Is Beauty Best Even for the Less Beautiful?
by Sandra Praxmarer

Bower (2001) expressed concerns that women can experience frustration by comparing themselves with highly attractive female models thus resulting in less favourable attitudes toward the product. Is it necessary to rethink the use of highly attractive models in advertising? The present study shows that, even among women who perceive themselves as not attractive and “inferior” relative to the female endorser they saw in the ad, the facially beautiful endorser was more persuasive than the less beautiful endorser. These positive effects occurred for both a beauty-enhancing product and an attractiveness-unrelated product. In contrast to previous studies, respondents were not made aware of the model’s attractiveness before expressing their attitudes and therefore were less biased toward attractiveness as a cue, as in real world advertising exposure.

Keywords
Social comparison jealousy, attractiveness, facial beauty, match-up hypothesis

1. Introduction

In advertising, usually highly attractive models, often celebrities, are used as endorsers (Bower 2001; Gulas/McKeage 2000; Ohanian 1991). Higher advertising effectiveness through presenting attractive models is often explained as follows: People prefer to interact with attractive others (Bull/Rumsey 1988), pleasant stimuli can result in liking of the advertisement and the product (MacKenzie/Lutz/Belch 1986; Mitchell 1986), and attractive models can motivate imitation (Bandura 1969). Furthermore, the model’s physical attractiveness can increase consumer’s perception of their trustworthiness and expertise (Patzer 1985).

Nevertheless, consumers, or at least some of them, could also react negatively to advertisements containing “overly beautiful” presenters and hence to the advertised products. Some researchers have shown that women can experience negative emotions, like frustration or sadness, by comparing themselves with highly attractive female models (Bower 2001; Cash/Cash/Butters 1983; Martin/Gentry 1997; Richins 1991). Bower (2001) found that women who compared themselves with a highly body-attractive female model in an advertisement experienced negative emotions, leading to decreased evaluations of the model’s expertise and to lower product evaluations. However, the methodology Bower used might be problematic for drawing conclusions on attitudes resulting from a “normal” advertising contact. Bower directly asked the female respondents whether they compared themselves with the model and if they felt frustrated when they looked at the model. In other words, respondents were prompted to think about the model’s attractiveness relative to their own while rating the product.

One objective of the present study is to determine the effects of a celebrity model’s facial beauty on consumers’ attitudes without explicitly making respondents aware of the model’s beauty. To test whether negative effects really occur, the most likely reactive subgroup is considered, namely women who perceive themselves as not beautiful, and noticeably less beautiful than the female endorser. This research concentrates on facial beauty, although several other possible sources of audience’s negative reaction to advertisements exist (e.g., unattainably perfect body or excessive thinness).

The second objective of this study is related to the match-up hypothesis (e.g., Kamins 1990; Till/Busler 2000). Some researchers argue that in general (disregarding a potential reactive subgroup) a model’s attractiveness has no influence on consumer’s attitudes if attractiveness-unrelated products are endorsed (Kahle/Homer 1985; Kamins 1990). Nevertheless, the present study aims to show that neither theory nor existing empirical studies convincingly confirm this view but, rather, that a model’s attractiveness does have a positive effect on con-
sumer’s attitudes even if an attractiveness-unrelated product is advertised. However, since highly beautiful endorsers are perceived to have a lot of expertise regarding beauty-enhancing products (Bower/Landreth 2001), the positive effect of a model’s attractiveness is expected to be stronger for beauty-enhancing products than for attractiveness-unrelated products.

2. Models’ Physical Attractiveness and Consumers’ Attitudes

2.1. Positive Effects

The following theoretical approaches can explain why attractive endorsers, relative to unattractive endorsers, are more effective and can lead to favourable attitudes:

- People prefer to interact with attractive persons (Bull/Runsey 1988). Thus, receivers are more likely to more intensively get involved with an attractive endorser than an unattractive endorser.

- Physical attractiveness is one important motivation for imitating other people (Bandura 1969; Kelman 1961). Consumers can be motivated to imitate an attractive model (and thus use the same product) because they aspire to become more like the admired person, while unattractive persons are, on the other hand, rarely imitated.

- Positive stimuli, like pleasant images or attractive endorsers, can result in positive emotions and liking of the advertisement (Mitchel 1986). Positive attitudes toward the advertisement can lead to a positive attitude toward the product (Kim/Lim/Bhargava 1998; MacKenzie/Lutz/Belch 1986; Mano 1997).

- The beauty-is-good stereotype indicates that other positive attributes are ascribed to attractive people also. Hence they are perceived as more successful, more experienced or more trustworthy (Chaiken 1986; Dion/Berscheid/Walster 1972; Hosoda/Stone-Romero/Coats 2003; Maddux/Rogers 1980). Especially expertise and trustworthiness are important elements of endorser’s credibility (Ohanian 1990). Thus, an indirect positive effect of attractiveness on consumers’ attitude can occur.

In summary, positive effects of endorsers’ attractiveness on consumers’ attitudes can be expected and the following hypotheses are put forth:

H1A: Female endorsers’ beauty has a positive effect on women’s attitude toward the advertisement.

H1B: Female endorsers’ beauty has a positive effect on women’s attitude toward the product and purchase intention.

2.2. Possible Negative Effects

However, a beautiful female model does not have to be a positive stimulus for all female receivers. Some women might also react negatively to highly attractive female models. Therefore, the following exceptions might exist.

Women could compare themselves with the highly attractive model or celebrity presented in an advertisement and, as a result, experience negative emotions such as frustration, envy, sadness, or anxiety (Bower 2001; Cash/Cash/Butters 1983; Martin/Gentry 1997; Richins 1991). This can be explained by social comparison theory (Festinger 1954; Gulas/McKeage 2000; Smesters/Mandel 2006) and social comparison jealousy (Bower 2001; Salovey/Rodin 1984). Negative emotions can result in disliking of the advertisement and – as effects are transferred (MacKenzie/Lutz/Belch 1986) – they can lead to inferior attitudes toward the product and lower purchase intention.

Furthermore, if social comparison results in negative emotions and an erosion of self-esteem, one typical reaction is the denigration of the “superior” person (Cialdini/Richardson 1980). Even Dion/Berscheid/Walster (1972), who supported the “what is beautiful is good stereotype”, stated that the jealousy of a person of the same sex can offset this effect. Byrne (1971) argued that, in general, similar people are liked more than dissimilar persons and Salovey/Rodin (1984) found that social comparison jealousy led to reduced evaluations of the “rival’s” character. Bower (2001) observed that social comparison resulted in lower judgements of the highly attractive model’s expertise. Thus, if social comparison jealousy occurs, the model’s attractiveness can result in an indirect negative effect on consumers’ attitudes as highly attractive models can be perceived as less expert and therefore less persuasive.

Additionally, a prerequisite for the tendency to imitate someone is perceived similarity to this person (e.g., women are more likely to imitate women than men). Pater (1985) argues that a model’s high attractiveness can lower perceived similarity from the perspective of a “normal” woman and therefore reduce the tendency to imitate this model.

The negative effects described above should most likely occur if a woman perceives herself noticeably less beautiful than the model (Cialdini/Richardson 1980; Dermer/Thiel 1975) and if she tends to evaluate her own attractiveness as low anyway (Burton/Netemeyer/Lichtenstein 1994). Regarding this most likely reactive subgroup the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2A: Among women who evaluate themselves as not beautiful and who perceive the female model’s beauty as noticeably higher than their own beauty, a negative effect of the female endorser’s beauty occurs on attitude toward the advertisement.

The negative evaluation of the ad and the model is expected to transfer to the product (MacKenzie/Lutz/Belch 1986). Thus,

H2B: Among women who evaluate themselves as not beautiful and who perceive the female model’s beauty as noticeably higher than their own beauty, a negative effect of the female endorser’s beauty occurs on attitude toward the product and on purchase intention.
3. Product Type as Moderating Variable - The Match-up Hypothesis

Some researchers argue that for an attractiveness-related product (e.g., lipstick) an attractive endorser is more effective than an unattractive one, but if the product is attractiveness-unrelated (e.g., a home computer) the impact of endorser’s physical attractiveness is at best minimal (Kahle/Homer 1985; Kamins 1990). This difference was explained in terms of social adaption theory (Kahle 1984).

Nevertheless, most of the theoretical processes (listed in section 2.1.) that explain why beautiful endorsers can be more effective should also be valid in case of an attractiveness-unrelated product. If, for instance, human beings prefer to interact with an attractive endorser relative to an unattractive one, this effect should not be dependent on the product type being advertised. Correspondingly, several studies showed positive effects of endorser’s attractiveness on consumers’ attitude, purchase intention, or sales figures even though attractiveness-unrelated products were advertised (Baker/Churchill 1977, coffee; Caballero/Pride 1984, books; De-Shields/Kara/Kaynak 1996, car insurance; Gierl/Praxmarer 2000, pain relievers; Reingen/Kerran 1993, smoke detectors; Till/Basler 2000, pen).

Two studies did not find positive effects of a model’s attractiveness for attractiveness-unrelated products and therefore are often cited as supporting the match-up hypothesis. However, on closer examination their results are not entirely convincing. Caballero/Solomon (1984) examined the impact of a very attractive and of a very unattractive model presented on displays for beer and facial tissues in grocery stores. As the dependent variable the authors observed the purchase behaviour of consumers walking by. For the facial tissues the unattractive model led to higher sales figures. However, facial tissues are likely to be bought without formation of attitudes and the type of advertising that Caballero/Solomon tested operates directly on purchase behaviour rather than on product attitude. Thus, the very unattractive and therefore unusual model may have strongly attracted consumer’s attention and consumers may have merely reacted on the eye-catching stimulus. The results of the study cannot be transferred to advertising that has to persuade consumers by creating a favourable product attitude which then forms the basis for subsequent purchase behaviour (Rossiter/Percy 1980). Caballero/Lumpkin/Madden (1989) showed videotapes to consumers including more or less attractive endorsers in a grocery store. Neither for the soft drink nor for the cheese did the authors observe the purchase behaviour of consumers more or less attractive endorsers in a grocery store.

A critical review of other empirical studies that are usually cited as supporting the match-up hypothesis demonstrates that they scarcely show any evidence for the match-up hypothesis. Baker/Churchill’s (1977) results do not support the match-up hypothesis as, overall, a positive impact of the models’ attractiveness was predominant even for the attractiveness-unrelated product (coffee). Kahle/Homer (1985) included an attractiveness-related product but not an attractiveness-unrelated product in their study. Kamins (1990) found no differences in mean results on the dependent variables between an attractive and an unattractive celebrity for the attractiveness-unrelated product (a home computer) and claimed this as support for the match-up hypothesis in that no differences would be predicted. But neither were there significant positive effects of celebrity’s attractiveness for the attractiveness-related product (a luxury car) for five of seven dependent variables (e.g., attitude toward the product, purchase intention), and so the match-up prediction was mostly unsupported when it should have been most evident.

All in all, the theoretical processes described above (in section 2.1.) explaining positive effects of endorser’s attractiveness should also be valid for attractiveness-unrelated products. And none of the existing empirical match-up studies convincingly confirms the match-up hypothesis. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3A: A positive effect of the model’s beauty on consumers’ attitude toward the ad also occurs for attractiveness-unrelated products.

H3B: A positive effect of the model’s beauty on consumers’ attitude toward the product and purchase intention also occurs for attractiveness-unrelated products.

The negative effects due to social comparison jealousy described in section 2.2. can occur if either an attractiveness-related or if an attractiveness-unrelated product is endorsed. Thus,

H4A: Among women of the most likely reactive subgroup, a negative effect of the model’s beauty on consumers’ attitude toward the ad occurs for both beauty-enhancing and attractiveness-unrelated products.

H4B: Among women of the most likely reactive subgroup, a negative effect of the model’s beauty on consumers’ attitude toward the product and purchase intention occurs for both beauty-enhancing and attractiveness-unrelated products.

Bower/Landreth (2001) distinguished two types of attractiveness-related products: beauty-enhancing products (e.g., lipstick) and problem-solving products (e.g., acne concealer). Their approach is valuable since consumers might doubt that very beautiful endorsers use problem-solving products and thus perceive them as low in

https://doi.org/10.15358/0344-1369-2006-JRM-2-103

Das Erstellen und Weitergeben von Kopien dieses PDFs ist nicht zulässig.
expertise and less credible. Bower/Landreth (2001) found that a highly attractive model was more effective compared with a normally attractive model if a beauty-enhancing product was advertised, whereas when endorsing a problem-solving product both models were equally effective. The present study will not involve a problem-solving product but focus on a beauty-enhancing product, to be compared with an attractiveness-unrelated product.

Taking social adaption theory into account, one can argue that the positive impact of an endorser’s attractiveness should be stronger if an attractiveness-related (beauty-enhancing) product is advertised compared to an attractiveness-unrelated product (Till/Basler 2000). When endorsing a beauty-enhancing product, the beautiful model is perceived to have greater expertise and therefore be a more socially adaptive person to imitate than a less attractive model (Bower/Landreth 2001). While usually a peripheral cue, the endorser’s attractiveness can contain important information and thus become a diagnostic cue that provides a product-relevant argument (Petty/Wegener 1999). Therefore, a stronger positive effect of the model’s attractiveness should occur for a beauty-enhancing product.

H5A: The positive effect of the model’s beauty on consumers’ attitude toward the ad is stronger if a beauty-enhancing product is advertised than if an attractiveness-unrelated product is advertised.

H5B: The positive effect of the model’s beauty on consumers’ attitude toward the product and purchase intention is stronger if a beauty-enhancing product is advertised than if an attractiveness-unrelated product is advertised.

4. The Study

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Pretest

A pretest was conducted to select celebrity models and product stimuli. Since active and former athletes are quite common in advertising, two female tennis players were chosen for the study. First, female students were asked if they had heard of eight female, active or former tennis players. If they answered affirmatively to all, they were given a questionnaire (30 female students participated in the pretest). First, they were asked to express their liking of the tennis players without seeing any pictures (6-point scale) and were asked if they had heard about any scandals the celebrities were involved in (yes/no). Afterwards the respondents saw pictures of the tennis players’ faces and evaluated their attractiveness (6-point scale). From the facial attractiveness ratings, Anna Kournikova was selected as the attractive and Jana Novotna as the less attractive model. Apart from the perceived attractiveness the pretest did not show noticeable differences between the two celebrities in terms of liking or involvement in scandals. To choose one beauty-enhancing product and one attractiveness-unrelated product, respondents were asked if several products (lipstick, sun glasses, perfume, pen, home computer, and vacuum cleaner) can be relevant to enhance its user’s attractiveness (6-point scale). The lipstick proved to be the most attractiveness-enhancing product and the vacuum cleaner the least. None of the products was characterised by a predominantly low product involvement (regarding mean values) (Lutz/MacKenzie/Belch 1983) with involvement measured following Zaichkowsky (1985).

4.1.2. Stimuli, Participants and Procedure

Four advertisements were designed each containing the face of one of the two endorsers and a picture of one of the two fictitiously named products that were recommended by the endorser via a short headline (“My kind of beauty” for the lipstick and “My clever house maid” for the vacuum cleaner). The advertisements are shown in the appendix. Initially, 120 female students took part in the study. However, the most likely reactive subgroup – women who see themselves as not attractive and less attractive than the presented model – was not large enough. Therefore, 29 more female students were added to the study. The additional participants resulted in 55 women being assigned to this subgroup, and the overall sample size was 149 participants.

Each participant was given one advertisement – a random allocation from the four ads – and a questionnaire. Participants were told to look at the advertisement and then asked to respond to the questions. The first page of the questionnaire contained all items regarding attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product, and purchase intention. The items measuring the model’s and one’s own attractiveness occurred separately on the second page of the questionnaire. To prevent any “method-activated” bias, participants were told not to leaf through the questionnaire but to read and respond to one question after the other.

4.1.3. Measures

In this paper effects of a model’s facial beauty are analysed. The widely used attractiveness-scale of Ohanian (1990) includes only one item (“beautiful-ugly”) that properly measures a female endorser’s facial beauty. According to Rossiter (2002, p. 313) a single-item measure is valid if the attribute it represents is clear and unambiguous to the raters. Since the item “beautiful-ugly” clearly represents beauty, this single-item measure was used for measuring the model’s beauty and the participant’s own beauty. Participants responded on a 6-point scale with the two poles “beautiful” and “ugly”. Respondents’ perceptions regarding other items of Ohanian’s scale (e.g., attractive-unattractive; sexy-not sexy) were also measured, but, as they could refer to body-attractiveness and do not clearly represent facial beauty,
they were not used in the data analysis (although the Cronbach $\alpha$ was high: 0.93 for models’ attractiveness and 0.91 for the female students’ own attractiveness). Attitude toward the advertisement, attitude toward the product, and purchase intention were measured with the items shown in Table 1. Participants could express their agreement on a bipolar 6-point scale (fully disagree; fully agree). A confirmatory factor analysis was run to assess dimensionality of the three dependent variables (Table 1).

The fit indices provide support for the model. All indicator loadings are highly significant at $p < 0.1\%$ and the average variance extracted estimates are between 0.76 and 0.83. The three items measuring attitude toward the advertisement and the two items measuring purchase intention were aggregated.

### 4.2. Analysis and Results

To provide an overview of the results, mean values for female consumers’ attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product, and purchase intention dependent on the model’s high or low beauty (measured) and the participants’ own high or low beauty (measured) are shown in Figure 1. For the analysis, firstly, perceived beauty of the model and the participants’ self-rated own beauty were each split so that $\leq 4.0$ on the 1–6 scale = “low” and $> 4.0$ = “high” (the median was 4.0 for the model’s beauty and participants’ own beauty). Then, secondly, individual participants were assigned to the “inferior” groups 1 or 2 if their self-rated beauty was $\geq 1.0$ scale points lower than their rating of the model’s beauty and to the “not inferior” groups 3 or 4 otherwise. Thus, group 1 is the most likely reactive subgroup, because they see themselves as not beautiful absolutely and also as relatively less beautiful than the model in the ad.

In all groups (except group 2) and for all dependent variables the models’ beauty shows positive effects (or at least the tendency). As might be expected, group 2 had no cases where the (self-rated) highly beautiful participants rated themselves as less beautiful than the low beauty model, but this group is not critical for testing the relative beauty hypotheses. Even in group 1 (the most likely reactive subgroup), attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the product are more favourable if the endorser is perceived to be beautiful. Thus, the results are against hypotheses 2A and 2B. For purchase intention, mean values are also higher if the model is perceived as beautiful, but the difference is not significant.

Since dichotomizing of the models’ perceived beauty leads to a loss of information and should be avoided (Irwin/McClelland 2003), for the further analyses the models’ beauty was treated as a metric variable. Also, for the further analyses groups 2 and 4 were aggregated, due to group 2’s small size (both groups contain women who perceive themselves as beautiful and in both groups positive effects are expected). To test the remaining hypotheses, the following model was estimated for each dependent variable:

**Model:** \[ \text{Attitude/Purchase Intention} = b_0 + b_1 \times \text{model's beauty in group 1, if attractiveness-enhancing product is advertised} + b_2 \times \text{model's beauty in group 1, if attractiveness-unrelated product is advertised} + b_3 \times \text{model's beauty in group 3, if attractiveness-enhancing product is advertised} + b_4 \times \text{model's beauty in group 3, if attractiveness-unrelated product is advertised} + b_5 \times \text{model's beauty in group 2/4, if attractiveness-enhancing product is advertised} + b_6 \times \text{model's beauty in group 2/4, if attractiveness-unrelated product is advertised} \]

This model shows the effects of the model’s (the endorser’s) beauty in the (now) three groups and for both product types. Furthermore, it allows for comparison of the effects for the two products. This is needed to test the hypotheses 5A and 5B, in which a stronger effect of the model’s beauty for the beauty-enhancing product is assumed. Results of the three regression models for the dependent variables are shown in Table 2.

### Table 1: Results of confirmatory factor analysis for attitude toward the ad ($A_{Ad}$), attitude toward the product ($A_{Product}$), and purchase intention (PI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>$A_{Ad}$</th>
<th>$A_{Product}$</th>
<th>PI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like the ad</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the ad appealing</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the ad tasteful</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The product is appealing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I guess I would buy the product</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I guess my friends would buy the product</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \alpha = 0.90 \]

\[ r = 0.75 \]

Chi-Square = 6.89 ($p = 0.33$); df = 6; GFI = 0.98; AGFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.032; SRMR = 0.023

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>$A_{Ad}$</th>
<th>$A_{Product}$</th>
<th>PI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$A_{Ad}$</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$A_{Product}$</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://doi.org/10.15358/0344-1369-2006-JRM-2-103

Das Erstellen und Weitergeben von Kopien dieses PDFs ist nicht zulässig.
Figure 1: Mean values for women’s attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product and purchase intention dependent on the beauty of the female endorser.
Table 2: Results for the regression model for the three dependent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Attitude toward Ad</th>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Attitude toward Product</th>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Purchase Intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t-Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>t-Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>t-Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_0$</td>
<td>0.940</td>
<td>1.190</td>
<td>0.791</td>
<td>2.518**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_1$</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>0.436</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>5.541***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_2$</td>
<td>0.240</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.377</td>
<td>5.275***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_3$</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>0.546</td>
<td>0.390</td>
<td>3.429***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_4$</td>
<td>0.221</td>
<td>0.233</td>
<td>0.426</td>
<td>3.717***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_5$</td>
<td>0.463</td>
<td>0.437</td>
<td>0.499</td>
<td>5.743***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_6$</td>
<td>0.300</td>
<td>0.258</td>
<td>0.447</td>
<td>4.905***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ 0.427 0.298 0.234

***p < 1%; **p < 5%; *p < 10%

Table 3: T-Values for the test of hypotheses 5A and 5B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Attitude toward Ad</th>
<th></th>
<th>Attitude toward Product</th>
<th></th>
<th>Purchase Intention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>t-Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>t-Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>t-Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_1 &gt; b_2$</td>
<td>4.664***</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.229**</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.354*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_3 &gt; b_4$</td>
<td>1.418*</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.204**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$b_5 &gt; b_6$</td>
<td>2.512***</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.246**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.660</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < 1%; **p < 5%; *p < 10%

All parameters in Table 2 are significantly positive. Although mean values (Figure 1) for the dependent variable of purchase intention did not differ significantly in group 1 or in group 3, the parameters in Table 2 show a significant effect on purchase intention. This can be explained by the loss of information from dichotomizing the ratings of the model’s beauty in Figure 1. Supporting H1A and H1B, a female model’s beauty positively influences female consumers’ attitude toward the advertisement, attitude toward the product, and purchase intention. Regarding H2A and H2B, which were previously rejected for the dichotomized variables, the parameters for the models’ beauty in the most likely reactive subgroup ($b_1$ and $b_2$) are positive (instead of negative) for all three dependent variables. Thus, hypotheses 2A and 2B are again not supported.

In hypotheses 3A and 3B, positive effects of a model’s beauty are expected even if an attractiveness-unrelated product is advertised. Parameters $b_2$, $b_4$, and $b_6$ are significantly positive for all three dependent variables. Therefore, the endorser’s beauty does affect consumers’ attitudes and purchase intentions positively even when an attractiveness-unrelated product (vacuum cleaner) is endorsed. Hypotheses 3A and 3B are supported.

In hypotheses 4A and 4B, a negative effect in the most likely reactive subgroup was expected for both the beauty-enhancing and the attractiveness-unrelated product. Therefore, $H4A$ and $H4B$ are specifications of $H2A$ and $H2B$. Since no negative effects can be observed, hypotheses 4A and 4B are not supported.

Hypotheses 5A and 5B proposed a greater effect of a model’s beauty when a beauty-enhancing product is endorsed, compared with an attractiveness-unrelated product. Support for these hypotheses requires the following differences in parameters: $b_1 > b_2$, $b_3 > b_4$, and $b_5 > b_6$. Table 3 shows the resulting t-values.

For attitude toward the ad, the effect of the model’s beauty is significantly greater if a beauty-enhancing product (lipstick) is advertised rather than an attractiveness-unrelated product (vacuum cleaner). Thus, hypothesis 5A is supported. Hypothesis 5B is supported for attitude toward the product, but only in the most reactive group, group 1, for purchase intention. This last result, though not hypothesized as such, can be seen as strong disconfirmation of the “beauty reactivity” notion because beauty worked among those respondents who should be most sensitive to their own lack of it.
5. Discussion

In the present study the effects of a model’s facial beauty were determined. Concerns that highly attractive female models may lead to a negative attitude among female consumers are not supported in this study. Even among women who perceived their own beauty as low and the model’s beauty as markedly higher – and therefore belong to the most likely reactive subgroup – a positive effect of the model’s beauty could be observed. If the model’s beauty does not have a negative effect even among these women, one could ask whether negative effects of attractive endorsers occur at all.

Respondents’ specific emotions upon exposure to the ad were not measured in the study. Thus, it is not known whether negative emotions were missing or whether they occurred but did not transfer to attitude and purchase intention. Nevertheless, this study showed that, if women are not made aware of the model’s beauty, no negative impact on attitude or purchase intention is observable. The method used here should be closer to a “normal” advertising contact than the method in previous studies in which the model’s attractiveness was pointed out to respondents before they expressed their attitudes. Attractiveness works “subconsciously” and, if people are made aware of it, the effects can be cognitively controlled and can change (Maddux/Rogers 1980; Patzer 1985). Scarcely anybody would, for instance, state that an attractive person has more expertise than an unattractive one but, nevertheless, positive effects of a person’s attractiveness on their perceived expertise are found repeatedly (Dion/Berscheid/Walster 1972; Hosoda/Stone-Romero/Coats 2003; Joseph 1982; Maddux/Rogers 1980; Patzer 1985; Reingen/Kerman 1993). The more beautiful model in the present study (Anna Kournikova) may have been perceived as more expert than the less beautiful model (Jana Novotna) and her expertise may have transferred for lipstick but is unlikely for a vacuum cleaner.

The positive effects of a model’s physical attractiveness (facial beauty) also occurred for the attractiveness-unrelated product, the vacuum cleaner. Therefore, once again the often suggested match-up hypothesis was not supported. If the existing empirical studies are critically viewed there is little support for the match-up hypothesis. Possibly researchers should not suggest that there is no positive impact of a model’s attractiveness if attractiveness-unrelated products are advertised (Kahle/Homer 1985; Kamins 1990), since some theoretical approaches can also explain positive effects of a model’s attractiveness in these product categories (see section 2.1). Positive match-up effects are perhaps better explained by expertise: a model’s attractiveness has an even stronger impact on consumers’ attitudes if an attractiveness-related product is endorsed (Till/Busler 2000) because a beautiful model is perceived as an expert for beauty-enhancing products (Bower/Landreth 2001). In the present study, whereas the model’s beauty helped sell a vacuum cleaner, it helped sell lipstick, an obvious area of expertise for a beautiful model, even more.

Several issues should be considered in future research. Bower (2001) analysed the effects of the model’s body attractiveness and observed negative reactions whereas the present study focused on the model’s facial beauty. It is possible that reactive effects may occur regarding a model’s body attractiveness. Anecdotal reports of negative reactions of female consumers have concerned the models’ extreme skinniness (Goodman 1998). The effects of a model’s body attractiveness on product-related attitudes could be further determined among likely reactive women. A second issue is that social comparison jealousy could also occur among male consumers and the reactions of male respondents to highly attractive male models should be investigated. Furthermore, the moderating role of different product types should be specified. Beauty problem-solving products (Bower/Landreth 2001) could play an exceptional role since consumers might doubt that beautiful endorsers use problem-solving products (e.g., acne concealers) and thus perceive beautiful endorsers as low in expertise. Moreover, “reactivity” effects might also be observed regarding other attributes of an endorser, for instance, social prestige. Not only a comparison with highly attractive but also with rich or successful celebrities or with models of seemingly high status might result in social comparison jealousy and negative emotions.

The managerial implication of the present research is that concerns regarding the use of beautiful models in advertising are not justified. Highly attractive models and their often discussed negative influence on consumers’ self-esteem (Martin/Gentry 1997; Peck/Loken 2004; Richins 1991; Smeesters/Mandel 2006) might be an ethical issue rather than an issue affecting advertising effectiveness. Additionally, this study has shown that beauty works best even if attractiveness-unrelated products are advertised.

A further analysis of the match-up hypothesis under consideration of consumers’ involvement can be found in Praxmarer (2006).

Appendix

The four advertisements used in the study are shown below (please note that data analysis was conducted with measured beauty only).

The advertisements are fictitious and were only used for this experiment. When respondents had completed the questionnaire they were informed that the advertisement they had seen was not a real advertisement but specially created for this study. Furthermore, they were told that the advertised products do not exist and that the celebrities shown do not endorse these specific products.
References


Praxmarer, Is Beauty Best Even for the Less Beautiful?


... certainly a must for anyone who does a lot of business translation