

# How does expert endorsement affect consumer's perceived credibility?

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## **Abstract**

Endorsement is a very common marketing strategy and has been traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Expert endorsement is a type of endorsement that is frequently used to endorse a multitude of different products. Previous research on endorsement has shown a positive connection between endorsement and credibility. This research aims to examine expert endorsement and how it relates to perceived credibility.

This research had a qualitative approach and explored credibility of expert endorsement from the consumer's point of view by using the source model theories.

The main findings were that expert endorsement does have a positive effect on the perceived credibility of the endorsement. But as previous research suggested not all the source factors: Trustworthiness, expertise attractiveness likability similarity and familiarity were as vital for the credibility of the expert. The most important source of credibility when engaging in expert endorsement was the perceived expertise of the expert.

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# 1. Introduction

*In this first chapter the reader will be provided with the background of this bachelor thesis, followed by a problem discussion. The discussion will provide the purpose and the research questions as well as the delimitations. At the end of this chapter the reader will find the outline for the thesis.*

## 1.1 Background

Marketing in today's society has grown from the previous limited ways to connect with consumers to a multitude of ways to reach the desired audience (Juska, 2017). From a marketing stand point it has become increasingly more important to differentiate the communication efforts for products or brands. The marketing efforts have changed over time since the consumer has become more aware and capable of evaluating different proposals as well as becoming more selective (Bird, 2004).

One of those marketing tools used to communicate with the consumers is endorsement. Endorsement has been a part of the marketing strategy for decades and has its roots from modern testimonial advertising which started in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where testimonial ads were used in magazines and newspapers to reach consumers (Segrave, 2005). They started creating ads that contained endorsements and testimonials from regular individuals, experts and celebrities (Segrave, 2005).

The most common and frequently studied type of endorsement is celebrity endorsement but expert endorsement is one form of endorsement that has grown more popular over time. With expert endorsement companies use the expertise of an individual to endorse a brand or a product (Biswas, 2013). This type of endorsement is used on a multihued of product from medicinal to sportswear and can be found on all channels.

## 1.2 Problem discussion

Although there have been an increasing number of studies made on endorsement over the years, expert endorsement is a relatively less researched topic considering that many brands uses experts to endorse their products

Everybody nowadays calls themselves an expert without providing any credentials to validate those claims. In endorsement the “expertness” is often derived from the advertisers who control the narrative and creates experts that fit into their message.

This study sets out to research how the consumer perceives the credibility of the endorsement when the source behind it is an expert. Does the consumer find the endorsement of an expert to be more credible compared to a non-expert. Understanding what qualifies as being an expert and how we view expert opinions is part of this study as well as understanding what separates it from a non -expert.

How does the consumer navigate through the clutter of experts and these self-proclaimed experts? Is there any value for the company to use an expert in their endorsement or could they simply use a non-expert.

There is a lack of previous study on how consumers view the perceive credibility of expert endorsement. This area of research is interesting because understanding how the consumer perceives the credibility of an expert endorser can benefit companies when facing the decision of who should endorse their product.

### 1.3 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is from the consumers points of view examine perceived credibility of expert endorsement.

**RQ1:** Does expert endorsement have an effect on perceived credibility?

### 1.4 Delimitations

Due to the qualitative nature of this study only a limited amount of interviews were held. Therefore the study is going to be limited to individuals between the ages 20-30 from Stockholm. This was based on the time and resource restriction as well as convenience and accessibility.

### 1.5 Disposition

This thesis is based on five chapters: Introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and findings & conclusions. The first chapter introduces the reader to the chosen research area with a background which is followed with the problem discussion and results in the purpose and the research question. In chapter two previous researches on the topic is presented. In the fourth chapter the main findings of the empirical data is analyzed. The fifth and final chapter provides the reader with the key findings and conclusions of this thesis as well as answering the research question.

## 2. Literature review

*The previous chapter gave an introduction to expert endorsement as well as the purpose of this research. In this chapter an overview of relevant theories on credibility and expert endorsement will be presented. The information from this chapter will be the basis of the interview guide.*

### 2.1 Expert

According to the Cambridge dictionary the definition of an expert is “a person with high level of knowledge or skill relating to a particular subject or activity”. According to Maddux Rogers (1980) an expert can be defined as “A source of valid assertion" or "one whose statements have been verified empirically".

According to Biswas (2013) an expert is someone deemed to have great insight and that makes valid claims, they ordinarily have a firm stand in the selected matter. Since expertise is related to a specific topic to be qualified as an expert general knowledge is not sufficient, the expertise has to be explicit (Maddux, 1980).

Maddux (1980) Highlights that the difference between an expert and a non-expert lies on the fact that the expert has topic specific expertise in the chosen area, it is merely not enough to have general knowledge to be deemed an expert.

### 2.2 Expert endorsement

Expert endorsers can be defined as an individual who possesses knowledge and utilizes that to endorse product within their area of expertise (solihah & Zulfa, 2009). Expert endorsement emphasizes on the qualifications and knowledge of the endorser, the individual has to be revered as an expert (Biswas 2013). An example of this is a dermatologist endorsing a facial cream or a chef endorsing kitchen equipment. Previous research has shown that expert endorsement generates a higher belief in an ad, as a result of the credibility of the source being amplified (Biswas, 2013). The expertise from the endorser can be derived from the individual’s capability to convey and spread information to the targeted audience as a result of their knowledge, education and experience within their area of expertise (Biswas, 2013).

The effectiveness of expert endorsement is based on several factors that either adds or reduces the persuasiveness of the endorsement (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Some of these factors are reoccurring and can be related to Ohanian (1990) 'source' characteristics, attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness. According to Biswas (2013) previous research on expert endorsement has shown that credibility of the source is imperative for successful endorsements.

### **2.3 Perceived credibility and source characteristics**

Credibility according to Callison (2001) is "the judgement made by a message recipient concerning the believability of a communicator". Credibility can also be explained as people's perception of how truthful the information received is as well as the ability to believe that they are not being misled.

The source behind a message is essential to the overall perceived credibility of the message (Berlo et al. 1969). Information and ideas are accepted by individuals depending on who said it and how (ibid). Erdrogen (1999) explains that perceived credibility is subjective but that previous studies have shown that even though preferences are individual the level of agreement between individuals was high.

Maddux (1980) states that there has been a positive connection between perceived credibility and attitude change as well as persuasiveness of message. According to Ohanian (1990) perceived credibility of a source relies on the 'source factors', expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. These factors were previously mentioned but will be explained more in depth in the following pages.

### *2.3.1 Expertise*

The expertise according to Erdogan (1999) can be derived from the perceived validity of the statements made by the endorser/source. Credibility can be explained as “the extent to which the source is perceived as possessing expertise relevant to the communication topic and can be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject” (Goldsmith et al., 2000, p.43; Ohanian, 1990).

If someone we deemed to be credible provides us with information they are more likely to influence our beliefs, opinions and attitudes, this through a process called “internalization” (Erdogan, 1999). Internalization transpires when the message communicated is received and accepted as well as the source of the influence in relation to their personal attitudes and value structures (Erdogan, 1999). The level of expertise perceived by the consumer depends on their belief in the sources knowledge and skill in the area of expertise. Previous research has also shown that the expertise of a source also impacts the perceived perception of the quality of a brand.

### *2.3.2 Trustworthiness*

According to Sabel (1993) “trust is the mutual confidence that no party to an exchange will exploit another’s vulnerabilities”. From this definition Sabel defines trustworthiness as someone being worthy of another parties trust. The separation between the two is explained as trust being a characteristic in a relationship between two or more parties whereas trustworthiness is a characteristic related to one individual (ibid)

“Trustworthiness refers to the honesty, integrity and believability of an endorser” (Erdogan, 1999). Trustworthiness is the level of what the recipients of the message deems the source statements to be valid (Holvland et al. 1953). Erdogan (1999) states that the perception of trustworthiness depends on the consumers and by selecting an endorser who is considered honest, authentic and reliable there is a positive effect on perceived credibility. The effectiveness of an endorsement relies greatly on how trustworthy the source is considered (Shelton & Chiliya, 2014)

### *2.3.3 Attractiveness*

Attractiveness refers to how appealing the source is considered and how this relates to their perceived credibility in either a positive or a negative way (Maddux, 1980). Previous research has shown that when individuals make their first assessment of an endorser attractiveness has a vital role. We tend to favor people deemed as attractive over those considered unattractive, this is partly because of the preconceived notion one has of such people (Ohanian, 1990).

The attractiveness of the source also has a positive impact on the overall view of the endorsed product (ibid). Attractiveness is what helps the source gain and retain the attention of the consumers as well as it aids to the persuasiveness (Erdogan, 1999). Attractiveness is not restricted to merely physical attributes, but entails characteristics like personality, lifestyle and intellect (Maddux, 1980). There are three dimensions to the perceived attractiveness of a source apart from the physical aspect; similarity, familiarity and likability.

### *2.3.4 Similarity*

Similarity in this context refers to the likeness between the source and consumer (McCraken, 1989). McGuire (1985) defines similarity as a “a supposed resemblance between the source and the receiver of the message”. If the endorser has to have similarities to the intended audience then the influence of that endorsement becomes greater (Erdogan, 1999) Similarity is based on demographic, background, lifestyle and interests. Consumers are more prone to be attracted and drawn towards people they share common interest with, this creates a connection between the source and the individual which in some cases generates the development of identification (Lee & Yurchisin, 2011).

### *2.3.5 Familiarity*

Refers to the level of comfort between the source and the consumer, familiarity suggests that if the source is perceived as “known” or have a bond with the consumer then they are more trusting and feel more comfortable making a decision (Lee & Yurchisin, 2011). The source has to be perceived as trustworthy for the message to have its preferred effect on the consumers.

### *2.3.6 Likability*

Likability according to McGuire (1985) is “the affection for the source because of the source’s physical appearance and behavior”. Previous research has shown that if the source is perceived as likable, that in turn leads to attitude change by the consumer as well as the persuasiveness becoming stronger. (Chaiken, 1980; DeBono & Harnish, 1988).

Likability can be seen as a vital part of trust and advertisers can generate the highest outcome by considering these two factors when choosing endorser. Consumers will automatically trust an endorser they find likable (Friedman, 1978). Since the expert might not be known to the consumers before hand

## **2.4 Expert endorsement and source credibility**

Expert endorsement possesses the source factors that according to (Ohanian, 1990) are underlying dimensions of perceived credibility. Source credibility refers to the credibility of the source delivering the information and not the information itself (Cheung, Lee & Rabjohn, 2008). According to Anderson (1971) source credibility can be viewed as a weight that adds to the significance of the information being conveyed.

Bansal & Voyer, (2000) has found that in regards to sales consumers are more prone to be open to and accept advice from an expert compared to someone who lacks expertise. The expert’s trustworthiness is derived from their perceived capability of them being able to separate relevant and correct information from inaccurate information (Willemsen et al., 2011; Van der Veen & Song, 2014). When the endorser communicates their message and conclusion without any persuasive arguments, we are more inclined to rely on experts because the influence from an expert is competence based "through implicit assurances, by virtue of the authoritativeness of the source, that the opinion has adequate justification in fact and logic"(Maddux, 1980). Furthermore to what level a source can be deemed an “expert” depends largely on the targeted audience (Biswas,2013).

Because experts can be both known and un-known the public This is something brands has to keep in mind since they can’t control the interpretation of the message, by developing their

own spokesperson the companies have more control over the messaging compared to attaching themselves to an already exciting identity Erdogan (1999).

### **3. Methodology**

*In this chapter the method of choice will be described and motivated. It will begin with the research purpose and approach and then follow with how the qualitative interviews will be held. And finally the process of how the data will be gathered will be explained.*

#### **3.1 Research purpose**

The purpose of this research as mentioned earlier is to obtain a deeper understanding of consumer's attitude towards expert endorsement and their perceived credibility of an endorsement if the endorser is or an expert. This research is of an exploratory nature since the previous research on this topic is scarce. Exploratory research provides flexibility since there is no specific design as to how it has to be conducted (Krishnaswany et al, 2009). Changes to the design can be made during the research as the research provides more insight to the chosen research area and more definitive questions may arise (ibid).

#### **3.2 Research approach**

A qualitative research method was used in the collection of empirical data in this research. Qualitative research focuses on individuals or groups views or perceptions of different questions or problems (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is not based on numerical or the quantification of different variables as quantitative research sets out to do (Golafshani, 2003). Qualitative research focuses on understanding topic-specific phenomenon, usually through observations or interviews (ibid) . Qualitative research is according to denscome (2010) best suited for small- scale research with a limited amount of respondents. The aim of qualitative research is to gain deeper insight, thus the method of choice in this study.

### **3.3 Research strategy**

Denscombe (2010) explains that a research strategy differs from the research method, the strategy is how to reach the particular goal and the method contains the instrument needed for the collection of data. Before selecting a research strategy the following three aspects need to be evaluated, is it suitable, feasible and ethical (denscome, 2010). If its suitable refers to if the strategy is well-suited in relations to the purpose of the research. Feasibility in this context means that the different practical part of the research must be possible, access to the required sources of data collection is vital and the chosen strategy must consider this. And finally the research strategy needs to be ethical which refers to no harm affecting those who participate. There are some general guidelines regarding ethics which entail anonymity of the participants, confidentiality, full disclosure of research purpose and all participation has to be voluntary(Denscome, 2010).

This research started with collection of previous research both from literature and articles, which led to the formulation of a research area and problem. Since the goal was to gain a deeper insight of how consumers perceive credibility coming from two sources of information a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

Data can be gathered in two different ways, according to Jacobsen (2002) data gathered for the first time and for a specific research is primary data. Primary data can be collected through interviews, observations or surveys (Stevens 2006). Secondary data refers to data previously collected for other purposes but that are in line with what the researchers are set out to study (Stevens, 2006). The terms "primary" and "secondary" has no inclinations to the prominence of the data, it is mainly related to the origins of its collection (Ibid). Data collection in this study started with the gathering of secondary data through previous studies but the study mainly consists of primary data that was collected through semi-structured interviews.

“Interviewing is the most commonly used method of data collection in qualitative research.”(King &Christine). Interviews can be conducted in different ways but generally according to Edwards & J Holland (2013) structured interviews and the use of surveys can be

found on the quantitative end of the spectrum while semi- and unstructured are more cohesive to the qualitative end of the spectrum. Semi-structured interviews allows the interviewer to follow a set of predetermined question while allowing the interviewee to go off script when answering the questions with no regard to chronological order (Descombe 2010). Flexibility in discussions generated from the topic and how questions are answered are higher in semi-structured interviews compared to structured interviews (R Edwards & J Holland 2013). Structured interviews usually consist of a generic survey or questionnaire where the questions are narrow in terms of responses and leave no room for discussion (Denscombe 2010).

A structured interview is a suitable approach when collecting data on a larger scale according to Edward & J Holland (2013). Since this research is based on a more in depth understanding of how and if consumers perceive a difference in credibility between expert and celebrity endorsement, the semi-structured approach is more in line with the purpose.

Since the research was based on the thoughts and views of six individuals, the interviews were preformed separately opposed to in a group setting. Denscombe (2010) describes four advantages of engaging in one-on-one interviews. The first benefit is the accessibility of arranging a meeting consisting of two individuals compared to a larger group. Second, the interviewee gathers information from one source at a time thus enabling identification of ideas specific to each informant. Third, controlling and directing the interview in the desired manner is more manageable with only on participant. And the last advantage according to Denscombe (2010) is that in case of audio-recording, the interviewee has to be able to distinguish views expressed from each individual and the recording consisting of only two voices facilitates to that need.

### **3.4 Implementation of interviews**

Before the interviews were conducted the interviewees were asked for permission to be recorded, this allowed full attention to be granted during the interview without the distraction of taking notes. The recording also enabled getting a full account of what was said, which provided a well-founded basis for the analysis.

According to Jacobsen (2002) the location and scenery of the interview may have effects on the outcome, therefore ensuring a neutral setting is important. The interviews were conducted

in an informal setting thus creating a relaxed and neutral environment. Previous research has found a correlation between responses and the perception of the person asking them (Denscombe 2010). Willingness to disclose information is also effected by the personal identity of the interviewer as well as how they act (ibid). To make sure the interviewees felt comfortable revealing and sharing their thoughts and point of view the interviewer was mindful of body language and facial expression during the interviews.

The three areas of investigation served as a basis for the interview guide, thus all questions were related to celebrity endorsement, expert endorsement and credibility. The questions were formulated in a clear manner to avoid misinterpretations and to ensure comprehension by the interviewee.

### **3.5 Sample selection**

Sampling refers to selecting and identifying of a group with in the researched area that is part of a population which we seek to investigate (descombe, 2010). In this research the population consists of consumers between the ages 20-30 living in Stockholm and the sample is comprised by the individuals selected to participate. The sample can either be a representative sample or an exploratory sample; representative samples are mainly associated with quantitative large scale surveys compared to exploratory samples which are, used in qualitative research and are usually smaller.

The sample collection can either be based on probability or non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is based on random selection i.e. anyone with in the population has an equal probability to be chosen (Zikmund & Babin 2007). While non-probability sampling is based on individual decision and there is no way to measure the probability of anyone in the population being selected (Zikmund & Babin 2007). A non-probability sample selection was applied in this research, the participant were selected from the authors social vicinity. This was partly for convenience but also because of the length of the interviews it seemed more suitable to choose someone familiar.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

When the data collection was completed and the analysis began. According to Denscombe (2010) analysis in a qualitative research is based on words and visual images compared to quantitative which is based on numerical values. The analysis in a qualitative research does not have to start when all the data has been collected, on the contrary the analysis has a tendency to begin even in the data collection phase (Denscombe, 20120). Creswell (2004) states that the data collected from a qualitative research can be specific or general and the significance of the collected data is interpreted and explained by the researcher.

After the interviews were completed data reduction was commenced, all the information gathered from each interview was summarized. When analyzing qualitative data there are different approaches, in this research a thematic analysis was selected (Braun & Clark, 2006). A thematic analysis consists of the data being identified and categorized under different themes, in this case under the different components of the source models (ibid).

### **3.7 Validity**

David and Sutton (2011) describe validity as the resemblance between collected data and reality and to what extent the data gathered really is a representation of how it is. They continue to explain that validity is consisting of internal and external validity, internal validity refers to the participants and if the data really captured their actual thoughts and opinions. External validity concerns the bigger picture, are the findings generalizable for the population related to the sample. This research was constructed through interviewing and according to David and Sutton (2011) this allows for the internal validity to be higher.

Concerns when conducting interviews is how to determine if the respondent are giving truthful answers, if the questions are based facts steps to verify information is recommended. But when the questions are based on experiences or perception there is no definitive way of validating what they expressed. (Denscombe,2010). To make sure the respondents felt comfortable with the answers they had given, after the interview a summary of their responses was communicated and allowed them to clear up any misunderstandings.

### **3.8 Reliability**

Reliability refers to what degree the findings from research could be duplicated given the same method, if the same research was conducted at another time the findings should be similar (Denscome, 2010). Reliability in the data collected from interviews are bound to a large part to the respondents as individuals and to the context in which they were interviewed, thus the data is to some part specific to the individual. Because of this the level of reliability can be questioned (Ibid).

Stenbacka (2001) states that when conducting qualitative research reliability has no significance since it refer to reliability of measurements rather than individual thoughts and views. She continuous to argue that when it comes do assessing the importance of the research reliability is not a determining factor.

## 4. Analysis

*In this chapter the collected empirical data was analyzed. The key findings and conclusions of this research followed by implications for theory and companies. To conclude ideas for future research as well as limitations of this thesis will be provided.*

### 4.1 Trustworthiness

The most common qualities used to describe a trustworthy individual were honest, reliable, experienced and caring, someone who follows through on their promises and commitments. When describing an untrustworthy individual arrogant, rude, and deceitful was the shared view of the interviewees. One interviewee explained it as someone who from previous experience has proven not to be dependable.

*“Honest, in the sense that the endorser is able to convey the perks of a product without extreme glorification of its abilities”.*

It was important that it felt like the endorser was transparent with the limitations of the endorsed product so that the consumer did not have any unpleasant surprises that they had to figure it out on their own. They all agreed on that a pleasant demeanor was important for the endorser as well as the endorser being knowledgeable within the endorsed field.

*“Definitely, in all contexts of life we usually turn to individuals we consider knowledgeable within the area that we need advice about”*

According to Callison (2001) credibility is how believable the endorser is deemed by the consumer. The majority of the respondents said that they would consider an endorsement by an expert trustworthy because the expert either through their work or schooling has knowledge that they do not possess themselves

*“If I recognize the person as an expert and I know they have extensive knowledge I will see the endorsement as trustworthy as they don’t have to sell as hard and their merit speaks for itself”*

Those who did not share this view argued that due to their noncomplex purchasing behavior their need for an expert to endorse a product was very low and the use of an expert would not impact their consumption. If there is a purchasing behavior was to change or if the purchase was of a considerable amount than that could probably have an effect on the consumer. The more complex the decision the more aware the consumer could become of the products qualifications and the individual providing the information. The respondent’s answers shows that when using expert endorsement the trustworthiness is derived from the experts expertise.

## **4.2 Expert**

The respondents shared the view that expertise was a preferred and valued qualification of an endorser. Depth in knowledge as well as experience was important for the endorsement to feel reliable and valuable. This supports previous research that expert endorsement creates a higher trust in ads as a result of higher credibility (Biswas,2013).

*“I could just as easily make the decision for myself if I did not feel like that person had any value that they could add to my decision”*

*“It is important because you would never turn to someone for advice if they were not an expert or at least had a natural connection to the product”*

The respondents emphasized the fact that for the expert endorser to generate credibility and authenticity then there had to be a natural connection between the endorser and the brand/product. However when it came to the experts credentials there was a sense of blind trust since there was no case of any respondent ever following up or checking the expert credentials. This goes to show that the consumer wants the co-sign of an expert but cannot know for sure if the expert really is an expert.

The respondents were more inclined to accept and follow the advice of a recommendation compared to an expert. This conflicts with the previous research by Bansal & Voyer (2000) that consumers are more inclined to listen to experts rather than someone who lack expertise.

*“If I am recommended a product by someone I would usually have a conversation and a shared dialogue about the product whereas with expert endorsement the communication is one sided”.*

The respondents found that they would be less worried about a hidden agenda if they were introduced to a product by a recommendation since they believe they would have no reason to recommend it if they did not genuinely like it. For that reason the authenticity was higher with a recommendation compared to expert endorsement. Previous research on credibility

*“Since I know that there is compensation involved with the expert that does affect my stand and makes me question the integrity of the endorsement”*

When comparing self-proclaimed experts to experts there were some disagreements between the respondents, some felt that endorsements made by experts were more credible. Others stated that they would initially hold the experts endorsement in higher regard, but on the other hand if a person who before the use of that product had a problem that was solved buy the product and they could recognize that problem within their own life, then and the shared experience would weigh heavier as they could relate to the situation and then the expertise of

that person was not the most crucial factor. This shows that problem identification and the ability to relate is what affects the respondents the most and what an expert endorser needs to be able to convey.

### **4.3 Attractiveness**

Physical appearance is important for the respondents whether it be consciously or unconsciously as the endorser is an extension of the product or brand. This supports Ohanian (1990) theory that consumers prefer attractive endorsers and that the overall view of the endorsement benefits from the use of an attractive endorser. However depending on the product the significance of the physical appearance differed, when endorsing beauty, fitness and health related products the physical attractiveness was very important factor compared to tech products.

*“I would never by a gym membership if the personal trainer at that gym wasn’t in good shape”.*

*“If someone who has bad skin endorsed a facial crème than that would not make the endorsement believable”*

Based on the respondents views when the endorser was an expert physical appearance was not the main focal point as they expected more than a pleasing exterior. If the endorser was an expert then their knowledge and educational background was more important than their physical appearance. But as the literature suggest being attractive aids to the expert endorser ability to draw maintain the consumers focus and attention (Erdogan, 1999). The credibility of the endorser based on the respondent’s answers would not be affected merely on the physical appearance of the expert. If the expert was qualified by their merits and knowledge then that would increase the credibility for the consumer.

*"I don't think I would ever consider a product better because the endorser was attractive however I might listen more meticulously if I found the endorser attractive, but my opinion would not change".*

It is important for the brands to be mindful if there is any identifying physical trait that people associate with a specific expertise. The respondents all agreed that if there was a uniform connected to a certain profession or expertise then by wearing that the credibility was higher.

*"If a doctor endorses a product in an ad without a white coat it would be no way for me to identify that individual as a doctor"*

#### **4.4 Likability**

Previous research showed that if the consumer found the endorser to be likable then that would increase their trust in the endorsement (Friedman, 1978). The general qualities that make someone likeable according to the respondents were down to earth, caring, personable and nice. The respondent also explained that the way the endorser speaks and the tone of the voice is important for the likability of the endorser. It shows the level of engagement the endorser has, if there is no genuine interest then that would be apparent.

Qualities that could make the respondents dislike an endorser was arrogance, exaggerated confidence and someone who talks down to people. . Clichés and trying to “over sell” are strategies that one respondent said makes them dislike endorsers.

There were some disagreements between the respondents on how their personal views of the endorser affects their thoughts of the overall endorsement. Some felt that they did not necessarily have to like the endorser as long as they did not harbor any negative connotations towards them.

*“I don’t have to like you, but at the same time it’s important that I don’t dislike you”*

Others felt it was not an issue, especially if they wanted a product and they knew the functions of that product then their opinions of the endorser would be secondary. However the respondents agreed that if they had previous knowledge of the endorser’s values or opinions and if they were not aligned with their own core values then that would definitely affect their overall thought of the product. Political views could be one factor that could make them question the endorsement and the brand for entering in to collaboration with an individual. Their thoughts of the endorser would most likely pour on to the endorsed product.

*“If I cannot relate to the person endorsing the brand, then I cannot relate to the brand”*

When the endorser was an expert personal qualities were not the primary thing that they would look at if it is documented that the endorser is an expert. The general sense was that as long as the expert knew what they are talking about then their personal qualities were not as important. But if the expert could not convey their message in a way that the consumer can understand or if they were not instructive then that could have an impact on the endorsement.

One respondent said that if they were trying to choose between two similar products and they happen to like the endorser then they believe that would sway their decision. The collected view was that expertise was more important but that for some products there was a need for the expert to convey and possess more qualities than just expertise.

This goes to show that when dealing with expert endorsement the expertise is the most important factor. However if the experts is known to them beforehand then all previous statements made or relations that the expert has could possibly affect the endorsement.

## **4.5 Similarity/Familiarity**

The majority thought it was an important factor to be familiar with the endorser since a previous knowledge or perception of the endorser helps make a greater overall impression as well as product recall. While some did not think it would make a difference if they recognized the expert, because the main focus for them was that the endorser was an expert.

If the respondents knew and liked the endorser than was an advantage, but if it was the opposite then that was something that could negatively impact the endorsement. When dealing with a familiar endorser the respondents felt like they would be less skeptical towards the expert and the endorsement as long as they were familiar with their experience and background.

Most of the respondents agreed that the disadvantages of recognizing the endorser that if the endorser had made offensive statements in the past or made questionable decisions that could also negatively impact their view of the endorsement. One respondent said that one negative aspect of recognizing the endorser is that that they might be more easily influenced without thought of actual expertise of the endorser. The interviewees all agreed that they would prefer to recognize the endorser.

There were some disagreements about how important the respondents thought it was to be able to personally connect with endorser. One respondent said if the endorser is similar to me in age and other features that would increase the recognition which would establish a connection which in turn would affect the level of trust that they felt for the endorser.

Another respondent said that it was not important because there is a limitation to the personal connection that they could achieve with an expert endorser. Another argued that it depended on the price of product; the more expensive the more they would value the connection to the endorser. This shows that

## 5. Conclusions and findings

*In this final chapter the reader will be presented with the findings and conclusions of this research followed by implications for theory and companies. To conclude ideas for future research as well as limitations of this thesis will be provided.*

This thesis set out to research if the use of an expert in endorsement had an effect on the credibility of the overall endorsement. This following segment will answer the question:

*- Does expert endorsement have an effect on perceived credibility?*

The research was based on the source model theories which states that the credibility of an endorser depends on to what extent the endorser possesses and fulfill the source factors.

This research found that some source characteristics were more imperative then others when it came to expert endorsement. All the characteristics did have some validity to the overall credibility of the endorser and were important to some extent.

What I found in this research was that physical attractiveness in an expert does help gain attention for the endorsement but does not generally increase or affect the perceived credibility of the expert as previous research has shown. As long as the products or brands where not related to physical appearance then attractiveness was not a source of credibility in an expert endorser. The trustworthiness of an endorser is mostly affected by the perceived expertise of the expert endorser and how they communicated the endorsement. This research also showed that consumers preferred an endorser that is familiar to them because it generated a greater overall impression of the endorsement. The likability of the endorser had some effect on the endorsement, if the expert endorser was known to the consumer beforehand and their values did match or at least not conflict with the consumers then that had a positive effect. This was

because of the limited interaction between the consumer and the endorser and therefore likability was not a primary concern.

The main findings of research showed that expertise was the most crucial quality for an expert endorser; depth in knowledge and experience was is imperative for the expert to possess. Even though the other source characteristics had an effect on the endorsement they all were secondary to the perceived expertise. However interestingly enough, even if it was important that the expert endorser really was an expert validating the credentials was something that was unheard of. This means that as long as the expert was identified as an expert and had all the physical attributes that one relates to expertise then anyone could potentially pose as an expert, as long as the targeted audience did not have any previous in depth knowledge of the area of expertise.

### **Implications for theory**

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of if expert endorsement had an effect on perceived credibility of the endorsement. This research contributes to the previous theory with its findings that expert endorsement does possess some characteristics that the source model theories implies generate source credibility. However the importance of the different characteristics were found to be diverse.

This thesis proposes that credibility of an expert endorser relies greatly on the expertise of the expert. This was an exploratory research and the findings add to the existing research of expert endorsement. My research provides findings that in some part contradict the previous theory and leaves room for further research. In conclusion this research contributes to the general understanding of how credibility relates to expert endorsement.

## **Implications for companies**

This research provided some insights that companies can apply to increase credibility when using expert endorsement

- Use an expert in the endorsement that has a natural connection to the product in order to generate a higher credibility.
- Physical appearance does help retaining attention to the endorsement but does not increase credibility.
- Research the experts thoroughly so now public statements from the past could affect the brand negatively.
- Being mindful of physical attributes that help identify certain expertise and make sure they are displayed.
- Use an expert who most people are familiar with to increase product recall.
- Depending on product type and prize consumers are more prone to pay closer attention to the expert endorser and therefore different approaches to selecting the expert has to be made.

## **Limitations**

The limitations in this research that have to be considered was the sample size consisted of 10 respondents, whom were all known to the interviewer beforehand which could have affected the formality of the interviews. During the interviews if the respondent misunderstood or needed more information examples were given, this could have affected the answers. All respondent were between the ages of 20-30 and the gender division among the respondents was not equal which could have an implication for the results of this research.

## **Future research**

The focus of this thesis was the perceived credibility of expert endorsement; to further explore the topic of credibility a comparison between other forms of endorsement i.e. Celebrity or influencer would be interesting. Another angle that would be interesting to research is expert endorsement and how it relates to purchase intention.

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## **7. Appendix**

### **Appendix 1- Qualitative research**

#### ***Interview questions***

Before the interviews commenced a short presentation of the purpose was given and the definition of an expert as it has been defined in this thesis was explained to the interviewees.

#### **Trustworthiness**

- How would you describe a trustworthy person from an untrustworthy person?
- What characteristics would make you trust an endorser?
- If you saw a product being endorsed by an expert would you consider the endorsement trustworthy? and why?

#### **Expertise**

- How important is it that an endorser is an expert in the endorsed field? And why?
- How important is it that the expert can provide credentials of their expertise? have you ever checked it up?
- Would you rather take the advice/buy a product from someone you know is an expert or from a recommendation?
- What if a non-expert (self-proclaimed expert) happened to have a lot of knowledge on a specific matter would you consider their endorsement in the same regard as an expert?

#### **Attractiveness/Appearance**

- What are your thoughts about physical attractiveness in an endorser?
- If the expert was attractive / unattractive would that affect your thoughts on the product?
- Are there any physical attributes that helps the endorser convey expertise? (for example a doctor wearing a white robe in a commercial) and how does that affect your thoughts of the believability of the endorsement?

#### **Likability**

- What would you say makes someone likable?
- Are there any qualities in an endorser that would make them dislikable?
- How does your personal view of the expert affect your thoughts of the endorsement/product?
- If the endorser is an expert how important are their personal qualities when endorsing a product?

**Similarity /Familiarity**

- How important is it that you familiar with the expert endorsing a product?
- Could you think of any advantages or disadvantages from recognizing and not recognizing the endorser? Which would you prefer?
- How important is it to be able to personally connect with endorser? And why?