

# **Celebrity Influences on Consumer Decision Making: New Insights and Research Directions**

## ***Abstract***

Throughout human history, people expressed admiration for heroes who possessed extraordinary abilities and achieved superhuman goals. For many, modern-day celebrities fulfil this role and are prominent in various marketing communications activities. This paper addresses the literature review gaps and provides an in-depth review of the psychological and social psychological perspectives which are relevant to the celebrity endorsement literature. The contributions of this paper consist of a detailed analysis of most important consumer-celebrity relationships, key emotional drivers (e.g., envy and admiration) of celebrity influence and the development of an original conceptual model. The conceptual model pulls together the past research and identifies new research gaps, which synthesises different research perspectives and provides a sound theoretical basis guiding future researchers and marketing managers.

*Keywords: Celebrity Marketing; Human Brands; Human Brand Attachments; Celebrity Influence; Celebrity Endorsements*

## **Introduction**

Throughout the last three decades, the celebrity phenomenon has increased enormously in popularity (Gamson, 1994; Rowlands, 2008). The plethora of large numbers of celebrity brands, which is a mixture of genuinely talented people with deserved reputations, and ‘manufactured celebrities’, has created vast numbers of fans and followers susceptible to celebrity endorsement influences and celebrity role modelling. Celebrities such as Justin Bieber and Katy Perry have over 100 million followers on Twitter (TwitterCounter, 2017).

Hence, the multifaceted influence of celebrities on consumer decisions makes them a critical research topic for marketing managers and academics to investigate and discover more effective marketing applications (Gamson, 1994; Rojek, 2001, 2012; Rowlands, 2008; G. Turner, 2013). A number of researchers have reviewed the key models in the celebrity endorsement literature (see Table 1). However, the social psychological processes and emotional influences augmenting the influences of celebrity endorsers are under-researched, especially the increased interactive effects of social media communications between celebrities and consumers.

Amos, Holmes, & Strutton (2008) and Erdogan (1999) provide a comprehensive understanding of the relevance of persuasive source models to the celebrity endorsement literature, but there have been some more recent developments. Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) identified six main research areas in the celebrity endorsement research: celebrity prevalence, campaign management, financial effects, celebrity persuasion, non-evaluative meaning transfer and brand-to-celebrity transfers. Nonetheless, it does address in the evolving ways consumers interact with celebrities.

The importance of entertainment celebrities in modern societies is increasing at an exponential rate (see Yu, Ronen, Hu, Lu, & Hidalgo, 2014). Hence, Keel and Natarajan (2012) call for studies which address the role of celebrities beyond the celebrity endorsement field. In the last decades, the ways consumers relate with celebrities have evolved. Hackley and Hackley (2015) propose that consumer relationships with celebrities are shaped by the media convergence which provides multiple communication channels. The increased democratization of fame and its consequences should be incorporated into the future research agenda. Through the development of new social media platforms and reality television

programming, more research is required to understand the key celebrities' attributes which contribute to stronger consumer-celebrity relationships.

Knoll and Matthes (2017) carried out an important and comprehensive meta-analysis of the celebrity endorsement literature in which the authors focused on the role of moderators and the affective, cognitive and conative effects of celebrity endorsements. The authors suggest that psychological aspects, such as those which influence the complex consumer-celebrity relationships, are important aspects to be addressed in future studies. Saldanha, Mulye, & Rahman (2018) elaborated on the relevance of consumer-celebrity attachments and argued that future studies should focus on the consumers' psychological mechanisms which could explain the celebrity influences which lead to stronger consumer attachment relationships and effects on decisions.

This paper addresses the literature review gaps and provides an in-depth review of the psychological and social psychological perspectives which are relevant to the celebrity endorsement literature. The unique contributions of this paper consist of a detailed analysis of most important consumer-celebrity relationships, key emotional drivers (e.g., envy and admiration) and the development of an original conceptual model which may guide for future marketing researchers and managers.

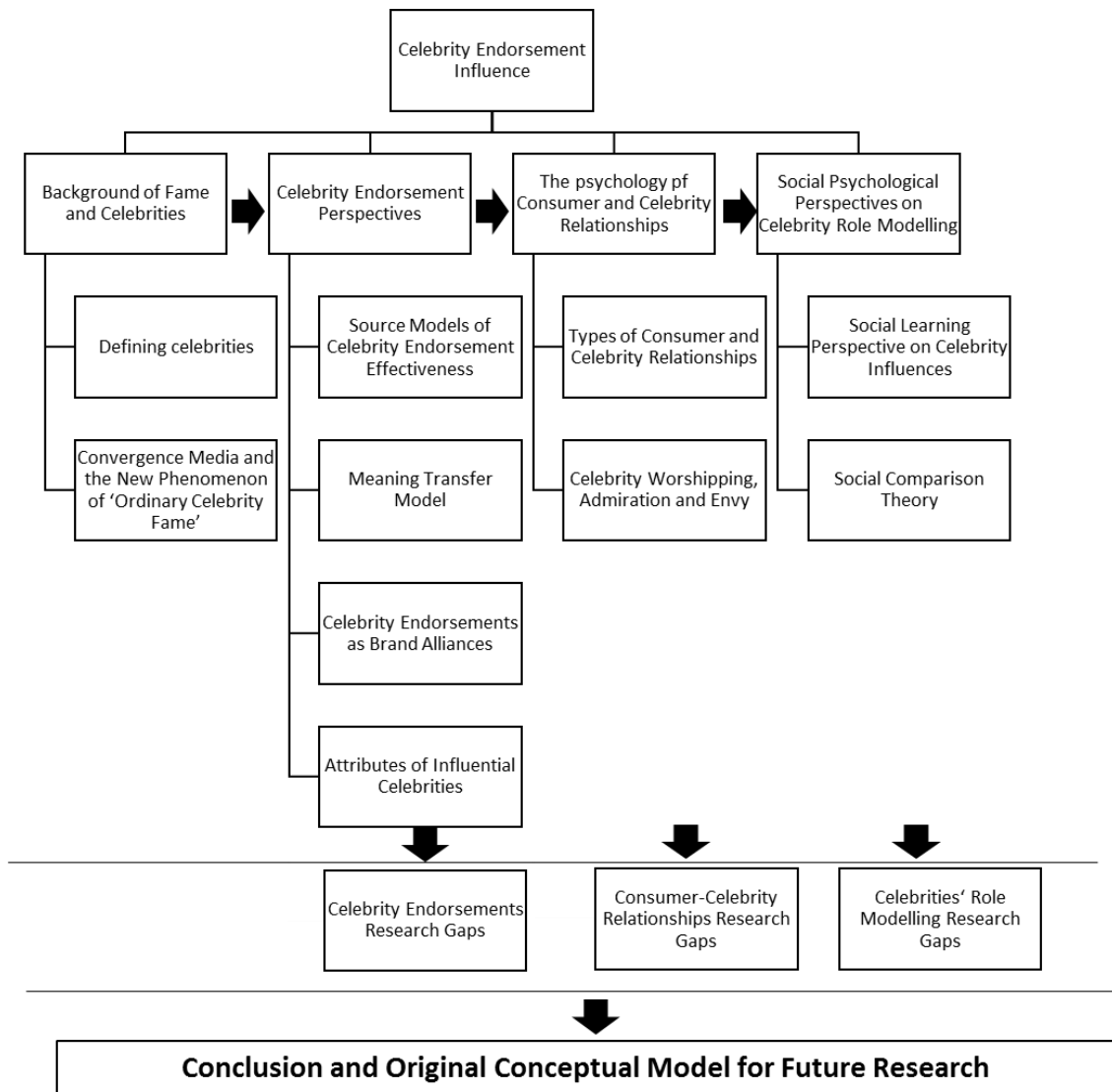
**Table 1-** Summary of seminal review and meta-analyses papers

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Type of Study</b>	<b>Main contribution/ focus</b>	<b>Identified suggestions for future studies</b>
Erdogan (1999)	Review Paper	Strong focus on the persuasive effects of celebrity endorsements (mostly source frameworks).	Stronger emphasis on how marketing managers make celebrity endorsement decisions. Source models rely on a limited number of 'source' attributes, but do not address the symbolic role of celebrities.

Amos et al. (2008)	Meta-analysis	Meta-analysis of 32 studies investigating the relationship between celebrity source effects and overall celebrity endorsement effectiveness.	Rigorous analysis of the match-up hypotheses is needed; and better understanding of the effects of different types of celebrity fame, and celebrity attributes (good vs bad) on consumer endorsements.
Keel and Natarajan (2012)	Review Paper	The authors review the celebrity endorsement literature (source models), and place a strong emphasis on ethical issues regarding vulnerable consumer groups.	Marketing researchers need to explore the wider issues of celebrity endorsements and go beyond the marketing related focus. Future studies should look into celebrity-branded products, types of branding relationships and trends in celebrity culture.
Hackley and Hackley (2015)	Review Paper	The paper provides a critical analysis of celebrity cultural meaning perspective, and identifies as a key driver the convergence of media communications tools.	The authors call for studies which focus on the cultural production and consumption of celebrities. Research in the increased democratisation of fame, and how the different research strands should be integrated.
Bergkvist and Zhou (2016)	Review Paper	The paper identifies six streams of celebrity endorsement studies: prevalence, campaign management, financial effects, persuasion, non-evaluative meaning transfer and brand to celebrity transfer.	The integration of celebrity persuasion research with campaign management and identifying the key factors relevant to endorsement strategies are areas for future research. There is a need to understand how different target markets process celebrity endorsements. Psychological theories should be used more to understand theoretically the celebrity endorsement effects.
Knoll and Matthes (2017)	Meta-analysis	Meta-analysis of 46 papers published until 2016. Focused on the cognitive, affective and conative effects, and the impact of moderators, (celebrity gender, type and familiarity of endorsements).	The authors identified seven main limitations in the celebrity endorsement literature: understudied dependent variables (e.g., meaning transfer), moderators (e.g., celebrity valence), long term effects, underlying psychologic processes, non-profit advertising, cross-cultural differences and side effects of celebrity role modelling.
Saldanha et al. (2018)	Conceptual paper	This paper analyses review the strategic relevance and effects of celebrity endorsements through the consumer attachment theory lenses.	Research involving psychological mechanisms that aim to gain a better understanding of attachment from a consumers' perspective.

## Topic Development

There are four main streams which contribute to the development of this paper's propositions and original conceptual research model: 1) Firstly, the background of celebrity fame provides an overview of the relevance of the propositions and research gaps identified in this paper which are mostly the result of relatively recent developments; 2) Secondly, the celebrity endorsement literature consists of an overview of celebrity endorsement frameworks and highlights possible areas of future studies; 3) Thirdly, the psychology literature contributes to understanding a range of vicarious social consumer-celebrity relationships which may complement the celebrity marketing literature/research; 4) Fourthly, the social psychology perspectives explain the influential role that celebrities have in societies and marketing communications. The paper concludes with research and managerial implications and proposes an original conceptual model synthesising the most significant research gaps with relevant propositions for future research for marketing practitioners and academics. Figure 1 summarizes the structure of this paper.



**Figure 1- Paper Structure**

## Background of Celebrity Fame

To gain a better understanding of consumer-celebrity relationships and socially influential role of celebrities and its relevance, it is important to first define modern ‘celebrities’ and to discuss development of this topic in the last decades considering that many of the research gaps presented in this manuscript are (in)direct outcomes of these developments.

### Defining Celebrities

The conceptualisation of celebrities is a controversial topic because of the different views, types and definitions of celebrities (see Hackley & Hackley, 2015 and Table 2). A celebrity can be famous for many different reasons (see Hackley & Hackley, 2015 for a detailed discussion) and comprise distinct levels or typologies (see Gamson, 2011; Giles, 2000 and Rojek, 2001). Table 2 identifies four key definitions which capture the core aspects of the celebrity construct. Overall, the main definitional components attributed to celebrities are a range of socially desirable personal attributes and skills which lead to the widespread recognition and creation of popular and influential individuals. For example, soccer specialists concur that David Beckham was a very good player, who used the popular recognition of his soccer skills to support his celebrity brand value for consumer endorsement purposes (Bascombe, 2013; Hughes, 2013).

**Table 2-** Selection of representative celebrity definitions

<b>Source</b>	<b>Celebrity definition</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>Boorstin (1987, p. 57)</b>	'...a person who is known for his well-knownness'	Boorstin's has arguably the most critical perspective towards celebrities. According to the author, mass audiences fail to recognise that celebrities are 'synthetic' products.
<b>Giles (2000, p. 3)</b>	'The defining characteristic of celebrity is that it is essentially a media production'.	Celebrities are essentially a production of media channels. The term celebrity is not necessarily accompanied by merit in any particular field.
<b>Rojek (2001, p. 10)</b>	'... the attribution of glamorous or notorious status to an individual within the public sphere''.	The author treats celebrities as cultural fabrications. Celebrities may gain this status for positive or negative reasons, but they require what the author refers to as 'cultural intermediaries', such as publicists as marketers.
<b>G. Turner (2013, p. 10)</b>	'Celebrity is a genre of representation and a discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity, and media industries that produce these representations and their effects; and it is a cultural formation that has a social function we can better understand'.	Celebrities are socially and commercially constructed human entities or social representations which are used primarily for commercial communications purposes.

The definitions of Boorstin (1987) and Rojek (2001) do not specify the ways through which a celebrity is produced, and many authors have incorporated social media celebrities into the broad characterisation of celebrities, such as Huda Kattan (make-up artist) are able to cultivate over 20 million followers through social media channels. Due to recent social media and mobile communications innovations, the continuum of fame has extended to include genuine famous individuals with deserved fame, as well as the other extreme of 'vfame' by ordinary people who become famous because they manage to appear frequently on media networks (e.g., The Kardashians). Gamson (2011) categorises online celebrities into three categories: 1) anti-celebrities who unexpectedly achieve online fame (e.g., 'Charlie bit my finger' YouTube video); 2) self-made celebrities who develop their own personal brand (e.g., Huda Kattan) and 3) microcelebrities who are famous within smaller online communities. Internet opened the doors to self-made celebrities who engage in self-publicity and are able to bypass traditional media industries (Gamson, 2011).

### **Convergence Media and the New Phenomenon of 'Ordinary Celebrity Fame'**

During the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, major media and cultural developments led to the proliferation of celebrities becoming increasingly more influential (Yu et al., 2014). New social media developments are increasingly important because they enabled large numbers of untalented/ordinary individuals to pursue fame and influence wider consumer segments (Gountas, Gountas, Reeves, & Moran, 2012; G. Turner, 2006). There is a relatively new phenomenon of increased democratised desire for fame by the masses which may be referred to as 'vfame' (a new variant of fame), and translates to 'fame unconnected to any form of excellence or achievement' (Rowlands, 2008, p. 23). This new variant of fame is believed to have substantial implications to consumers and, as a result, marketing managers (see Gountas



et al., 2012). The literature suggests two main reasons for the increase of the celebrity culture and 'v fame': reality television shows and Web.2.0 internet technology (Rojek, 2012; Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010).

Reality television was the saviour of many television networks who ran into financial difficulties in the '90s because it managed to attract large audiences with low production cost (Couldry, 2008; Gamson, 2011). Reality television managed to attract not only ordinary people seeking their fifteen minutes of fame but also celebrities wanting to gain media attention and boost their popularity ratings (Hackley & Hackley, 2015; Holmes & Redmond, 2006).

The expansion of the internet and social media usage was another powerful enabling media channel responsible for the increasing importance of celebrities in the 21st century (Bird, 2011; Chung & Cho, 2017; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Meyers, 2012). Popular social media networks have changed the frequency and quality of perceived two-way interactive communications between consumers and celebrities. Continuous global information exchanges, regarding celebrities' private lives and personal information, are readily accessible to vast numbers of consumers. However, most of the direct interactive two-way communications between fans (consumers) and celebrities rely on marketing professionals to manage the large volumes of social media communication accounts (G. Turner, 2013). For example, some celebrities, such as Tom Cruise, openly admit that they do not write their own social media messages and employ professionals to manage their social media accounts (G. Turner, 2013).

Social media also enables celebrities to pursue global levels of fame on a global scale. For example, through effective social media marketing strategies, South Korean music celebrity, PSY, became a global celebrity. Besides, ordinary people can become self-made celebrities, producing their own content and managing their personal brand image to increase public awareness and develop a following which can be used for commercial endorsement purposes

through online platforms (Gamson, 2011). Self-made human brands are likely to increase because of increased global connectivity and new technological developments.

## **Celebrity Endorsement Perspectives**

Bergkvist and Zhou (2016, p. 644) define a celebrity endorsement as ‘an agreement between an individual who enjoys public attention (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity’. Celebrities, since the second half of the nineteenth century, have progressively gained a larger role in marketing communications becoming one of the leading forms of advertising (Erdogan, 1999; Seitz, Razzouk, & Eamsobhan, 2007). The popularity of celebrity endorsements is mostly justified because of its effectiveness in shaping consumers attitudes towards a brand, while evidence of causing behavioural changes is still weak (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Most of the research in the celebrity endorsement literature rely on three major theoretical models, namely the endorsement source attractiveness, celebrity credibility and ‘match-up’ hypothesis model. The celebrity endorsement literature provides valuable insights regarding the factors which can impact the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements and avoid pitfalls (see Erdogan, 1999 for a detailed discussion of the advantages and risks of celebrity endorsements).

### **Source Models of Celebrity Endorsement Effectiveness**

Identifying the most effective celebrity to endorse a brand depends on a number of variables which are not within the control of organisation (e.g., celebrity transgressions) and a big investment for many large corporations. It is estimated that Cristiano Ronaldo was paid 27 million of American dollars for his 2015 celebrity endorsement contracts (Forbes, 2015). As a result, a marketer needs to carefully analyse how to optimise the potential benefits of celebrity endorsements (Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005). The selection of an effective endorser has

been mostly explored using three conceptual perspectives: source attractiveness model, source credibility model, and the 'match-up' hypothesis.

The *source attractiveness model*, introduced by McGuire (1985), proposes that celebrities' physical characteristics are important factors affecting endorsement communication effectiveness. Originally, attractiveness was not only based on celebrities' physical appearance, but also on other features, such as likability (McGuire, 1985). Attractive endorsers may lead to more positive attitudes towards a brand (Eisend & Langner, 2010; Kamins, 1990). However, the importance of celebrity attractiveness is disputed (Erdogan, 1999), because it is a weak predictor of purchase intentions (Till & Busler, 1998) and may be an irrelevant attribute for non-beauty related product categories (Bower & Landreth, 2001).

Ohanian (1991) defines *source credibility* as the celebrity endorser's positive attributes that influence consumers' acceptance of a marketing message. The source credibility model initially focused on the endorsers' trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), but was expanded to incorporate attractiveness (Ohanian, 1991). *Trustworthiness* is the perceived honesty of a celebrity endorser (Erdogan, 1999) and arguably the most important dimension of the source credibility model (Amos et al., 2008). A celebrity endorser's perceived trustworthiness can be influential in shaping consumers' opinions and attitudes towards a brand (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). According to Deshpandé and Stayman (1994), consumers trust celebrities who they perceive as culturally and ethnically similar to themselves. Congruence between the celebrity endorser and consumer receiving a message is an important issue to explore in future studies.

*Expertise* is the degree of authority that a celebrity has in a product category (Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990) and the second most important dimension of source credibility (Amos et al., 2008). Celebrities who are involved in multiple endorsement messages may be perceived as

less credible (Tripp, Jensen, & Carlson, 1994). Expertise is particularly important when there is a time lag between the exposure to an advertising message and the purchasing situation (Eisend & Langner, 2010). Therefore, marketing managers should consider the best possible congruence between a celebrity who is recognised as an expert in a product category and appears to have a credible fit with a specific brand (Knoll & Matthes, 2017).

The '*match-up hypothesis*' investigates the perceived congruence between the endorsing celebrity's image and endorsed product (Misra & Beatty, 1990), thus resulting in increased believability and effectiveness of advertising messages (Byrne, Whitehead, & Breen, 2003; Fleck, Korchia, & Le Roy, 2012; 1994; O'Mahony & Meenaghan, 1997; Till & Busler, 1998, 2000). Celebrities' expertise is more important than attractiveness when there is a good match-up between a celebrity and product (Till & Busler, 1998). Nonetheless, some of the findings are contradictory, for instance, Callcott and Phillips (1996) suggest that celebrity endorsements are more appropriate for low involvement products, while Karasiewicz and Kowalczyk (2014) propose that celebrities are more suitable for durable goods instead of convenience items. Other scholars propose that celebrity endorsers are more appropriate for products which are high on social and psychological risks (Kamins, Brand, Hoek, & Moe, 1989); high on symbolic value (Packard, 1957); and low on technology (Biswas, Biswas, & Das, 2006). Albert, Ambroise, & Valette-Florence (2017) questioned the importance of a celebrity-brand match-up arguing that a brand-consumer fit is more relevant to trigger behavioural changes and build brand identity. According to Bergkvist, Hjalmarson, & Mägi (2016), a celebrity perceived motives for endorsing a product is an important variable to be included in future studies.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has been used to understand different conditions in which a match-up between the endorser and the product interferes with the cognitive

processes during evaluation of endorsement messages. Traditionally, celebrities have been considered effective as peripheral cues in low involvement messages (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995; Callcott & Phillips, 1996; Choi et al., 2005). However, celebrity endorsement messages can also be processed through the central and higher levels of cognition with a consistent match-up between the product and celebrity characteristics (Kahle & Homer, 1985).

More recent studies identified disparities in how a match-up between a product and a celebrity is perceived (Fleck et al., 2012; Ilicic & Webster, 2014). Product-celebrity congruency increases if consumers perceive celebrities to be likable (Fleck et al., 2012). The cultural background of consumers is an important issue influencing the perceived match-up of celebrity endorsements and consumer receptiveness (Kwon, Saluja, & Adaval, 2015). For example, consumers with collectivist mindsets are more sensitive to the cultural cues of the celebrity and product endorsements that match-up to collectivist values and lifestyles.

However, cultural sensitivity and match-up assessments appear to be less important for consumers of individualistic cultural perspectives (Kwon et al., 2015). Besides, when there is a match between the personality of the product and celebrity, the relationship between the celebrity's credibility and self-brand connections becomes stronger (Dwivedi, McDonald, & Johnson, 2014), and an advertising message tends to become more effective (Mishra, Roy, & Bailey, 2015). More research is needed to understand how consumers' cultural background and other personal attributes influence the premises of the match-up hypothesis as research suggests a higher celebrity endorsement effectiveness in countries with higher power distance (Winterich, Gangwar, & Grewal, 2018).

Many of the limitations of these models are a result of the relatively recent technological and social developments which have shaped the celebrity industry. For example, through social media networks, celebrities self-disclose aspects of their personal attributes which otherwise would not be evident audience members. Overall, the source models and 'match-up'

hypothesis do not account for the pseudo-relationships, such as parasocial friendships, consumers develop with celebrities considering the development of convergence media; and they do not elucidate the complex cultural symbolisms and interpretations of celebrity images and effects on consumers' decisions (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010). Celebrity endorsement studies can benefit from research that addresses the more complex symbolic and cultural meaning transfer of celebrities and the relationships consumers develop with influential role models in countries with different values (Hackler & Hackler, 2015). For example, a recent study suggests that celebrity endorsements communicating symbolic cultural meanings of more real and authentic relationships with brands tend to be more effective than traditional endorsements (Russell & Rasolofoarison, 2017). Additionally, most of the research in this area focuses exclusively on three source attributes (trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness). Thus, the relevance of other celebrities' personality attributes and symbolic meanings requires a better understanding (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Also, these perspectives do not address the reasons why certain celebrities connect with different consumer segments, which is a core research issue. Expanding the source models dependent variables by including meaning transfer is likely to provide a deeper understanding of how celebrity endorsements affect consumers.

### **Meaning Transfer Model**

The *Meaning Transfer Model (MTM)* provides a different approach, from the source models, towards celebrity endorsements. According to McCracken (1989), an endorser's success depends partly on the subjective symbolic meanings consumers associate with the celebrity endorsements. The meaning transfer model focuses on understanding how celebrities transfer cultural and social meanings to consumers (Escalas & Bettman, 2015; Thompson, Stringfellow, Maclean, MacLaren, & O'Gorman, 2015). The MTM proposes that celebrities

are influential cultural symbols, and, as a result, consumers associate celebrities with particular valued personality and lifestyle attributes (McCracken, 1989). Celebrities and other role models' symbolic attributes can positively contribute to the creation of certain brand meanings, images and enhance brand equity (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2015). Hence, consumers buy the meanings of the celebrity lifestyle by consuming endorsed brands, assuming that through mimicry these symbolic meanings will transfer to them thus enhancing and building their self-identity (McCracken, 1989). The MTM is consistent with conceptual or symbolic consumption theory, which suggests that consumers' identities are connected with the brand identities (Ariely & Norton, 2009). Consumer choices and buying preferences are influenced by the perceived key attributes of a brand image, therefore, marketers develop brand meanings to appeal to consumers' social-identities (Ariely & Norton, 2009; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2015; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Levy, 1959).

Empirical studies support celebrities' symbolic meaning influence on consumers' choices (Batra & Homer, 2004; Bergkvist, 2017; Escalas & Bettman, 2015; Knoll, Matthes, Münch, & Ostermann, 2017; Langmeyer & Walker, 1991; Miller & Allen, 2012; Newman, Diesendruck, & Bloom, 2011; White, Goddard, & Wilbur, 2009). For example, Langmeyer and Walker (1991) found that celebrities communicate a variety of meanings which are beyond those communicated in advertising messages. Bergkvist (2017) investigated the assumptions that celebrities' perceived personality traits are transferred towards the endorsed product through associative connections rather than a conscious process.

A few studies have tested the underlying principle of the MTM by applying the law of contagion (Hingston, McManus, & Noseworthy, 2016; Newman et al., 2011). Contagion is when a consumer believes that immaterial symbolic meanings of a product are 'magically' transferred to themselves and imagine that somehow they are similar to the endorsing

celebrity because they consume the endorsed product (Belk, 1988). Miller and Allen (2012) found that the mere co-occurrence of a celebrity with a brand is enough to shape consumers' opinions about a well-known brand. Also, consumers' conjectures and spurious judgements create imaginary expectations of 'celebrity-contaminated products' (e.g., celebrity auctioned personal items) (Hingston et al., 2016, p. 195). As meanings are carried from the celebrity endorser towards the endorsed brand, there are risks in this process as celebrities' transgressions may result in negative celebrities' meanings being transferred towards the brand (Ambroise, Pantin-Sohier, Valette-Florence, & Albert, 2014; Campbell & Warren, 2012; White et al., 2009), which may result in substantial financial losses. For example, there was a decrease in the stock exchange value of brands endorsed by Tiger Woods after his involvement in negative personal scandals (Knittel & Stango, 2013). Interestingly, negative celebrity news tends to cause more damage towards an endorsed brand when there is congruence between news and brand (Um & Kim, 2016). Escalas and Bettman (2015) found that celebrities influence the process of consumer identity development, suggesting that this is likely to occur if there is a reasonable match between a consumers' ideal self-image and the celebrity's portrayed character/persona attributes.

Although the MTM addresses some of the important issues related to cultural value and meaning transfer, it has its limitations (Banister & Cocker, 2013; Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). The MTM has been mostly criticised because it assumes that audience members are passive receivers of celebrities' meanings (Banister & Cocker, 2013) and meanings are only transferred in one direction, from the celebrity towards a brand and then to the consumer (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010). The MTM does not consider that symbolic meanings can also be transferred interactively from a brand towards a celebrity image and from the consumers towards the brand (Saldanha et al., 2018). Researchers suggest that there is a two-way meaning transfer with reciprocal exchanges of meanings between celebrity, the endorsed



brand and the consumers (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Seno & Lukas, 2007). These authors argue that celebrity endorsements are brand alliances.

### **Celebrity Endorsements as Brand Alliances**

Celebrities are valuable human brands and, therefore, they are more than mere endorsing agents (Luo, Chen, Han, & Park, 2010; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Thomson, 2006).

Celebrities rely on skilful strategic planning to grow in popularity and maintain social appeal through effective marketing strategies (Gabler, 1998; Gamson, 2011; Rojek, 2012; G. Turner, 2013). If celebrities are human brands, it is appropriate to consider celebrity endorsements as *brand alliances*, and, in some cases, as co-branding relationships (Ambroise et al., 2014).

From a brand alliance perspective, both parties gain potential financial and image benefits, and are exposed to potential risks (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Seno & Lukas, 2007). Hence, meanings are also iteratively transferred from the endorsed product/brand towards the celebrity brand image (Ambroise et al., 2014; Arsena, Silvera, & Pandelaere, 2014; Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010; Seno & Lukas, 2007). Human brands (celebrity endorsers) and endorsed brands exchange a wide variety of meanings which can be mutually beneficial and contribute to the overall brand value (Keller, 2003). However, very little is known about the effective match-up of brand personality attributes and human brands.

Research on the effectiveness of influential human brands and their brand alliances interactions with commercial brands is a promising field that needs further investigation.

### **Attributes of Influential Celebrities**

The question of what attributes are necessary for a celebrity to succeed and become influential is a key issue that is not fully understood yet (Rein, Kotler, Hamlin, & Stoller, 2006). Besides the attributes analysed in celebrity source models, there are other personality

attributes which may benefit the effective use of celebrities in marketing communications. A strong celebrity brand depends on the way distinct complex personality attributes and meanings are constructed and promoted (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013). The growth of the celebrity brand industry has contributed to the heightened research interest on individual traits that distinguish and differentiate celebrity brands (Preece, 2015).

Celebrity attributes are complex traits to measure. Nonetheless, valuable insights can be gained by approaching how human brands' meanings and attributes are perceived by their fans. A small number of research studies have attempted to identify celebrity brand attributes, using traditional brand personality scales to measure complex human brand personality traits. Specific new human brand (celebrity) personality inventories need to be developed and validated in order to be relevant to marketing practitioners and researchers.

Human brands are usually focused on growing their own celebrity brand appeal, maintaining and defending their reputation and enhancing brand equity value (Holmes & Redmond, 2014; G. Turner, 2013). Contemporary celebrity brands need to be authentic (G. Turner, 2013). According to Moulard, Garrity, & Rice (2015), celebrity authenticity consists of two dimensions: rarity (talent, discretion and originality), which is more important to younger consumers, and stability (consistency, candidness and morality), which is more important to older consumers. Preece (2015) argues that celebrity authenticity should be analysed from a corporate perspective as it is partially manipulated

Yue, Cheung, & Wong (2010) found that some celebrities are perceived to be more glamorous and self-absorbed, but others are perceived to be more engaged and socially connected with charitable causes and pro-social activities, which are more likely to lead consumer emulation. However, more research is needed to develop specific personality

instruments which identify celebrity brand traits relevant to marketers (Moulard et al., 2015; Yue & Cheung, 2000; Yue et al., 2010).

For example, two relevant human traits, *charisma and social intelligence*, which have been investigated in the leadership management literature, could provide useful insights into celebrity popularity. According to Verčič and Verčič (2011), charisma is composed of a constellation of attributes, which can be divided into five facets: communication skills, ability to elicit admiration from others, honesty and reliability, calmness and vision, and power/dominance. The leadership literature suggests that charismatic leaders are likely to score high on narcissism, authoritarianism, locus of control, and self-confidence (House & Howell, 1992). Celebrity brands are social leaders, and therefore more research is needed including some of the negative traits that celebrity personalities may have (e.g., high narcissism and locus of control) which may influence popularity and consumer loyalty.

Social intelligence may be another putative attribute of a celebrity brand. Social intelligence is defined as the ability to understand other people's emotions and thoughts (social awareness), and to interact with others smoothly and effectively (social facility) (Goleman, 2007). The social facility dimension is particularly relevant for celebrity brands because media communications mediate physically distant and impersonal fan-celebrity relationships, thus reducing the personal one-on-one, real-time experience effects. Consumers' personal attributes may also influence the way a celebrity is perceived. Soneji, Riedel, & Martin (2015) found that consumers who display a higher degree of self-concept clarity may display a more positive attitude towards celebrities such as celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay, because of their perceived sophistication, ruggedness, self-confidence and determination.

### **Celebrity Endorsement Research Gaps**

The celebrity endorsement literature indicates four main research gaps in the celebrity endorsement literature. Firstly, the majority of celebrity endorsement models advocate a one-directional perspective and, therefore, miss out a range of complex meaning interactions which seem to be particularly relevant considering the nature of modern consumer-celebrity relationships. Celebrity brand research needs to expand beyond the endorsement source attributes (attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise).

***GAP 1-** Celebrity source models place a strong emphasis on a limited range of celebrity attributes and does not address a complex interactive process. Exploring the psychological characteristics and cultural meaning transfers of celebrity brands are likely to provide more information regarding why certain celebrities are more influential than others.*

Further research on the personality attributes is needed, which identifies the reasons which make human brands influential. Understanding which celebrity personality traits attract more consumers would benefit celebrity endorsement marketing practitioners and researchers. The meanings associated with celebrity endorsers are complex, and therefore research paradigms trying to identify different celebrity meanings and their respective impacts on consumers' attitudes and behaviours is essential for marketers.

***GAP 2-** The exact human brand attributes, which are more effective in marketing communications and on creating a following/fandom by targeting certain consumer groups are largely unknown.*

The current endorsement literature does not fully address the reasons why different segments of consumers identify with and become loyal consumers of particular celebrities. Exploring a broader range of personality constructs, e.g., charisma, self-confidence, narcissism and social intelligence related to both the celebrity endorsers and consumers is likely to provide

meaningful information of why celebrities have more influence on certain types of consumers.

***GAP 3-** Celebrity endorsement perspectives provide generic guidelines for celebrity selection, but do not account for the consumers' subjective interpretations and the multiple types of consumer-celebrity vicarious relationships.*

The existing literature focuses mostly on a one-directional exchange of meaning from the celebrity endorser towards the endorsed brand. Future studies can address the impact that brand alliance, co-branding and multiple brand associations have on multi-directional meaning transferred to and from human brands.

***GAP 4-** The impact that celebrity endorsements have on the image of a celebrity human brand is still an under-explored area of study.*

Some influential celebrity brands are created and managed by marketing and public relations professionals. Nonetheless, the process seems to be substantially under-studied in the marketing academic literature and possibly because of the long-term complexity in the marketing and management of human brands.

***GAP 5-** The process of creating strong human brands is still largely unknown in the marketing academic literature.*

## **The Psychology of Consumer and Celebrity Relationships**

Celebrities build seemingly meaningful relationships with large numbers of consumers (Banister & Cocker, 2013; Boon & Lomore, 2001). Media personalities provide a wide range of characters for people to relate, engage and adopt as role models (Rojek, 2012). The continuum of consumer-celebrity relationships ranges from healthy admiration and constructive role modelling to displaying more negative and pathological relationships

(McCutcheon, Lange, & Houran, 2002). Consumer-celebrity relationships can be important predictors of consumers' brand associations and product purchases (Banister & Cocker, 2013; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Hung, 2014; Hung, Chan, & Tse, 2011; Kerrigan, Brownlie, Hower, & Daza-LeTouze, 2011; Loroz & Braig, 2015; Thomson, 2006). Consumers develop different and complex types of relationships with celebrities, which have distinct effects upon consumers' identities and brand association (Banister & Cocker, 2013), and which may influence upon consumers' preferences, values and behavioural modifications (Basil, 1996; Boon & Lomore, 2001; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Therefore, the role of consumer-celebrity relationships is an important research topic in marketing and may influence how consumers interpret celebrity images and endorsement information.

Consumers' motives and goals influence, to varying degrees, the perceived celebrity-consumer relationships (Roy & Mishra, 2018). Research on celebrity-consumer attachments using self-determination theory motives (see Deci & Ryan, 2000), suggests that if human brands (celebrities) satisfy and augment consumers' needs for autonomy and relatedness, they lead to stronger emotional attachments (Thomson, 2006). Stronger consumer-celebrity attachments minimise the risks associated with celebrities overshadowing an endorsed brand (Ilicic & Webster, 2014) and the adverse impact of celebrities involved in multiple endorsements (Hung et al., 2011; Ilicic & Webster, 2011). However, Ilicic and Webster (2011) suggest that if consumers have a stronger attachment towards a celebrity, purchase intentions may decrease if this celebrity is endorsing multiple brands. Nonetheless, more intense attachments with celebrities elicit positive attitudes towards a brand, even if there is a mismatch between the celebrity and the endorsed brand (Ilicic & Webster, 2014).

Additionally, congruence between consumers' self-concept and celebrity image may lead to higher levels of celebrity influence on consumers' attitudes and behavioural choices (Banister & Cocker, 2013; Choi & Rifon, 2012). The variety of relationships and emotional

attachments that consumers develop with media personalities can assist marketers in gaining a better understanding of celebrity endorsements and the development of influential celebrities. Table 3 displays the key consumer-celebrity types of relationships and emotional interactions, which may be used to enhance and complement existing celebrity endorsement theories and are discussed in this section.

### **Types of Consumer-Celebrity Relationships**

*Parasocial relationships (PSRs)* are mediated relationships between members of the audience and media personalities, such as celebrities (Alperstein, 1991; Brown, 2015; Brown et al., 2003; Finsterwalder, Yee, & Tombs, 2017; Horton & Wohl, 1956). The term was first used by Horton and Wohl (1956) to describe relationships between television audiences with fictional television characters, which tended to be one-sided and do not require human reciprocity. PSRs can consist of imagined audience-celebrity relationships akin to real friendships, romantic or family relationships (Alperstein, 1991; Brown et al., 2003; Chung & Cho, 2017; Giles, 2002; Rubin & Step, 2000; Sun & Wu, 2012).

**Table 3– Consumer-celebrity types of relationships and emotional responses**

Type of relationship / Emotional response	Category	Definition	Behavioural /cognitive outcome	Usefulness to marketing studies	Main authors
<b>Parasocial relationships (PSR)</b>	Type of relationship developed with media personalities.	Mediated relationships between members of the audience and media personalities.	Imaginary mediated relationships, such as friendships and romantic relationships, with celebrities.	Mediated relationships are intense and real. Hence, the socially influential role of celebrities might vary based on the type of mediated relationship developed with celebrities.	(Alperstein, 1991; Brown, 2015; Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003; Cohen, 2014; Giles, 2002; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Perse & Rubin, 1989; J. R. Turner, 1993)
<b>Wishful Identification (WI)</b>	Type of relationship developed with media personalities.	Personal desire and attempt to become like another person, e.g., a celebrity personality.	Absorption and emersion into a different imagined world.	Wishful identification can play a key role in the process of social influence and celebrity role modelling.	(Bond & Drogos, 2014; Hoegele, Schmidt, & Torgler, 2016; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Long et al., 2010)
<b>Worshipping/Adoration</b>	Type of emotion elicited by celebrities.	Adoration is an emotion elicited for someone perceived to have an extraordinary gift or skill, which is difficult to emulate.	Mimicry and desire to be affiliated with the worshiped celebrity.	Intense celebrity worshipers want to become part of the celebrity world. The worshiping groups of consumers suspend critical thinking and are likely to internalise the messages transmitted by their worshiped celebrities. There is a pathological element, which can bring negative consequences to consumers' personal lives.	(McCutcheon et al., 2002; Schindler, 2014; Schindler, Paech, & Löwenbrück, 2015; Schindler, Zink, Windrich, & Menninghaus, 2013)
<b>Admiration</b>	Type of emotion elicited by celebrities.	Admiration is less intense positive emotion than adoration and it is elicited by powerful role models.	Reflection and imitation of the admired person's attributes and achievements.	Most members of Western societies are mildly attached and display low levels of celebrity admiration. Research shows a close relationship between admiration and emulation.	(Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002; Onu, Kessler, & Smith, 2016; Schindler, 2014; Schindler et al., 2015; Schindler et al., 2013)
<b>Malign Envy</b>	Type of emotion elicited by celebrities.	Malign envy emotion is elicited when a person does not have the skills/resources to achieve similar outcomes. The envied celebrity is not perceived to deserve his/her success.	Aim to damage the envied person or avoid and move away from envied person (differentiation and rejection).	Malign envy can lead to consumers being less willing to purchase products or emulate the lifestyle of celebrities.	(Belk, 2011; Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009, 2011a, 2011b)
<b>Benign Envy</b>	Type of emotion elicited by celebrities.	Positive envy is elicited when a person does not have the skills/resources to achieve similar outcomes. The envied celebrity is perceived to deserve his/her success.	Motivation for self-improvement. Imitation of personal and behavioural traits. Move closer to be like the envied celebrity.	Benign envy increases the attractiveness of products used by references groups. As a result, consumers might be willing to spend higher amounts of money to emulate the lifestyle of envied celebrities.	(Belk, 2011; Nabi & Keblusek, 2014; Van de Ven et al., 2009, 2011a, 2011b)



For some consumers, the psychological effects of PSRs can be perceived as ‘real’ and similar as other interpersonal relationships (Derrick, Gabriel, & Tippin, 2008). For example, in some PSRs, viewers imagined break-ups with media personalities could lead to similar psychological outcomes as the termination of real-life relationships (Cohen, 2003) and display similar forgiveness tendencies in the case of celebrity transgressions as real-life friendships (Finsterwalder et al., 2017).

A strong predictor of PSRs is the level of perceived congruity between consumer-celebrity attitudes, values, culture, appearance and demographic background (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; J. R. Turner, 1993). However, there are substantial differences between PSRs and regular interpersonal relationships. Derrick et al. (2008) suggest that PSRs are particularly useful to boost individuals with low self-esteem or low self-confidence, especially when there is a good match between their ideal self and the celebrity’s attributes. However, high levels of PSRs are associated with negative personality characteristics, such as social anxiety, high materialism, and low self-esteem (Derrick et al., 2008; Greenwood & Long, 2009; Sun & Wu, 2012).

Social media has changed PSRs by increasing the interaction between celebrities and fans, thus complicating the assumption that PSRs are one-sided (Brown, 2015). Celebrities’ self-disclosure of their personal lives and personal experiences through social media networks (SMNs) lead to stronger PSRs friendships with their followers (Kim & Song, 2016), which can increase brand credibility and purchase intention (Chung & Cho, 2017; Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Consumers who feel closer to celebrities through SMNs perceive endorsed products or brands as if promoted by a friend (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Fans may suspend critical evaluation of their favourite celebrity’s paid commercial and promotional activities due to the halo effect (Holbrook, 1983) and optimism bias (Metzger & Suh, 2017), which cloud and

distort their perceptions. However, fans expectations of reciprocal social media communications with celebrities are bound to result in frustration and unfulfilled unrealistic expectations (Stever & Lawson, 2013).

Consumer identification with media characters is conceptualised as consumer-initiated ‘feelings of affinity, friendship, similarity and liking of media characters or imitation of a character by audience members’ (Cohen, 2001, p. 249). Identification is a key component in the process of social influence (Bandura, 2001; Kelman, 1961) and is used in marketing communications tactics by suggesting that consumers immerse into alternative imaginary celebrity lifestyles, hoping to expand their perspectives of reality (Cohen, 2014). Basil and Brown (1997) found that identification with celebrities can influence many meaningful areas of people’s lives, and, consequently, be effectively used in entertainment-information-education endorsements.

*‘Wishful identification’* (WI) is ‘a psychological process whereby an individual desires and attempts to become like another person’ (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005, p. 327). Fans’ ideal self-congruence with a television character contributes towards the process of WI. In particular, WI is more relevant when there is gender and attitudes congruence between viewers and characters (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Female fans wishfully identify and value a celebrities’ physical attractiveness, personality traits and behavioural style (Hoegle et al., 2016; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). However, male fans value the celebrities’ experience, skills and violent behavioural characteristics (Hoegle et al., 2016; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Through the process of WI, people can live a self-created fantasy and may lead them to develop new aspirations and behavioural lifestyle patterns, which marketers can focus and position their brands to fit with consumers’ ideal self-image and desired lifestyles.

### **Celebrity Worshiping, Admiration and Envy**

Celebrity worshipping, admiration and envy are often elicited by forms of consumer-celebrity attachments. Celebrity attachments are ‘positive emotions, such as admiration, which generally signal that things are going well, and can lead to creative exploratory behaviour’ (Van de Ven et al., 2011b, p. 790). Emotional responses towards celebrity endorsers may impact how endorsement messages are perceived and influence behavioural outcomes of marketing messages. After all, they can be important catalysts for personal change and character development (Belk, 2011; Schindler, 2014; Schindler et al., 2013).

*Celebrity worshipping* is the most well-studied emotion elicited by celebrities in the recent scholarly literature (Cohen, 2014). Worshipping, also referred to as adoration, is elicited by someone perceived to have an extraordinary gift or excellent skills which cannot be explained nor understood. Worshipped celebrities are seen as magical and/or supernatural human beings worthy of emulation (Schindler, 2014; Schindler et al., 2015; Schindler et al., 2013).

Celebrity worshipping is, in many aspects, similar to the worshipping of religious sacred religious figures (Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, & McCutcheon, 2002; Schindler et al., 2013). Worshipped celebrities’ accomplishments are perceived to be beyond the reach of ordinary people (Schindler et al., 2013).

McCutcheon et al. (2002) developed the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS) to measure different levels of celebrity worship tendencies including the extreme cases of obsessive-compulsive behaviours of celebrity worshipping. Even though celebrity worship may lead to personal growth and self-development (Schindler et al., 2013), high-intensity celebrity worshippers are more likely to display dysfunctional obsessive-compulsive behaviours, low satisfaction with life, low self-esteem, low self-concept clarity, depression and anxiety (Green, Arugete, McCutcheon, Griffith, & Edman, 2014; Maltby & Day, 2011; Maltby et al., 2004; Maltby et

al., 2002; Reeves, Baker, & Truluck, 2012). They are also more likely to display materialistic celebrity-like aspirations (Roy & Mishra, 2018).

*Celebrity admiration* is elicited by those who act as role models, and represent the very best values and ideals in a society (Schindler et al., 2013). Admired celebrities are perceived to be competent and deserving of their prestigious social status position which lends legitimacy and the ability to inspire others (Onu et al., 2016). The celebrities' admired skills and talents are perceived to be exceptional, but not magical, which means that admirers can attain them through training and skill refinement (Schindler, 2014). Admired celebrity figures are inspirational role models who encourage others to improve and achieve their ideal self-images and life aspirations (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Bush, Martin, & Bush, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Lockwood et al., 2002; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Ruvio, Gavish, & Shoham, 2013; Schindler et al., 2015; Schindler et al., 2013). When admirers perceive that celebrities' excellence and social status are achievable, they become more convinced that through effortful emulation they can attain similar results (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Onu et al., 2016; Schindler et al., 2013). Contemporary consumerism attitudes, role modelled by admired celebrities, suggest that younger aged consumers believe that celebrity fame and luxurious materialistic lifestyles are attainable and socially desirable outcomes (Belk, 2011; Gountas et al., 2012).

Celebrity admiration is a different construct from worshiping and should be treated as such, due to important differences in emotional and behavioural outcomes (Schindler et al., 2015). For example, admiration can lead fans to emulate and aspire to be like the admired celebrity; while worship creates the desire to form a closer bond with the adored person (Schindler et al., 2015). Thus, in the case of admired celebrities, consumers are expected to display higher

levels of emulation of the celebrity lifestyle accomplishments and personal attributes, but worshipping consumers are likely to seek emotional attachment benefits.

*Envy* is a negative emotion that arises from upward comparisons (Van de Ven et al., 2011a). Unlike admiration, envy leads to frustration and has negative implications on a person's well-being (Van de Ven et al., 2009). Van de Ven et al. (2011b) argue that envy can be more closely related to emulation than admiration. Recent research developments demonstrate complexities concerning different types of envy (Belk, 2011; Van de Ven et al., 2009). If an individual, such as a celebrity, is perceived to deserve his or her success, benign envy may arise in some consumers (Van de Ven et al., 2009). However, if a person is not perceived to be deserving of an elevated position, there is a tendency to feel malicious envy towards the individual (Van de Ven et al., 2009). Benign envy may lead to inspiration for self-improvement, while malicious envy may create desires to damage the envied person, such as sharing negative social media comments. Belk (2011) suggests that consumers' feelings towards celebrities may be due to a combination of benign and malicious envy. More studies are needed to empirically differentiate benign envy from admiration (Onu et al., 2016), and the effects on consumer decisions.

### **Consumer-Celebrity Relationships Research Gaps**

Firstly, the PSR literature suggests that consumers treat and respond to media celebrities similarly to how they treat those with whom they establish real-life interpersonal relationships. The different types of PSR and the impacts they might have on consumers' perceptions of celebrity endorsement messages is still under-researched.

*GAP 5- The marketing communications outcomes that different types and degrees of PSR have on consumers' decision making, behaviours and perceptions of celebrity endorsements messages (e.g., celebrities as genuine advocates or paid endorsers of a*

*brand or product) are poorly understood, and further research is required to benefit practitioners and researchers.*

The application of wishful identification (WI) to celebrity endorsement messages can lead to useful marketing opportunities. The emersion of consumers into imaginary lifestyles similar to their favourite celebrities may lead consumers to develop celebrity-like aspirations and behaviours, which can be effectively used in celebrity endorsements. The literature suggests that different types of emotional reactions (e.g., envy, adoration, admiration) towards celebrities lead to different consumer attitudes and behaviours and marketing outcomes.

***GAP 6-** The implications of consumers' WI with celebrities is under-researched. There is a lack of understanding on how WI influences consumers' aspirations, buying behaviours and perceptions of celebrity endorsements.*

Celebrity endorsement research can benefit greatly by gaining a better understanding of how envy, adoration and admiration interact with different types of consumer segments (e.g., young adults, middle-aged or older consumers). As a result, this will provide meaningful insights into how emotional responses towards celebrities may be used in endorsement messages.

***GAP 7-** The emotional responses (e.g., admiration, worshipping, and envy) triggered by celebrities are not fully understood and require more research to find out their effects on consumer decisions and behaviours towards endorsed brands.*

## **Social Psychological Perspectives on Celebrity Role Modelling**

Social influence is defined as 'the processes whereby some people directly or indirectly influence the thoughts, feelings and actions of others' (J. C. Turner, 1991, p. 8). The social

environment is an important predictor of behaviours and buying intentions (Bandura, 1971, 1986; Hinz, Schulze, & Takac, 2014). The attention celebrities receive in mass media makes them highly influential marketing communication tools and social role models (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown et al., 2003). The social learning and social comparison theories are particularly useful for understanding celebrity influence in marketing communications including endorsements. The following sections review the extant literature on social learning and social comparison perspectives.

### **Social Learning Perspective on Celebrity Influences**

According to the *social learning theory*, people learn through direct interpersonal social exchanges, behavioural observations and role modelling exposures (Bandura, 1971, 1986). The observation of role models' (celebrities) behaviours, attitudes and lifestyle choices may lead to vicarious observational learning and behavioural emulation (Bandura, 1971, 1986; East, Uncles, & Lomax, 2014). Social learning leads to an implicit understanding of behavioural rules, which are encoded as guides for future behaviours, based on implicit cognitive and judgemental rules (Bandura, 1986). Socially valued norms and behaviours provide implicit knowledge to consumers of real lifestyle role model examples to follow (Bandura, 2001). Learning from celebrities involves learning values, behaviours and aspirations, which are admired and esteemed in particular social groups and cultures. Consumer observations (via mass media) of celebrity role models have substantial effects on consumers' buying behaviour and preferences. For example, research evidence suggests that sports celebrities can shape consumers' buying preferences and intentions beyond their specific sporting expertise (Bush et al., 2004; Cai, Chen, & Fang, 2007; Chen, Wang, & Xie, 2011; Martin & Bush, 2000).

Celebrity role models can influence many aspects of individual identities and propagate the notion that consumers can ‘buy’ happiness through material products (Maher, Tanner, & Fraser, 2013). The fashion industry uses powerful celebrity brands as role models to create and shape consumer tastes and influence decisions. Unrealistic consumer desires for material luxuries and physical beauty, which are unlikely to achieve, are often outcomes of celebrity influence (Gountas et al., 2012). Celebrity influence extends to even more serious and dangerous issues such as body modification and elective cosmetic surgery (Maltby & Day, 2011; Swami, Taylor, & Carvalho, 2009). Research suggests that increasing levels of narcissism among younger consumers are affected partially by the contemporary celebrity culture (Greenwood, McCutcheon, Collisson, & Wong, 2018). Younger consumers tend to display inflated levels of self-importance and believe they are entitled to the best material things in life, such as luxury cars and houses without the required talents and effort (Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Keith Campbell, & Bushman, 2008).

The *Construal Level Theory (CLT)* is particularly relevant to understand the process of celebrity-consumer communications and how their perceived psychological distance can influence social learning between fans (consumers) and celebrity models (information senders). Psychosocial distance, in particular, affects social learning for different types of people during different social and cognitive interactions (Kalkstein, Kleiman, Wakslak, Liberman, & Trope, 2016). Social learning and information transmission depend on the psychosocial distance and necessitates different forms of communication such as verbal or pictorial depending on the type of social or emotional distance between the learner (receiver) and teacher/role model (sender) (Kalkstein et al., 2016). More abstract, generalised information or high-level construal of communication (e.g., language with abstract symbolic meanings) are more useful when the psychological distance is more prominent between the sender (role model) and receiver. However, for smaller psychosocial distances the more



concrete types of information inputs (e.g., pictorial and more empirically personal experiences) are effective means of communication (Kalkstein, et al., 2016). Based on CLT, it is possible to conclude that people are more likely to learn specific behaviours from role models perceived to be psychologically close and general behavioural traits learned from distant others. Utilising CLT could inform marketers and researchers how to use different types of celebrity communications for different degrees of psychosocial distance. However, the literature review revealed no published research about the effects of psychosocial distance between celebrity and consumer interactions and what types of information is more persuasive to influence behavioural decisions.

### **Social Comparison Perspectives**

According to the *social comparison theory*, people compare themselves to others to determine their level of self-worth and, by doing so, internalise some other observed social behaviours (Beer, 2012; Festinger, 1954). There are three underlying motives related to social comparisons: self-evaluation, self-improvement and self-enhancement (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; Helgeson & Mickelson, 1995). Highly admired positive role modelling behaviours are used as benchmarks to create comparisons and aspirations for upward social mobility (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Upward social comparison can be driven by self-improvement motives which are inspired by celebrity role models. Conversely, downward social comparison, using lower and undesirable benchmarks of comparison, can be used to prevent undesirable behaviours and to preserve and enhance the current status quo (Higgins, 1997; Lockwood et al., 2002; Lockwood, Sadler, Fyman, & Tuck, 2004). Consumers seeking self-improvement connect with brands used by aspirational role models such as admired celebrities and congruent reference groups. However, if consumers seek self-verification,

they connect with brands used by their social membership group (e.g., cultural associations, friends and professional colleagues) (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

The *Self-discrepancy theory* attempts to explain the variations of consumers' behavioural outcomes affected by upward social comparisons. According to the self-discrepancy perspective, people are driven to achieve relevant goals based on how they perceive their own self-image (Higgins, 1987). Comparisons between celebrities and consumers can increase the perceived discrepancy gap between consumers' actual and ideal self-image, which may lead to 'frustration of unfulfilled desires' (Higgins, 1987, p. 322). Consumer frustration levels depend on the size of the discrepancy gap and the perceived ability to bridge this gap (Higgins, 1987). For example, marketing messages with highly attractive models have been found to lead to lower levels of consumer subjective well-being (Richins, 1991). Other studies suggest that continuous exposure to magazine advertising messages with thin and attractive female models increases female consumer's body satisfaction and engagement in healthy behaviours (Knobloch-Westerwick and Crane (2012). Additionally, the outcomes of social comparison are influenced by the subjectively perceived attainability of a goal. Role models' attainable achievements are more likely to be motivational than unattainable achievements (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Schindler et al., 2015; Schindler et al., 2013). Therefore, celebrity role modelling is more effective if it creates and promotes aspirational lifestyle behaviours, which fans perceive to be attainable.

### **Social Learning Theories and Celebrities' Role Modelling Research Gaps**

The social comparison and social learning theories are particularly useful lenses to understand how consumers compare and perceive themselves in relation to celebrities, and how role modelling influences consumers' aspirations and behavioural choices. Social psychology perspectives provide useful insights regarding the increasing levels of

materialistic aspirations, among younger generations. The complex influence that celebrity endorsers have on consumers' perceived reality and interpretation of social/cultural cues transmitted by celebrities is a major challenge for marketers.

***GAP 8-** Celebrities have a substantially complex role modelling function, which needs further investigation to understand how celebrities influence consumers' self-images, attitudes and behavioural choices.*

Social media and reality television have substantially changed consumer-celebrity interactions and the perceived psychological-social distance of celebrities. For example, Langer (2006) suggests that television celebrities are perceived to have a more intimate relationship with the audience because they share more of their personal lives. Thus, it is hypothesised that consumer-celebrity relationships can be even stronger and more influential through social media and reality television, which justifies why perceived psychological-social distance should be incorporated in future studies.

***GAP 9-** The concept of psychological-social distance needs further exploration to understand celebrity social learning, effectiveness of different types of information (abstract vs concrete); and the outcomes on consumers' susceptibility and behavioural imitation due to social comparisons.*

## **Conclusion and future Research**

The extant literature consistently indicates that celebrity human brands are complex multifaceted entities and their effects on consumer decisions and behavioural choices are not fully understood. Figure 2 presents a model synthesising the most important endorsement relationships and variables which are useful to advance future research. Clearly, it is important to address the complex meanings associated with celebrity brands and how they

complement the current celebrity endorsement literature. The resulting research propositions fall under four broad research streams: first, the research gaps concerning the interactive relationships between consumers and celebrity's personality characteristics; second, the research gaps regarding the relationships between a wider range of celebrity attributes and the existing celebrity endorsement frameworks; third, the gaps concerning consumer-celebrity relationships; fourth, the gap related to celebrity role modelling influence. Table 4 displays the link between the research gaps identified and the new research propositions.

The major issue underpinning all three groups of research gaps appears to be the lack of knowledge regarding the interactive effects between celebrities, consumers and brands' attributes. The underlying personality attributes and consumer processing of endorsement message transfer are a major under-researched area which is vitally important for marketing practitioners spending substantial promotional budgets and, therefore, more research is needed. The following paragraphs discuss the research gaps and propositions mapped out in Figure 2.

Most of the celebrity endorsement studies apply two dominant conceptual frameworks (Source Credibility Model and Product-Celebrity Match-up Hypotheses). Hence, the relationships between these theoretical frameworks and the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers have been extensively studied. However, there is a gap in understanding the consumers' personal attributes, aspirations and socio-cultural values which influence their interpretation of celebrity meaning transfer through brand endorsements. For example, cross-cultural differences can play a significant role in consumer-celebrity social relationships which influences the overall endorsement effectiveness with different cultural and subcultural consumer segments (Choi et al., 2005; Um, 2013). The literature review supports proposition one (see figure 2, proposition 1 (P1)) indicating that there is a knowledge gap between

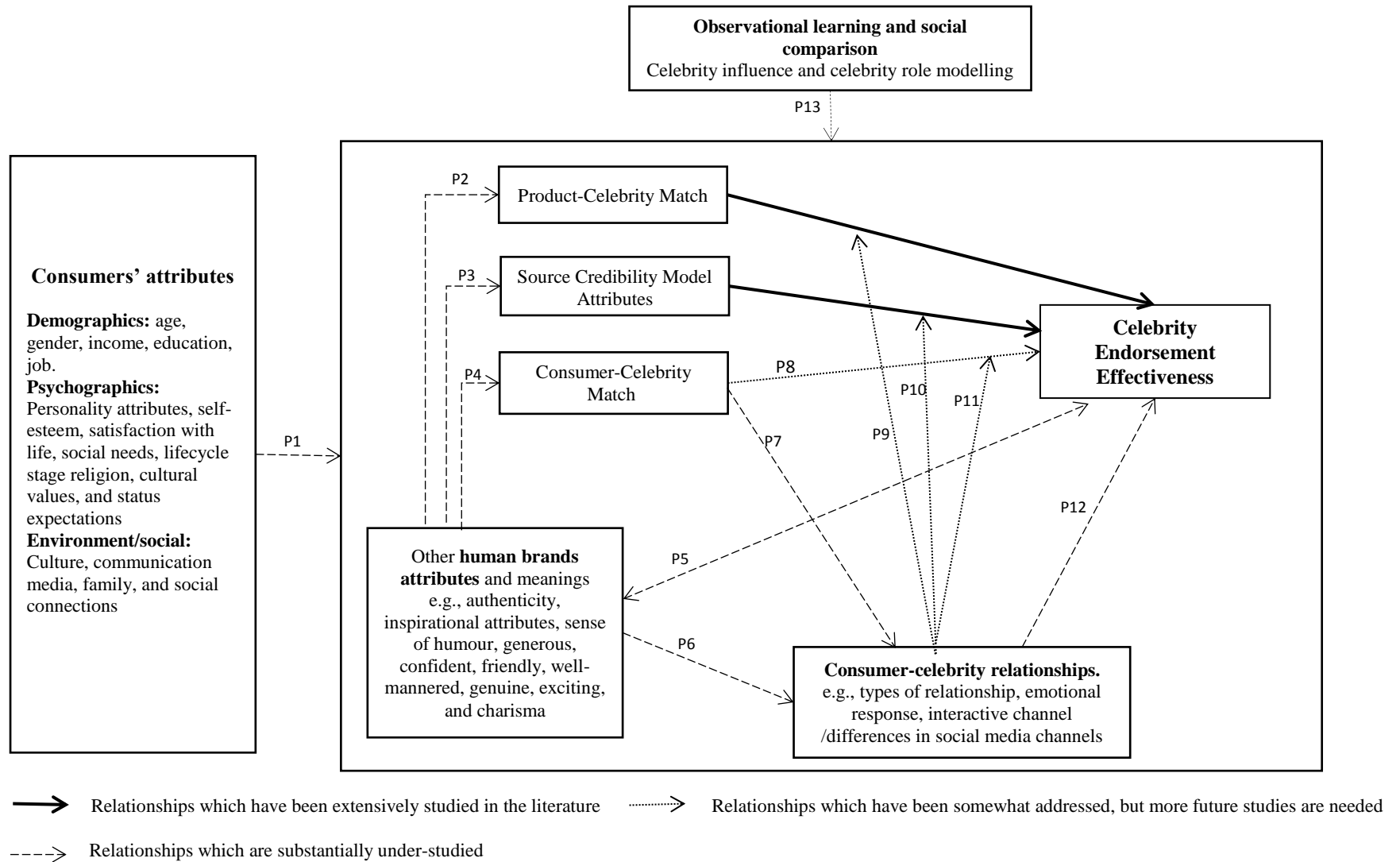
consumers' personal attributes and their respective effects on consumer-celebrity relationships, aspirations and effects on decision making.

**Table 4-** Relationships between research gaps and research propositions

<b>Gaps</b>	<b>Propositions (see Figure 2)</b>
GAP 1- Celebrity source models place a high emphasis on a limited range of celebrity attributes and over-simplify a complex interactive process. Exploring the psychological characteristics and cultural meanings of celebrity brands are likely to provide more information regarding why certain celebrities are more influential than others.	P2, P3, P4, P13
GAP 2- The exact human brand attributes, which are more effective in marketing communications and on creating a following/fandom by targeting certain consumers' groups are largely unknown.	P2, P3, P4
GAP 3- Celebrity endorsement perspectives provide generic guidelines for celebrity selection, but do not account for the consumers' subjective interpretations and the multiple types of consumer-celebrity vicarious relationships.	P1, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12
GAP 4- The impact that celebrity endorsements have on the image of a celebrity human brand is still an under-explored area of study.	P5
GAP 5- The marketing communications outcomes that different types and degrees of PSR have on consumers' decision making, behaviours and perceptions of celebrity endorsements messages (e.g., celebrities as genuine advocates or paid endorsers of a brand or product) are poorly understood and further research is required to benefit practitioners and researchers.	P7, P9, P10, P11, P12
GAP 6- The implications of consumers' WI with celebrities is under researched. There is a lack of understanding how WI influences consumers' aspirations, buying behaviours and perceptions of celebrity endorsements.	P7, P9, P10, P11, P12
GAP 7- The emotional responses (e.g., admiration, worshiping, and envy) triggered by celebrities are not fully understood and require more research to find out their effects on consumer decisions and behaviours towards endorsed brands.	P7, P9, P10, P11, P12
GAP 8- Celebrities have a substantially complex role modelling function, which needs further investigation to understand how celebrities influence consumers' self-images, attitudes and behavioural choices.	P13
GAP 9- The concept of psychological-social distance needs further exploration to understand celebrity social learning, effectiveness of different types of information (abstract vs concrete); and the outcomes on consumers' susceptibility and behavioural imitation due to social comparisons.	P12

The research gaps regarding celebrity brand attributes represent a meaningful area for future studies. To address these research gaps, the model includes a range of additional personality constructs which need further investigation to ascertain their impacts on consumer decisions and behavioural choices (Moulard et al., 2015) (see P2, P3, P4 in Figure 2). The model suggests that celebrity human brand attributes play an important role in the perceived endorsement credibility. Celebrity attributes (e.g., lifestyle and authenticity) can support celebrities image of being inspirational, which can affect celebrity endorsements and consumer-celebrity relationships (see P5 and P6 in Figure 2). A better understanding of how celebrities can influence the interactive consumer-celebrity relationships would enable more precise consumer segment targeting with specific brand offerings.

Successful celebrities can emotionally connect with consumer's ideal self-image (see P7 and P8 in Figure 2). Consumers tend to be attracted to celebrities who represent their ideal self-image. Self-identification with their ideal role model celebrity is a consistent predictor of consumer behavioural imitation and, therefore, understanding the celebrity-consumer personality match-up is an important step towards achieving more effective endorsements. Consumer-celebrity relationships seem to be stronger when there is a congruence of attitudes, personality, aspirations/goals and behaviours. This is an important aspect of youth marketing because self-image and identity are more relevant to susceptible younger consumers who look for role model guidance to emulate.



**Figure 2-** Proposed celebrity endorsement conceptual model

The current models of celebrity endorsement do not capture the complex human emotional attachments that consumers develop towards human celebrity brands. Emotions, such as admiration and envy, can improve the effectiveness of marketing messages delivered by celebrities. Therefore, the impact of consumer-celebrity attachments on the subjective endorsement interpretations is poorly understood and requires further research (see P9, P10, P11 and P12) to improve message effectiveness and reduce marketing expenditure.

The existing paradigms on celebrity endorsement do not account for social media interaction effects. Social media networks encourage imaginary celebrity-consumer relationships and friendships with large number of unknown ordinary people from diverse psychographic, demographic, socio-cultural and backgrounds (see P9, P10, P11 and P12 in Figure 2).

Celebrity and ordinary consumers' influence on social media endorsement communications is still an under-researched area. A better understanding of how celebrities achieve engagement with targeted cross-cultural online communities has a meaningful relevance.

Although authors highlight the impacts of celebrity role modelling on consumer decisions, the precise level of celebrity influence on consumers' preferences and decision-making process, with different brand categories, is still largely unknown. Social psychology perspectives may provide a strong theoretical background to understanding the phenomenon how celebrity-consumer attachments influence decisions (see P13 in Figure 2). Social learning and social comparison perspectives seem to be particularly useful to explore in more detail to understand how celebrities influence decisions and behavioural changes. The degree of perceived psychological distance in conjunction with social psychological theories may also lead to new theoretical insights into information processing. Hence, neuromarketing type of research methods may provide fruitful empirical findings.



The conceptual model in Figure 2 provides a comprehensive overview of which areas of celebrity endorsement research have been researched extensively, which need to be explored further and which areas are under-researched. The research propositions identified cover most aspects of celebrity endorsements and types of product sectors. However, evaluating the validity and reliability of the current theoretical models and the identified research gaps are useful because they apply to all types of marketing endorsement activities.

## **Managerial Implications**

The nature of celebrity endorsements has changed due to social media and reality television.

It is arguable that celebrities are an important phenomenon of contemporary culture and a significant topic for marketing researchers and practitioners. There have never been so many famous role models competing for public attention, popularity and endorsement fees.

Celebrity endorsement selection has become more complex and scientific. As a result of these developments, marketing managers need to gain a better understanding of consumer-celebrity relationships and the overall image of the celebrity brand, such as personality attributes, to achieve better results with less investment, which makes the propositions raised in this paper particularly relevant. Marketing practitioners would be advised to integrate the established source models with psychological perspectives, identifying celebrity personality characteristics congruent with consumer characteristics, which may lead to stronger consumer-celebrity relationships. Psychological distance needs to be reduced to avoid failures in both domestic and international marketing endorsements. Online social media endorsements are increasing, and marketers should consider ordinary consumers as well as famous celebrities as promotional agents, and how these individuals develop relationships with their respective audiences/consumers. Human celebrity brands are not without major reputational risks, and therefore marketers need to analyse the selection of endorsers more

comprehensively and also develop contingency plans to handle negative celebrity behaviours. Besides, media convergence enables for more effective communications which can shape relationships between celebrities and consumers. Social media platforms are powerful tools for organisations and individuals to capitalise on celebrities' influential role modelling. Celebrities are involved in the endorsement of multiple products through multiple mediums. Thus, congruence between celebrity and brand image needs careful management to match effectively with consumers' attributes and emotional attachments towards celebrities. Celebrity influence tends to be more prevalent in the lifestyle type of consumers' decisions, and therefore, marketers should pay attention to consumer concerns about self-wellbeing, social-wellbeing and ethical considerations.

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