## **2.2. The Source Attractiveness Model**

Attractiveness includes various attributes such as intellectual skill, personality properties, lifestyle or athletic prowess that consumers might perceive in a celebrity endorser (Erdogan, 1999). Likeability is the “affection for the source as a result of the source’s physical appearance and behaviour” (McGuire, 1985, 239). In that perspective, celebrities need to be at least well known and admired in the public eye (Belch & Belch 2001). Erdogan (1999) provides a good summary of this phenomenon: attractive celebrity endorsers can enhance attitude towards advertisement, the brand or the product. But results about behavioural intentions are not consistent and therefore no generalization can be made. Many researchers reveal that consumers have a tendency to form positive stereotypes about attractive individuals. Compared to their unattractive counterparts, physically attractive communicators (celebrities) are more successful at changing beliefs (Baker and Churchill, 1977). It is therefore important to test the validity of the Source Attractiveness Model in the current study. This leads to the first hypothesis H1: The greater the attractiveness of the endorser the greater the likeability of the brand (a) and its purchase intention (b).

## **2.3. The Source Credibility Model**

“Source credibility” is used commonly to entail the communicator’s positive attributes that affect the recipient’s acceptance of a message. (Ohanian, 1990). Furthermore, the source needs to be trustworthy, believability, honestly and ethically founded (Belch & Belch, 2001). Choosing an appropriate celebrity to endorse a product or brand is often done successfully when the endorser and brand share similar characteristics (Till & Busler, 1998). An extensive body of literatures has explained that a source which is highly credible have been found to be more persuasive and believable than less credible models (Atkin & Block, 1983; Erdogan, 1999). The same is reflected in the source credibility model, which contends that the effectiveness of a message displayed depends on a perceived level of trustworthiness and expertise of the endorser (Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1991). McCracken (1989) defines expertise as the endorsers’ perceived capability to state convincing statements. An endorser exhibiting expertise and reliability is credible and, to that extent, persuasive. Endorsers are perceived as experts if they have great knowledge and experience about the product and the necessary skills regarding the endorsed item (Erdogan, 1999). Trustworthiness is the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he/she considers most valid and consists of honesty, integrity and believability (Ohanian 1991). Hence, it is hypothesized: H2: The greater the trustworthiness of the endorser the greater the likeability of the brand (a) and its purchase intention (b); H3: The greater the expertise of the endorser the greater the likeability of the brand (a) and its purchase intention (b)

### 3. RESEARCH PROTOCOL

#### 3.1. Research design

The objective is to measure the impact a celebrity would have on the likeability and purchase intention of a brand. A 4-fictitious scenario (Table 1) was designed and addressed to respondents. The nationality of the celebrity and the country-of-origin were manipulated in order to measure respondents' perceptions of the attitudes towards the advertised products.

**Table 1. Experimental design framework**

	Chinese-Celebrity + Imported (US) Wine product	US-Celebrity + Domestic (Chinese) Wine product	US-Celebrity + Imported (US) Wine product
			

Respondents would first be asked to rate their attitude toward the brand based on their perception towards the scenario-ad by the 7-point scale, and then to rate the endorser characteristics using a 5-point likert-scales (attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise-in-wine); then finally the respondents would be asked to rate their purchase intention based on the standard Juster-scale.

#### 3.2. Endorsers, Products and Advertisement

For the persistence and to avoid pre-judgments, all endorsers are adhered to be recognized actors/actresses, sharing similar background, image and style. To endorse a general trustworthiness image, the authors carefully screen out the young spectrum and focus on actor aged between 50 to 58 years old. In order to eliminate the preference (or bias) in prejudice and/or duplication on profession setting and identity, the choice of celebrity model-image would all be actors who is popular among Chinese society and has no associational effect to alcoholic brand in the real world. Based on a preliminary study (not presented here), Ren Da-Wah and Nicholas Cage have been selected. Both are recognized in their profession as award-winnings actors.

Two fictitious wine brands were produced for this study. To avoid personal preference (or bias), a single varietal wine was selected. Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the world's most widely recognized red wine grape varieties. Two products, differing only on their country-of-origin should features the same grape varietal (Cabernet Sauvignon) and shared a similar packaging (label design), would be used to analyze the impact of different endorser types: 1)

Domestic Product – Heavenly Made Vineyard 天上品葡萄园 (Shandong, China); 2)  
Imported Product – Sunshine Valley Vineyard 阳光谷葡萄园 (California, USA).

Four fictitious color images were developed for this study (see Table 1). Each wine product would be advertised by one endorser type individually. The communication tool used was a print advertisement, due to its simplicity and easiness to incorporate in an online questionnaire. Product's brand logo, packaging, and color tone were adopted on a similar design touch while only emphasis on the difference of its country-of-origin. The overall design for the advertisements would be identically the same except on the endorser and endorser quotes. Handling for the advertisement images were equal on all four scenarios – to highlight the difference on the endorser type and the product's country-of-origin. The endorser quotes were made to enhance the advertising message for the respondents in the purpose of measure the endorser effect. Similarly the model images, same cautions would be applied carefully on the presentation of these "quotes". An overall approach of simple, straightforward, same but identically different prints layout was retained.

### **3.3. Data collection and analysis**

The authors have chosen a China web-based survey system company to host and manage the survey administration. The company claims that they have a powerful database support engines that currently have over 2.6 million sample sources. These 4-scenario ads, together with the pre-set questionnaires, were posted online for 21 days to select randomly and achieve a sample size of 2000 respondents. In consideration with the study objectives, the authors decided to conduct the survey in single language: Chinese. The sampling frame is Chinese online user, and, in order to obtain an exhaustive nationally representative sample, no prior screening has been set forth. A total of 2041 respondents formed by the four-scenario groups (S1, n=525; S2, n=501; S3, n=509; S4, n=506) participated in the survey. In the meantime, 46 under age respondents were taken out. Further 126 cases were removed from the database for the non-wine-drinker and ineffective cases due from missing values. The final sample includes 1869 respondents. To test hypothesis 1 to 3, descriptive analysis, ANOVA and regression analysis were conducted. "Attractiveness", "Trustworthiness" and perceived "Expertise in wine" are the three independent variables whereas attitudes toward the brand (likeability) and purchase intent are the dependent variables. Analysis were conducted using SPSS software.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1. Characteristics of the sample**

The final sample of 1869 respondents includes 53% of male and 47% of female, all have drink wine at least once in their life. People who responded to the survey are located in various provinces of China (34 in total), including Hong Kong and Macau. 1309 respondents (69.89%) are aged between 26 and 40. Male respondents with income between 8001-15000 yuan represent the highest sample size at 348 cases (18.6%) whilst highest sample size on female respondents are 297 cases (15.84%) with income range between 3001-5000 yuan. They jointly represent a sample size of 645 constituting 34.44% of the sampling. About 64% of the respondents declared 'liking' or 'liking a lot' wine.

## 4.2. Results

Hypotheses H1a, H2a, H3a use attitudes towards the brand as dependent variable. The first result shows that the attractiveness of the endorser (Beta=0.229 and  $p \geq 0.001$ ) has the strongest relationship contribution to the dependent variable (see Table 2), followed by the perceived expertise (Beta=0.110 and  $p \geq 0.001$ ). “Attractiveness” and “Perceived expertise in wine” have both a significant impact towards the “Brand likability”. Trustworthiness has the lowest impact (beta=0.062). Hence, hypothesis H1a, H2a and H3a are supported with the findings. The results suggest a positive strong association between perceived “Attractiveness”, “Trustworthiness” and perceived “Expertise-in-wine” of celebrity endorsement with brand likability.

**Table 2: Statistical analysis of hypotheses H1a, H2a, H3a**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	521.494	3	173.831	79.899	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	4066.296	1869	2.176		
Total	4587.791	1872			

a. Dependent Variable: Negative to positive

b. Predictors: (Constant), Expertise in wine of CE, Attractiveness of CE, Trustworthiness of CE

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.731	.220		7.861	.000
1 Attractiveness of CE	.502	.060	.229	8.323	.000
Trustworthiness of CE	.131	.063	.062	2.079	.038
Expertise in wine of CE	.201	.048	.110	4.202	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Negative to positive

Hypotheses H1b, H2b, H3b use the purchase intention towards the brand as dependent variable. Results indicate that all three independent variables have a significant impact on the dependent variable (Table 3).

**Table 3: Statistical analysis of hypotheses H1b, H2b, H3b**

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.514 <sup>a</sup>	.264	.263	2.116

a. Predictors: (Constant), Expertise in wine of CE, Attractiveness of CE, Trustworthiness of CE

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	3007.784	3	1002.595	223.903	.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	8369.006	1869	4.478		
Total	11376.790	1872			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Expertise in wine of CE, Attractiveness of CE, Trustworthiness of CE

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-1.505	.316		-4.763	.000
1 Attractiveness of CE	.812	.087	.235	9.377	.000
Trustworthiness of CE	.701	.090	.211	7.767	.000
Expertise in wine of CE	.505	.069	.175	7.360	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

Perceived “Attractiveness”, again, has the strongest positive association with purchase intent among the three independent variables ( $\text{Beta}=0.235$ ), followed by perceived “Trustworthiness” ( $\text{Beta}=0.211$ ) and perceived “Expertise-in-wine” ( $\text{Beta}=0.175$ ). Therefore, hypotheses H1b, H2b and H3b are all supported. It means that the greater the perceived “attractiveness”, “trustworthiness” and perceived “expertise-in-wine”, the greater the purchase intention. Additionally, perceived attractiveness of the celebrity endorser remains the highest factor between trustworthiness and perceived expertise-in-wine, impacting the purchase intention of Chinese wine consumers.

## 5. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

Celebrity’s physical attractiveness is perceived as the most prominent factor compares to trustworthiness and perceived expertise. As such, attractive celebrity can elicits more favourable attitudes towards the advertisements in both brand attitude and purchase intention in a Chinese wine market perspective. Source credibility has been proposed as an important antecedent to attitudes toward an advertisement and ultimately, advertising effectiveness, whereas physical attractiveness is liked more and has a positive impact on opinion change and product evaluations. Trustworthiness was not established as a significant determinant of respondent’s intention to purchase since advertising viewers do not have a high level of trustworthiness towards celebrities in paid commercials.

For marketing managers, and concerning the efficacy of celebrity endorsement, it seems more important to identify the marketing targets. If the target is about increasing brand likability, a well-liked celebrity should come foremost before considering perceived expertise and trustworthiness aspects. If the marketing objective is about increasing purchase intention, a celebrity demonstrating physical attractiveness with perceived expertise-in-wine would likely win all. Additional analyses suggest that if promotions were to be made on an imported brand, collaboration with an attractive local (Chinese) celebrity would be a good choice as this would elicit more favourable attitudes towards the advertisement; and at the same time, the local celebrity would benefit from a favourable image.

The findings indicate that neither local nor foreign celebrity has made significantly influence on brand attitude and purchase intentions towards a domestic advertised brand. COO factor still constitutes an important or dominant role comprehend by the wine consumers in China. Considering the growth of domestic supply in the past few years, wine productions in quality has been improved and leads to increments on local consumptions, different findings might then be seen in the future.

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