

DECEASED CELEBRITIES IN ADVERTISING: AN  
EXAMINATION OF EFFECTIVENESS ON TWO  
AUDIENCES

By

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1994

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
December 2001

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Thesis Approved:



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The achievement of this project would not have been possible if it were not for the patience and help from my wife Laura, to whom I am deeply grateful, and family and friends. I would also especially like to thank my adviser Dr. Tom Weir for his help and direction in undertaking this research. His knowledge, insight, humor and patience is a tribute to the teaching profession. I am also grateful to the other committee members, Dr. Jami Fullerton, and Dr. Barbara Desanto for their help and advice during the course of this study

Special thanks are also extended to my parents, who helped me gather the participants that participated in this study. They have been a great encouragement in helping me see this study through to the end.

Most importantly I would like to thank the Lord for allowing me to see through the clouds that often obscure the beauty that lies beyond.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### General

In both print and televised advertisements, digital and computer-imaging technology is making deceased celebrities appear to promote products without them ever having done so while alive. In print advertisements, for instance, the Gap stores have used Orson Wells, Humphrey Bogart, Rock Hudson, Sammy Davis Jr. and other notable deceased celebrities to sell khaki trousers.

In television advertisements, the medium of focus for this study, Bruce Lee's caricature is used to sell Lipton tea, John Wayne's image is used to promote Coors beer, and Fred Astaire's image is used to literally push vacuum cleaners. Whether or not these former legends would have endorsed the products while alive is unknown; they, of course, cannot be asked. This fact alone tends to make using their images for commercial gain controversial.

This research measures the social acceptance of both young and older Americans toward deceased celebrities in advertising. The proposal being put forth is that older U.S. citizens (age 50 and up) will be less accepting of digitally manipulated images of celebrities appearing to endorse products than are college-age Americans (age 18-30). Because younger Americans have grown up with digital computer animation it is believed

that they will be more accepting of these "tricks" of advertising than Americans who grew up watching the legends during their lives. High-profile stars like John Wayne, Fred Astaire, and Lucille Ball made commercials while they were alive. However, as with any celebrity, it was up to each individual to decide whether or not he or she would endorse a particular product. Summarily, since the celebrities are now deceased, it will never be known whether or not they would have endorsed the products they are now shown to be "endorsing". This research attempts to discover if older Americans' opinions of this form of advertising will be significantly lower than younger Americans' opinions.

### Background

To date, research has shown only how people react to seeing live celebrities in advertisements, not how they react to deceased celebrities pitching products as a result of digital computer technology. Few advertisers have actually used manipulated images of deceased celebrities in their advertisements, mainly because the technology is relatively new. It is also true that few of them have used these images because it is still a costly procedure. However, G. Paschal Zachary reported in the Wall Street Journal (Zachary, 18 Jan. 1993, p. B1) that the new technology used to put deceased celebrity images into commercials and films is getting easier, and once costs lower, living actors may be replaced to a greater degree by deceased ones.

Stephen Prince (1996) compiled a study on the use of digital imaging technology, the same technology that is used when deceased celebrity images are used in television



commercials (Prince, 1996, 28). He found that the rapid growth of this technological breakthrough is creating problems for the industry. The prospect of inserting deceased celebrity images into films and television programs creates a different realism than formerly was possible. Through this manipulation, modern actors are appearing in historical footage as if they were in the footage all along. Though this has little to do with how consumers view manipulated images in endorsements, it does make a statement on the fact that this new technology has far-reaching implications.

### Theoretical Framework

Two theories about how people evaluate and shape their opinions will be used to supplement the proposed hypothesis, since this study focuses on the way people feel when observing others in action (in this case, deceased celebrity's images). The first, self-perception theory, states that people perceive how they feel according to their own value systems more than actual behaviors and actions (Wilcox and Laird, 1992, p. 279).

According to William James, when a person does graft a new opinion on to his old ones, he stretches his former beliefs only enough to admit the new novelty, for loyalty to the old way of thinking is foremost in their psychological makeup (Wilcox and Laird, p. 279).

Common sense might indicate that feelings precede action, and cause various kinds of behaviors: we frown because we feel angry, slump in our chairs because we feel depressed, speak well of a person because we feel attracted to him or her, and so forth (Wilcox and Laird, 2000). However, William James' self-perception theory states the

opposite: that people prone to these bodily signals take their cues about how they feel from their own smiling, frowning, etc. (Laird and Bresler, 1992, p. 204). Since people respond differently to their own bodily reactions and behaviors, a person who is prone to the machinations of self-perception theory feels cheerier when smiling, angrier when frowning, more dejected and less confident when slumping, and more in love with their spouse when flirting with strangers (Laird & Bresler, p. 204). In other words, these people's pre-formed opinions are so ingrained that something as obvious as physical body language is necessary to make them note their disapproval or acceptance. If that person is made to smile by the Bruce Lee caricature in the Lipton tea commercial, he may come away with a positive feeling about that particular advertisement, and by extension purchase that product. By the same token, a Fred Astaire fan who felt appalled at seeing him dancing with a Dirt Devil vacuum, if he felt the deceased actor was exploited, may instinctively slump and frown. This very behavior would tell that person—if he was prone to perceiving his emotions via bodily cues--that he was not happy, and perhaps by extension that he didn't like that advertisement, or the product.

While some people respond emotionally to their own gestures, other people appear to be unaffected by their own bodies and behaviors. Their emotions instead seem to be determined by social expectations. A person whose emotions are determined by the criterion of social comparison theory would evaluate his opinions and abilities first through objective, nonsocial means and then, if such means were unavailable, through comparisons with the opinions or abilities of other people. Leon Festinger, the pioneer behind this theory, explained that humans have a drive to evaluate their opinions and

abilities and that this drive has "survival value" (Suls and Miller, 1977, p. 3). In other words, without an accurate appraisal of one's abilities and opinions, one could not survive effectively.

"The focal point of the theory," wrote Jerry Suls and Richard Miller (1977, p.3) "concerns the choice of particular others when social comparison is necessary". They go on to state that "given a range of possible persons for comparison, someone close to one's ability or opinion will be chosen."(Suls and Miller, pp. 3-4). In terms of this study, social comparison theorists would infer that people use celebrities' supposed opinions to help form their own when they don't already have strong opinions themselves. Social comparison theory, not self-perception theory, proves more relevant to this research.

It has been found (Laird and Wilcox, 2000, p. 279) that women with mostly situational cue responses (cues picked up from other people) enjoyed looking at magazine pictures of extremely slender models, presumably because they identified with the models. In contrast, women more responsive to personal cues (signals their own bodies were giving them) did not enjoy the pictures and their self-esteem plummeted, apparently because these women used the models as standards of comparison." (Laird and Wilcox, 2000, p. 279)

This research sought to discover whether or not people who take situational and social cues to determine their own opinions would respond to digitally manipulated advertising according to how they felt that celebrity would respond. In other words, a man watching John Wayne appear to endorse Coors beer in a commercial may think he would identify with Wayne in some way if he drank Coors, or he might think John

Wayne would never have liked that beer and that his image was being exploited. In the latter case, the man would still be taking situational cues, and social comparison theory would be in full effect (Kahle and Homer, 1985, p. 956). Yet the outcome would be completely different, and not positive for the advertisers. This is the backlash advertising firms have had to respond to following unwelcome campaigns with live celebrities. With deceased celebrities, there are no new "embarrassing incidents", but advertising companies still have to look for positive feedback to the celebrities they use.

What was just described in terms of social comparison theory and manipulated celebrity images is just as true for viewers who respond more often with the traits of self-perception theory. As mentioned above, a viewer more responsive to self-perception theory may find himself laughing or frowning at a particular ad and then go on to evaluate his own endorsement or criticism of the campaign as a result of his "gut reaction". These differences in response to bodily and behavioral, or "personal", cues (as opposed to "situational" cues) appear to be common across all situations (Kahle and Homer, 1985, p. 958). Therefore, although research with this type of advertising is limited, there appears to be little doubt that television ads stimulate similar emotional responses as other social and behavioral situations.

## Statement of the Problem

Because digital manipulation in advertising is relatively new, there is a lack of information available as to how it affects various demographics, such as age groups. Because older Americans grew up watching the now-deceased celebrities perform in movies, their perception of deceased celebrity images in advertising may be quite different to the perceptions of those images by college students. Even very young Americans, who grew up in the computer age, may feel discontent when faced with a celebrity endorsement that does not appear credible or warranted. It was the goal of this study to address these issues.

## Purpose of the Study

Advertisers know that there are risks with any ad campaign including the issues concerning the use of deceased celebrities in ads and must rely on public opinion toward this practice. That a particular age group finds a type of campaign reprehensible or indispensable could be of interest to advertisers and digital animators alike. Additionally, the study examines which celebrities people of two generations feel to be more representative of their respective eras--a compilation of data that could prove useful in many fields of business.

## Methodology

In order to assess subjects' attitudes toward the use of deceased celebrities used as advertising spokespersons, a video of three commercials featuring deceased celebrities was shown to subjects selected from college classrooms and senior citizens' organizations. The commercials were edited together with news, a partial sitcom and other commercials to simulate an actual commercial break. Participants were shown a 12-minute videotape. This video included three commercials using deceased celebrities, a news promo, and part of a situational comedy. Participants were then asked to record their attitudes concerning each spot.

Respondents were asked to answer specific questions about two advertisements in an attempt to get a sense of their acceptance of, or dissatisfaction with, the spokespersons used in the ads. Questions regarding the identification of the celebrity in the advertisement also served as a control measure, so that the respondents would not detect the sole purpose of the research and try to conform their answers to the study's hypothesis.

A pattern of responses was recorded from two segments of the population, under 30 and over 50. The questions conformed to the semantic differential scale of measurement in which respondents rate the numerical value most closely reflecting their opinion with the statements made in the questionnaire. Respondents' answers were scaled 1-7 so that their opinions toward the advertisements could be quantified.

The questionnaire asked subjects to identify the two celebrities in the two commercials featured. Commercial A depicted deceased celebrity John Wayne in a Coors

Beer advertisement The next commercial, commercial B, depicted actress Halle Berry, a living actress, talking to an animated M&M character. In reference to this the questionnaire included two questions that featured an image taken from the commercial with Halle Berry and an image of the M&M character, also taken from the commercial.

The second page of the questionnaire asked a series of four questions concerning commercial A, which depicted deceased celebrity John Wayne in a Coors Beer advertisement. Question one asked subjects to rank responses to commercial A based on the criteria of seven-point bipolar scales. The bipolar scale included whether they liked or disliked the commercial, and whether they found it bad or good; tasteless or tasteful; dishonest or honest, unenjoyable or enjoyable; irresponsible or responsible, boring or interesting, weak or strong, indecent or decent, ineffective or effective, and unimportant or important.

The second question asked subjects to rank the believability of the advertisement. The third question concerning commercial A asked subjects to rank the celebrity, in this case John Wayne, who appeared in the advertisement in question. Lastly the groups were asked to rank their opinion of the product featured in commercial A, which in this case was Coors Beer.

Commercial B depicted actress Halle Berry and a computer animated M&M character. This commercial was treated to the same questions that were asked about commercial A.

Finally, the questionnaire asked subjects to indicate to what extent certain celebrities were representative of their era. The seven-point scale was used with 1

representing “not”, and 7 representing “very”. The celebrities included Goldie Hawn, John Wayne, Meg Ryan, Cary Grant, Tom Hanks, Brad Pitt, Lucille Ball and Clint Eastwood.

The independent variable in this study was the spokesperson used in the television advertisements shown. The dependent variable was the perceived acceptance of deceased celebrities as spokespersons as well as the age range of the participants. Differences in responses were examined according to subjects’ gender and age. The questions asked conformed to the semantic differential scale of measurement in which a statement is followed by a series of seven-point scales representing differing opinions. (Wimmer and Dominick, 1953, p.54)

### Research Objectives

This study involved gathering data from two samples of American television viewers, one group 30 and under, the other 50 and older. The goal was to uncover two answers: are older Americans less accepting of deceased celebrities in television advertising than younger ones, and do they in turn have lower opinions of products “endorsed” by deceased celebrities?



## Significance of the Study

Digital animation and image manipulation is relatively new. Controversy has arisen surrounding deceased celebrity images in ads, but few researchers have examined its effects on various audiences. None of them, that this research could uncover, have examined the effects of such advertisements on older versus younger consumers. Although there are many potential practical applications, advertisers and computer animators could definitely benefit from knowing how certain demographic groups respond to these digitally manipulated images.

## Scope and Limitations

The scope of the project is fairly clear-cut. This research covered only television advertisements and both senior citizen organizations and college classrooms were visited in order to get the cross-section needed to analyze the hypotheses. The participants were told that they would watch a video tape and then complete a short questionnaire.

As for limitations, it is understood that this was by no means a comprehensive population sample and that reactions would probably vary somewhat from reactions to print ads.

It is believed that the measures were reliable in their confidentiality and unbiased in their presentation. (Festinger and Katz, 1953, p. 249). To ensure that the scores had integrity and were not biased, they were made classifiable into the same category on all grounds.

Other issues to consider were whether or not an attempt had been made to summarize what was observed in quantitative terms, and what kind of mean score was assigned. By using the semantic differential scale system, participants were asked to rate each segment according to the bipolar statements on a scale of 1 to 7. With this method it became possible to compare opinions toward the advertisements being studied.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This body of literature might tend to indicate that people who have feelings of nostalgia about celebrities now deceased might disapprove of their images being used to sell products. In "The Culture of Narcissism" U.S. historian Christopher Lasch wrote, "A society that has made 'nostalgia' a marketable commodity on the cultural exchange quickly repudiates the suggestion that life in the past was in any important way better than life today." (Lasch, 1979). Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, U.S. poet, wrote of nostalgia, "A feeling of sadness and longing that is not akin to pain, and resembles sorrow only as the mist resembles the rain." (Longfellow, 1920) When advertisers use deceased celebrities in their advertisements, they are hoping to cash in on that sense of painful longing by associating pleasant star memories with widely circulated new products.

Although studies abound on the use of current celebrities in advertising, very little has been written on consumer perception of deceased celebrities for the same purpose. This is primarily because digital technology is such a new area. Thus, this research will compare what has been written on both live and deceased celebrity endorsements with the empirical data revealed by on-site questionnaires with television audiences. Of particular interest is whether different age groups respond differently to the use of deceased

celebrities as advertising spokespersons--a topic that can hardly be examined without looking also at nostalgia. It is the opinion of this researcher that older Americans (50 and up) will feel more of a bittersweet longing for the celebrities the way they were, not appearing to be endorsing various products. After all, these individuals "knew them when"; they were the cinematic heroes of their day. Fred Astaire and John Wayne were huge superstars prone to receiving the very best scripts, not advertising products. And even if they were making commercials, they were making commercials that they chose to make. The controversy of this method of advertising lies in the fact that these celebrities are not alive to give their personal consent. Several studies researching the effectiveness of living celebrities in advertisements will demonstrate why some agencies use them and why others refuse. However, there have been very few studies to date on deceased celebrities in advertisements, and even fewer on their effects on audiences. This section will present its research questions and hypotheses, review what has been written on living celebrities in ads, then examine what has been written on deceased celebrities for the same purpose.

Viewers under 30 may have more of a detached approach toward the technology, since they grew up with computers and since they didn't have the older stars as current icons in their lifetime. The theoretical framework of the study demonstrated how people come to form opinions toward themselves and the world, and it is believed that people over 50, whether they operate more by social comparison or self-perception, will have a problem with their former screen idols selling products without their permission.

## Living Celebrity Advertisement Effectiveness Studies

Historically, advertisers have used celebrity endorsements because they believed that the celebrities involved would have an impact in swaying consumer interest in purchasing a product (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995, p.57). This widespread use spurred researchers to look into the issues surrounding this practice. Out of some of this research new arguments arose for the use of deceased celebrities in advertisements, namely that deceased celebrities, while still holding the influential power of celebrity, may be less expensive and less troublesome than live ones.

Agrawal and Kamakura wrote of the way that celebrities make money for advertising agencies. In "The Economic Worth of Celebrity Endorsers: An Event Study Analysis" (1995), the authors assess the impact of celebrity endorsement contracts on the expected profitability of a firm by using event study methodology. An event study is an analysis of whether there was a statistically significant reaction in current testing to past occurrences of a given type of event hypothesized to affect groups in a particular way. Sometimes the event is within the researchers' control and sometimes it is outside their control. By incorporating this methodology into their study, Agrawal and Kamakura found that, overall, celebrities are worthwhile investments (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995, p 58).

A great number of researchers have studied the credibility of celebrity endorsers. In "Endorsers in Advertising: The Case of Negative Celebrity Information", Till and Shimp (1988) studied the effects of negative celebrity information on subjects viewing an ad campaign with that celebrity as an endorser. The researchers considered four variables

the size of the association set for the brand; the size of the association set for the celebrity; the timing of the negative celebrity information, and the strength of the associative link between the brand and the celebrity. In the first two studies, they used a fictitious but realistic celebrity endorser, and in the third they used an actual celebrity. In keeping with various studies about nostalgia, Till and Shimp found that negative information about a celebrity resulted in a decline in attitude toward the endorsed brand only for the fictitious celebrity. The general relationship was moderated in varying degrees by association set size, timing of the negative information, and the strength of the link between brand and celebrity. (Till & Shimp, p. 82).

There was inconclusive data as to whether or not spokesperson effects are consistent for all types of communication media. Previous findings have shown that advertising spokespersons were able to produce differential effects on consumer responses and that the effectiveness of spokespersons varied depending on the “criterion variable of interest” (Freiden, 1984, p. 35). It has thus been argued that advertising managers should exercise caution in generalizing spokespersons’ effects for a heterogeneous audience (Freiden, 1984, p. 35). Evidence was found that distinct sub-segments occur within the consumer community (in particular, older versus younger consumer responses to celebrity endorsements).

Consumers’ views and perceptions about a reviewed topic indicate that the average consumer has an overall positive attitude toward celebrity endorsement (O’Mahony and Meenaghan, 1997, p. 17). Such endorsers were perceived as attention-gaining, likable and capable of making an impact, although they were not generally

regarded as overly convincing or believable. The perceived credibility and expertise of the endorser were found to be the two "source" characteristics with the greatest influence on product purchase intentions. The study also confirmed that consumers expect congruence between the perceived images of the celebrity endorser and the types of product they endorse. In other words, celebrities must possess expertise in product categories consistent with their public profiles and perceived life styles. (O'Mahoney and Meenaghan, 1997, p. 19)

It seems that not only are congruent ads perceived more favorably, but remembrance of the ad is enhanced when celebrity and product type match. Like O'Mahoney and Meenagan, Misra and Beatty (1990) focused their study on recall and product/celebrity congruence. According to their study, "Celebrity Spokesperson Congruence: An Assessment of Recall and Affect", recall is enhanced when celebrity and brand are matched. When matched transfer of affect from spokesperson to brand were found to be facilitated (when the brand and spokesperson were matched), affect toward the brand was also found to be higher (Misra & Beatty, 1990, p.170).

This recollection of the product really is no accident. Advertisers work very hard to match celebrity to brand name in order to increase recall and brand recognition. It was even found that if brand name and advertisement recall are most desirable, advertisers should use a celebrity as an endorser (Freidman and Freidman, 1979, p. 64). However if believability of the endorsement, overall attitude toward the advertised product, and an initial intent to purchase the product are desired, the type of endorser should be more carefully considered. If the product risk is social and or psychological then a celebrity

should be chosen. For a complex product, financial performance or physical risk, an expert should be chosen. (Friedman and Friedman, 1979, p. 64)

Many researchers stress that celebrities' effectiveness as endorsers stems from the cultural meanings with which they are endowed (McCracken, 1989, p. 315). This research shows how meanings pass from celebrity to product and from product to consumer (McCracken, 1989, p.315).

In a similar vein, many researchers state that the physical attractiveness of a celebrity endorser may only enhance both product and ad-based evaluations if the product's characteristics "match up" with the image conveyed by the celebrity (Kamins, 1990, p.5). It has been found that for an attractiveness-related product, use of a physically attractive celebrity was observed to significantly enhance measures of spokesperson credibility and attitude toward an ad relative to the use of a physically unattractive celebrity. (Alternatively, the physically attractive celebrity was found to have no effect on various spokesperson product and ad-based dependent measures relative to the physically unattractive celebrity for an attractiveness-unrelated product.) (Kamins, 1990, p.11)

One of the criticisms concerning the use of highly influential people, such as celebrities in advertisements for products such as alcohol, is that young people may be improperly influenced. Much of the controversy surrounding this issue stems from the debate over how people begin to develop particular behaviors and habits. Social comparison theory would indicate that people try to be like those they admire, while self



perception theory would state that they act first, then more or less notice their automatic behaviors (Festinger, 1953, p.249).

In studies where a behavioral cue was present, a highly credible source was shown to have an adverse effect on individual's attitudes or behavior (Dholakia & Sternthal , 1997, p. 224). A low credibility source induced a more positive attitude toward his advocacy than did a highly credible source when message recipients' own behavior served as a cue for determining their attitudes. In contrast, when the behavioral cue was absent, a highly credible source did not have an adverse effect on individuals' attitudes or behavior. These findings are interpreted in terms of self-perception theory and cognitive response analysis. (Dholakia & Sternthal , 1997, p. 225).

Very specific to the studies of advertising's effects on young people is the research testing the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers in alcohol advertisements on young audiences. In short, it was found that celebrity figures produced consistently more favorable impact than did non-celebrity spokespersons (Atkin & Block, 1983, p. 59). Basically, participants perceived celebrity characters as more trustworthy and competent. This study, featuring different alcohol advertisements both with and without celebrities, found that advertisements showcasing celebrities produced consistently more favorable impact on young people than the non-celebrity ads (Atkin & Block, p. 61).

Since one of the opinions tested in this study was whether or not viewers found celebrity commercials enjoyable or not, it may be important that beauty plays an important role in advertisements with the rich and famous. One study found that attitudes and purchase intentions changed due to celebrity source attractiveness, (Kahle

and Homer, 1985, p. 956). When three factors were manipulated in an ad for disposable razors (endorser attractiveness, celebrity-source likability, and participant product involvement), the results were interpreted as supporting social adaptation theory (Kahle and Homer, 1985, p. 956). These findings were fairly specific to this study in that they showed how much influence a well-known name can have.

Freiden, (1984) makes three basic points in his essay, "Advertising Spokesperson Effects: An Examination of Endorser Type and Gender on Two Audiences". First, he notes that fees for celebrities can be substantial. Second, the costs for national advertising, especially on television, are extremely high. And third, the type of spokesperson can affect levels awareness and recall. In short, he says, research shows that ad spokespersons produce differential effects on consumer responses (Frieden, 1984, p. 35).

### Deceased Celebrity Images in Advertising

The rapid development of digital imaging technology has created problems for film theory, demonstrating how far-reaching the implications of technological advancements can be (Prince, 1996, p. 29). However, the new technology used to put deceased celebrity images into commercials and films is only getting easier, and once costs lower, living actors may be replaced at a greater degree by deceased ones (Zachary, 1993, p. B1). If a firm does choose to use a celebrity for an endorsement, what makes a good one?

When the economic worth of celebrity endorsers was studied, results indicated that on average they are perceived as a good investment. Many advertisers have used deceased celebrity images because they find them just as effective in selling their products as living celebrities. (Frieden, 1984, p. 35).

Reports that advertisers find deceased celebrities to be more stable in character than living celebrities claim that the deceased cannot embarrass advertisers the way that live ones can (Goldman, 1994, p.B1). Fear of celebrity scandal has given rise to a mini-trend of using deceased celebrities instead of live ones for precisely that reason (Till and Shimp, 1998, p. p. 69).

An article in *Marketing News* (1993) featured Roger Richman, whose Beverly Hills, California agency represents the heirs of several celebrities. He claims that advertising agencies like the idea of using deceased celebrities because they know there are not going to be problems with morality, and they can save money. (Miller, 1993, p. 4).

McDonough (1996) makes the statement that "Maybe the only thing better than a live celebrity is a dead one", noting the "peace of mind that comes in trusting a product to a star who cannot get busted by vice cops . . ." (McDonough, 1996, p. S16).

In *Business Week*, Hyman (1997) reported that an investment bank, Alex. Brown & Sons Inc., paid \$15,000 for the use of Babe Ruth photos in 3 newspaper ads, which Hyman claimed was "chicken feed" compared to the fees commanded by top living celebrities (Hyman, 1997, p. 115).

Still, using a deceased celebrity in an advertisement does not guarantee that an advertiser will have no problems. One study revealed just how the new technology

creates new problems (Zinkhan and Watson, 1996, p. 163). As digital imaging technology is used to enhance different product images, one study contends, there are debates both pro and con over the impact of this on consumer response and the effectiveness of this advertising method (Zinkhan and Watson, 1996, p. 170).

Popular press reporting on the use of deceased celebrities in advertisements provides another look at many viewpoints surrounding these issues. Deceased celebrities, it has been noted, are not apt to get poor press over misdeeds. There are pro and con debates as to the cost efficiency of using a deceased celebrity in advertisements versus a live one. Morality issues have surfaced that try to make sense out of creative technological accomplishments and their use for advertisement purposes. Some consumers have protested the practice. Also there have been pro and con viewpoints concerning the lawfulness of using deceased images of notable personages in advertisements.

Boedeker (1997) reported in the Chicago Tribune that even though there has been a "how did they do that" factor concerning the technology involved in creating commercials with deceased celebrity images, there is a drawback with the price and difficulty involved in producing such a commercial (Boedeker, 1997, p. 7). Still others have reported that using a deceased sports celebrity to anchor an ad campaign can work beautifully and be inexpensive.

Los Angeles Times reporter Denise Gellene (1997) reported that deceased celebrities in advertising are viewed as a "safe bet" but that advertisers may experience possible pitfalls. For one thing, she wrote, deceased celebrities, "can overshadow the

product that they are being used to pitch." She also notes that some advertisers are moving away from celebrities, living or deceased, because of the debate over the issue. (Gellen, 1997, p. D 4:1)

In USA Today (Sept. 17, 1989), Michael Wayne, son of actor John Wayne and a representative of Wayne Enterprises, argued for legislation to protect celebrity images and restrict the use of celebrity names (Wayne, 1989, p.A 10). But he is not the only one. Many consumers, most far less tied to the issues than Wayne's son, dislike the practice.

Very related to this study is the research by Jon B. Freiden. Freiden's research (1984) says that older consumers tend to respond to spokespersons in different ways than younger ones, and that effectiveness of spokespersons seems to vary depending upon the criterion variable of interest (Freiden, 1984, p.35).

The question then of response of subject based on age has been proven to differ. Continuing with this line of research, the first research question of this study is, "How is age related to people's perceptions of the use of deceased celebrity endorsements?" The second research question is, "How is age related to the perception of products which are endorsed by deceased celebrities?" The hypotheses which follow therefore are:

H1: "Subjects age 50 and over disapprove of deceased celebrities in advertising to a greater degree than subjects under the age of 30", and

H2: "Subjects age 50 and over have a lower evaluation of products which are endorsed by deceased celebrities than younger subjects under the age of 30."

Cumulatively, the research by others led to this study, for what was missing was found to be as important as what was available. Based on celebrities' influence on

viewers, their nostalgic feelings toward deceased celebrities, and the work of social development theorists like Leon Festinger, it is anticipated that the older viewer will be influenced in a more negative way by this type of digital manipulation than the younger viewer.

### Summary

An attempt is being made with this research to determine whether or not older Americans (50 and up) disapprove of former celebrities being digitally manipulated to look as if they are pitching products. It was anticipated that consumer reaction to seeing popular actors of years past endorsing products would be more negative in the older group than in the younger, because the younger audience did not “know them when”. It is also anticipated that the older audience will have a lower evaluation of products that are endorsed by deceased celebrities than younger subjects. Social comparison theory has relevance in that persons identifying with or idolizing former Hollywood celebrities would indeed dislike the advertisement, or find it dishonest, or irresponsible, because they might believe that the deceased celebrity would disapprove of being used in a commercial without their consent even after death.

Advertisers know that there are risks with any advertising campaign, and they rely on public opinion. Ultimately, however, the success of the campaign (and thus public opinion) will always be assessed by general sales of the product being promoted.

There is no doubt that there is a growing interest in the use of deceased celebrity images in advertising (Barrett, 1997, p. 7), yet it is unclear whether or not sales suffer when the public disapproves of their use in ads. Overall, deceased celebrities, like living ones, are perceived as being a good investment. A type of advertising campaign that will link a celebrity's image to a product allures many consumers to purchase based on those connections, which is exactly what advertisers hope for when they employ expensive digital manipulation techniques. Whether or not a public backlash will counteract the benefits of using those celebrities is something this research hopes to discover.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Overview

To examine the factors that might influence the effectiveness of deceased celebrity endorsers, a twelve-minute video featuring material from NBC was recorded during a period of regular Tuesday evening broadcasting in October of 2000. The video showed three groups of advertisements with the end of a local newscast and the beginning of a sitcom. The only changes made to the NBC broadcast were the replacement of several advertisements with other advertisements. The advertisements replacing the ones broadcast that evening consisted of one advertisement with deceased celebrity Fred Astaire and one with John Wayne; an animated M&M commercial, and a cartoon character of Colonel Sanders selling Kentucky Fried Chicken.

#### Subjects

One hundred ninety one subjects, ranging in age from 19 to 98, watched the video. Afterwards, they responded to a questionnaire consisting of questions about the spokespersons used in the two types of advertisements shown. . The number of subjects at each unit of analysis was between five and 55.



Subjects were chosen by visiting senior citizen community centers and classrooms at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, OK. This selection had freedom from bias, except for the socioeconomic restrictions of quality senior living or college education. Since the subjects were college students or persons over 50, there was the necessary variety to compare differences between groups. The subjects, 63 of whom were male and 128 of whom were female, were needed for only 20 to 30 minutes. It was a one-time only testing procedure, and there were no anticipated risks. Subjects viewed a tape of commercials and programming suitable for all age groups and then answered questions about it. No shocking or misleading material was used in the tape or questionnaire.

#### Design/ Sampling Plan

Sampling procedures consisted of the convenient selection of three classrooms of Journalism and Broadcasting students at Oklahoma State University, ranging in size from 19 to 55. All students asked to take the survey complied.

Persons 50 and older were asked to participate by attending screening sessions in an area community center in which the same stimulus materials were shown. The heads of the senior citizens' centers were contacted prior to the visits and had collected volunteers. Groups of 5-15 were gathered in different assisted living homes and senior citizen organizations to take the test.

In all cases involving the subjects, there was a short introduction as to what the research concerned without revealing what answers the research was seeking. Following

this a 12-minute tape was shown and a short questionnaire followed. There was no manipulation of environment. Respondents were asked to answer specific questions about two advertisements in an attempt to get a sense of their acceptance of, or dissatisfaction with, the advertisements and their spokespersons. Questions regarding the identification of the celebrity in the advertisement served only as a control measure, so that the respondents would not detect the sole purpose of the research and try to conform their answers to the study's hypothesis.

### Research Design

This study utilized an experimental design. The independent variable in this study was the spokesperson used within the television advertisements shown. The dependent variables are the perceived acceptance of deceased celebrities as spokespersons, perceived credibility of the endorsers, and overall perception of the brand. The questions asked conform to the semantic differential scale of measurement in which a statement is made, followed by a series of seven-point scales anchored by contrasting attitudes (see Appendix B). The semantic differentials were chosen from a study by Charles Atkin and Martin Block, who were examining the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers (Atkin and Block, p. 59). On a scale of one to seven, respondents judged whether they liked or disliked the commercial. They then judged the effectiveness of the celebrity in terms of the following bipolar representations: bad or good; tasteless or tasteful; dishonest or honest, unenjoyable or enjoyable; irresponsible or responsible,

boring or interesting, weak or strong, indecent or decent, ineffective or effective, and unimportant or important.

Levels of each bipolar adjective were applied to each of two commercials shown when subjects were asked to rate how the extent to which adjective accurately described each commercial.

### Data Processing and Analysis

After the questionnaires were completed, each response was recorded into a spreadsheet, which was then entered into the statistical program SPSS. The statistical analyses involved were primarily independent sample T-Tests to evaluate the significance of differences between the mean scores of each group. By these means, the data obtained was used to determine the relationship between age and acceptance toward the advertisements presented to the subjects.

### Limitations

This was an experiment involving ingrained feelings that are hypothesized to exist regarding how people see the world, themselves, and others. Since these feelings are dictated by social theories, they are part of our social reality and therefore not required to be tested randomly. Therefore, although this study was did not involve a random selection, randomness was not considered to be mandatory. However, this means that all

attitudes cannot have been represented; the research attempted to find a narrow perspective in a convenient sample. Rather than represent all attitudes, only those on the bipolar scale were represented.

In addition, this study queried a limited number of subjects, which could not perceivably represent the overall attitudes of persons age 18 to 90 in the United States as concerns their perceptions about deceased celebrities in advertising. Thus, another potential limitation of the study was that it queried only a limited number of subjects.

An artificial atmosphere exists that might not truly represent a subject's actual attitude and perception toward advertisements of this nature by watching a video and then taking a questionnaire. In addition the study might have been limited by the choice of commercial spots. Participants might not have approved of the sexual innuendo existing in the M&M's commercial, or that alcohol was promoted in commercial A. Furthermore, the believability of commercial B was automatically affected by the fact that it involved a talking candy. It is possible that subjects discredited the actress to a degree because of the outrageousness of the commercial's premise.

Finally, in some cases, subjects may not have identified the deceased celebrity as being such and therefore have no real attitudes toward the celebrity in general.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if Americans, ages 50 and older, differ from Americans, ages 18 to 30, in their perceptions of advertisements using deceased celebrity images. A twelve-minute video with recorded material from NBC was shown to college students from three Broadcast and Journalism classes at Oklahoma State University, and to separate gatherings of individuals ages 50 and older. The younger group, which was taken from the classes at OSU, were primarily advertising students in their sophomore and junior years of study. Older subjects were gathered at several different retirement communities and several senior citizen community centers located in Stillwater, Oklahoma. All volunteers were given a brief introduction, shown the video, and then given the questionnaire.

#### Demographics

The demographic factors included in this study were age and gender. Of the 191 subjects, ranging from 19 to 98, 33% were male and 67% were female. Subjects were college students or persons over 50, creating the variety necessary to examine differences

between groups. The goal was to determine whether older Americans viewed deceased celebrities in advertising more negatively than younger Americans. Table I presents the demographic data collected.

TABLE I  
AGE and GENDER

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Age	191	79	19	98	39.75

	Frequency	Percent
Male	63	33.0
Female	128	67.0

The questionnaire began by asking subjects to identify two celebrities out of two commercials featured in the questionnaire. The first commercial, commercial A, featured John Wayne's image taken directly from the Coors beer commercial shown to the subjects. Overall, the data shows that both participating groups correctly identified John Wayne as the celebrity.

The next commercial, which depicts actress Halle Berry talking to an animated M&M character, was referenced by two questions that featured an image taken from the commercial with Halle Berry, and an image of the M&M character, also taken from the

commercial. Overall group one correctly identified both Halle Berry and the animated character as being associated with M&M's candy. The group of other subjects, however, did not recognize Halle Berry overall, but did recognize the M&M character.

The second page of the questionnaire asked a series of questions concerning commercial A which depicted deceased celebrity John Wayne in a Coors Beer advertisement. Question one asked subjects to rank response to commercial A based on the criteria of seven-point bipolar scales.

The research found that in every adjective statement the younger group, group one, ranked the commercial significantly higher than group two. Group one had a mean score of 5.52 as opposed to group two who had a mean score of 3.99 when asked to rank commercial A along a seven-point scale from Tasteless to Tasteful. Similarly ranked was Irresponsible-Responsible with group one having a mean score of 5.02 and group two 3.77. Although there was a significant difference between both groups as to Unimportant-Important, both ranked commercial A lowest in this particular criteria statement with group one having a mean score of 4.38 and group two 3.38. Table II indicates the mean score and the significance based on the two-tail test.

These findings work to partially support the first hypothesis in this study. Although more specific tests follow, it is shown here that in each category the older subjects ranked the commercial lower than the younger subjects.

**TABLE II**  
**Bipolar 7-point Scale**  
**Ranked Response for Commercial A**

---

Group 1=age 30 and under  
Group 2=age 50 and older

	Group	N	Mean	Significance
Dislike/Like	1	86	5.36	.001
	2	69	4.39	
Bad/Good	1	86	5.44	.000
	2	69	4.29	
Tasteless/Tasteful	1	86	5.52	.000
	2	69	3.99	
Dishonest/Honest	1	86	4.98	.000
	2	69	3.65	
Unenjoyable/Enjoyable	1	86	5.51	.000
	2	69	4.26	
Irresponsible/Responsible	1	86	5.02	.000
	2	69	3.77	
Boring/Interesting	1	86	5.51	.000
	2	69	4.23	
Weak/Strong	1	86	5.31	.000
	2	69	4.00	
Indecent/Decent	1	86	5.57	.000
	2	69	4.39	
Ineffective/Effective	1	86	5.35	.000
	2	69	4.07	
Unimportant/Important	1	86	4.38	.000
	2	69	3.38	

---

The second question asked subjects to rank the believability of the advertisement. Table III indicates that there was a significant difference between both groups regarding this question with group one having a mean score of 5.27 and group two 4.32. The



indication is that, overall, group one significantly favored commercial A. This supports Hypothesis 1, which was that older U.S. citizens (50 and up) would be less accepting of digitally-manipulated images of celebrities appearing to endorse products than are college-age Americans (age 18-30). It was proposed that because younger Americans have grown up with computers and digital manipulation, they might be more accepting of these "tricks" of advertising than Americans who grew up watching the legends during their lives.

TABLE III

Bipolar 7-point Scale

Ranked Believability of Commercial A

---

Group 1=age 30 and under

Group 2=age 50 and older

	Group	N	Mean	Significance
Not/Very	1	86	5.27	.003
	2	69	4.32	.003

---

The third question concerning commercial A asked subjects to rank the celebrity, in this case John Wayne, who appeared in the advertisement in question. As Table IV shows, a significant difference was found between both groups when asked to rank the celebrity as trustworthy, competent, and believable based on the seven point scale with one representing Not, and seven representing Very. Trustworthy scored the highest

difference between the two groups with group one having a mean score of 6.02 and group two 4.65.

These findings add additional support for the first hypothesis of the study which is “Subjects age 50 and over disapprove of deceased celebrities in advertising to a greater degree than subjects under the age of 30”. In each test, the older subjects ranked the commercial (and the celebrity endorser) less positively than the younger group. Hypothesis one is therefore supported.

TABLE IV  
Bipolar 7-point Scale  
Ranked Opinion of Celebrity in Commercial A

---

Group 1=age 30 and under  
Group 2=age 50 and older

	Group	N	Mean	Significance
Not/Very	1	86	6.02	.000
	2	69	4.65	
Not/Very	1	86	5.88	.000
	2	69	4.72	
Not/Very	1	86	5.27	.003
	2	69	4.32	

---

To test the second hypothesis in this study, the groups were asked to rank their opinion of the product featured in commercial A, which in this case was Coors Beer.

Table V indicates that seven-point bipolar scales were used with three opposite

statements. They were Like-Dislike, Bad-Good, and Inferior-Superior. In this case one equaled the negative, and seven the positive. In all three cases there was a significant difference between both groups based on these statements. In all cases, as with all statements made about question A, group two ranked the product significantly lower than group one. The older group was expected to react this way, therefore confirming that both the celebrity and the product were ranked lower overall in score by the older subjects. This provides support for the second hypothesis in the study, "Subjects age 50 and over have a lower evaluation of products which are endorsed by deceased celebrities than younger subjects under the age of 30".

TABLE V  
Bipolar 7-point Scale  
Ranked Opinion of Product Advertised in Commercial A

Group 1=age 30 and under  
Group 2=age 50 and older

	Group	N	Mean	Significance
Dislike/Like	1	86	4.69	.000
	2	69	3.51	
Bad/Good	1	86	4.91	.000
	2	69	3.65	
Inferior/Superior	1	86	4.69	.001
	2	69	3.72	

Commercial B depicted actress Halle Berry and a computer animated M&M character. This commercial was treated to the same questions that were asked about commercial A. In all cases of bipolar ratings with subjects making response, both groups showed a significant difference in mean scores as shown in Table VI. Group one ranked commercial B higher in all categories.

This particular commercial was incorporated into the study to assess the differences between groups regarding their reaction to live celebrity endorsements, and to serve as a comparison for the other stimulus materials. The results indicate that, also in the case of living celebrities (although this celebrity could not be correctly identified by the older group) the group of older subjects disapproved to a greater extent than the younger group.

TABLE VI  
Bipolar 7-point Scale  
Ranked Response for Commercial B

Group 1=age 30 and under  
Group 2=age 50 and older

	Group	N	Mean	Significance
Dislike/Like	1	86	5.98	.000
	2	69	4.57	
Bad/Good	1	86	5.91	.000
	2	69	4.49	
Tasteless/Tasteful	1	86	5.77	.000
	2	69	4.48	
Dishonest/Honest	1	86	5.40	.000
	2	69	4.19	
Unenjoyable/Enjoyable	1	86	5.85	.000
	2	69	4.57	
Irresponsible/Responsible	1	86	5.55	.000
	2	69	4.38	
Boring/Interesting	1	86	5.85	.000
	2	69	4.61	
Weak/Strong	1	86	5.60	.000
	2	69	4.26	
Indecent/Decent	1	86	5.65	.000
	2	69	4.49	
Ineffective/Effective	1	86	5.73	.000
	2	69	4.41	
Unimportant/Important	1	86	4.90	.000
	2	69	3.84	

Question two which asked subjects to rank the believability of the advertisement was the only question asked in which the difference in scores for both groups was found to be insignificant in difference. Table VII indicates the results for believability.

TABLE VII

Bipolar 7-point Scale

Ranked Believability of Commercial B

---

Group 1=age 30 and under

Group 2=age 50 and older

	Group	N	Mean	Significance
Not/Very	1	86	4.16	.077
	2	69	3.64	

---

When asked to rank the celebrity, in this case Halle Berry, there was a significant difference between the two groups. As can be seen in Table VII, Group one ranked the celebrity higher in the three categories; Trustworthy, Competent, and Believable.

TABLE VIII

Bipolar 7-point Scale

Ranked Opinion of Celebrity in Commercial B

Group 1=age 30 and under  
Group 2=age 50 and older

---

	Group	N	Mean	Significance
Not/Very	1	86	5.08	.000
	2	69	3.97	
Not/Very	1	86	5.23	.000
	2	69	3.74	
Not/Very	1	86	5.21	.000
	2	69	3.86	

---

When asked to rank the opinion of the product as to Dislike-Like, Bad-Good, and Inferior-Superior, group one significantly ranked the product higher in all three categories. Table IX indicates the results of the data.

TABLE IX  
Bipolar 7-point Scale  
Ranked Opinion of Product Advertised in Commercial B

Group 1=age 30 and under  
Group 2=age 50 and older

	Group	N	Mean	Significance
Dislike/Like	1	86	6.13	.000
	2	69	4.45	
Bad/Good	1	86	6.05	.000
	2	69	4.45	
Inferior/Superior	1	86	5.85	.000
	2	69	4.25	

The final page of the questionnaire asked subjects to indicate to what extent certain celebrities were representative of their era. The seven-point scale was used with one representing not, and seven representing very. Group one identified most closely with Brad Pitt. Tom Hanks followed, then came Meg Ryan. The celebrities which were found to be least representative of group one were Lucille Ball receiving the lowest overall mean score of 2.58, followed by Cary Grant with a mean score of 2.69. The celebrities that ranked slightly higher were Clint Eastwood, Goldie Hawn and John Wayne.

When asked the same question regarding celebrity representation of era, group two identified most closely with John Wayne receiving a 5.55 mean score, followed closely by Lucille Ball and Cary Grant. The lowest rating of era representation was Brad Pitt who ranked a mean score of 2.46. Meg Ryan and Goldie Hawn also received lower scoring.



This portion of the questionnaire was only provided to seek out whether or not persons of any age identify with celebrities of their particular era. The results show that for the most part celebrities were ranked higher when they were closer in age to the respondents.

TABLE X  
Bipolar 7-point Scale  
Ranked Response for Celebrity Representation of Era

Group 1=age 30 and under  
Group 2=age 50 and older  
Findings ranked by most popular to least popular celebrity

	Group	N	Mean
Brad Pitt	1	86	6.40
Tom Hanks	1	86	5.94
Meg Ryan	1	86	5.87
Clint Eastwood	1	86	3.62
Goldie Hawn	1	86	3.58
John Wayne	1	86	3.05
Cary Grant	1	86	2.69
Lucille Ball	1	86	2.58
John Wayne	2	69	5.55
Lucille Ball	2	69	5.35
Cary Grant	2	69	5.14
Clint Eastwood	2	69	4.39
Tom Hanks	2	69	4.01
Goldie Hawn	2	69	3.99
Meg Ryan	2	69	3.25
Brad Pitt	2	69	2.46

In this chapter the statistical evidence was stated in determining whether older Americans viewed deceased celebrities in advertising more negatively than younger Americans. This was the principal purpose of this research. In each test, the older group ranked the endorser less highly than the younger group, supporting the first hypothesis of the study. In addition, the second hypothesis is supported by the older group rankings of the products being advertised. Chapter V presents the interpretation of findings in this chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine if Americans ages 50 and older differ from Americans ages 18 to 30 in their perceptions of advertisements using deceased celebrity images. A twelve-minute video with recorded material from NBC, and several inserted commercials was shown to three Broadcast and Journalism classes at Oklahoma State University and to separate gatherings of individuals ages 50 and older. The younger group, which was taken from classes at OSU, were primarily advertising students in their sophomore and junior years of study. Older subjects were gathered at several different retirement communities and several senior citizen community centers located in Stillwater, Oklahoma. All volunteers were given a brief introduction, shown the video, and then given the questionnaire.

The demographic factors included in this study were age and gender. Of the 191 subjects, ranging from 19 to 98, thirty-three percent were male and sixty-seven percent were female. Subjects were college students or persons over 50, creating the variety necessary to examine differences between groups.

The test results consistently showed that older Americans reacted more negatively than younger ones to deceased celebrities images being used to endorse products. This could be due to their sense of nostalgia, which would be an indication that they didn't

want their fond memories tarnished by an attempt to sell goods. It could also be because their sense of social development (Festinger & Katz, 1953, p.249) was enhanced by movie stars such as Wayne, and they do not care for the weight of his association to be lessened by his involuntary participation in a commercial. It is unclear why older subjects responded more negatively to the use of Wayne's image, but it supports the hypothesis that they did. It is perhaps telling that the older subjects rated the Wayne commercial not only as less believable, but also as distasteful. Further theories can be drawn that this is because they have nostalgic feelings toward the star and did not appreciate the appropriation of his image without his consent. It is also possible that the older subjects had negative feelings about the product, and therefore might have ranked the commercial according to these opinions.

Other factors examined in the research were the ways in which people come to view themselves and others. To this end, self-perception theory and social comparison theory were introduced and used as backdrops to how people view themselves and, by extension others, including celebrities. This was intended to help discover how different age groups generally feel about advertisements featuring celebrities who are deceased and no longer able to give their official endorsements. Self-perception theory, for instance, emphasizes loyalty to habitual ways of thinking (Wilcox & Laird, 2000, p. 279). It states that when a person does eventually (and in most cases reluctantly) graft a new opinion on to his old ones, he will stretch his former beliefs only enough to admit the new idea (Wilcox and Laird, 2000, p. 279). Operating under self-perception theory, older Americans may not be willing to stretch their previous notions far enough to admit John

Wayne endorsing a beer posthumously. Should the older Americans have been functioning under social comparison theory, they might have considered whether or not those really were the opinions of Wayne and, deciding that they were not, been put off by the digital manipulation of his image. (Conversely, were Wayne alive when the advertisement was made, fans might have been the very ones to endorse the product wholeheartedly, under this theory.)

The literature review covers not only what has been written on deceased spokespersons in advertisements, but also some ads featuring living celebrities. This is because many of the same issues cross over (credibility, effectiveness, and so on), and one cannot be understood fully without examining the other.

Commercial B depicted actress Halle Berry with a computer-animated M&M candy character. There are several reasons why the older subjects might have ranked Commercial B lower than the younger subjects. First, the older subjects did not recognize Halle Berry as the actress in the advertisement. Second, the commercial had sexual overtones, with Berry enticing the M&M character to let her read his palm and ultimately to keep his "hand" so that she could eat him. The sexual innuendo is one possible reason that more of the older subjects disliked the commercial and the actress. Third, the younger subjects--having been more exposed throughout life to both sexually-charged advertising and commercial animation--were perhaps, by extension, less affected by the use of either in this particular commercial. The older subjects did recognize the animated character in Commercial B as an M&M, so there was no confusion on their part as to the commercials advertising intent.

Preconceived notions about celebrities stem from a lifetime of watching them appear in movies and other activities, such as awards shows or even advertisements. If the actor or actress is well liked by the viewer, then what the celebrity does and/or supports is often accepted and even supported by the viewer. Studies show, as per findings in the literature review, that celebrities receive a more favorable response in commercials than non-celebrity spokespersons. Still, when an actor endorses a product, even a fan may or may not purchase that product. The odds are decreased when he or she feels that the actor's sincerity is in question, or when the product and celebrity do not "match up"(Kamins, 1990, p. 6). Certainly, even with living celebrities there are many issues surrounding product endorsement, not the least of which is believability (i.e. Does the celebrity really like the product?). The fact that advertisers are now using deceased celebrities in advertisements--creating in those ads a highly unbelievable premise--leads viewers to a new perspective on all celebrity endorsements in television commercials. Viewers may wonder when seeing a deceased celebrity's image in a commercial if they would have endorsed the product while living, and, if they feel he or she would not have, come away with a lower opinion of both the product and the advertiser. It was hypothesized that older Americans would rate these types of commercials lower for many reasons, and they in fact did. This conclusion is limited perhaps by the number of spots. Although Coors and M&M's were used, perhaps a larger number of products depicting deceased or living celebrities would have yielded a more conclusive result. Yet another factor in determining the outcome of the results might have been that the celebrities were not doing a "straight-sell"; the celebrities were simply shown to be

engaging in different fantastical situations.

### Methodology

Subjects from college classrooms and senior citizens' organizations watched a 12-minute videotape including three commercials featuring deceased celebrities, some news, a partial sitcom and other commercials. This was to ensure an honest representation of programming. They were then asked to record their feelings on each of the portions, so that the news and sitcoms could serve as control mechanisms.

Respondents were asked to answer specific questions about two advertisements in an attempt to get a sense of their acceptance of, or dissatisfaction with, the spokespersons used in the ads. Questions regarding the identification of the celebrity in the advertisement also served as a control measure, so that the respondents would not detect the sole purpose of the research and try to conform their answers to the study's hypothesis.

A pattern of responses given by two segments of the population, 30 and under, and 50 and over, were recorded. Respondents' answers were scaled 1-7 so that their opinions toward the advertisements could be quantified. The questions conformed to the semantic differential scale of measurement in which respondents rate the numerical value most closely reflecting their opinion with the statements made in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire began by asking subjects to identify the two celebrities in the two commercials featured. Commercial A depicted deceased celebrity John Wayne in a

Coors Beer advertisement. The next commercial, commercial B, depicted actress Halle Berry talking to an animated M&M character. Two of the questions referred to an image taken from the commercial with Halle Berry: one, an image of her, the other, an image of the M&M character, taken from the same commercial.

The second page of the questionnaire asked a series of four questions concerning commercial A which depicted deceased celebrity John Wayne in a Coors Beer advertisement. Question one asked subjects to rank response to commercial A based on the criteria of seven-point bipolar scales. The bipolar adjectives were whether they liked or disliked the commercial, and whether they found it bad or good; tasteless or tasteful; dishonest or honest, unenjoyable or enjoyable; irresponsible or responsible, boring or interesting, weak or strong, indecent or decent, ineffective or effective, and unimportant or important.

The second question asked subjects to rank the believability of the advertisement. The third question concerning commercial A asked subjects to rank the celebrity, in this case John Wayne, who appeared in the advertisement in question. Lastly the groups were asked to rank their opinion of the product featured in commercial A, which in this case was Coors Beer.

Commercial B depicted actress Halle Berry and a computer animated M&M character. This commercial was treated to the same questions that were asked about commercial A.

The final page of the questionnaire asked subjects to indicate to what extent certain celebrities were representative of their era. The seven-point scale was used with



one representing “not”, and seven representing “very”. The celebrities included Goldie Hawn, John Wayne, Meg Ryan, Cary Grant, Tom Hanks, Brad Pitt, Lucille Ball and Clint Eastwood.

The independent variable in this study was the spokesperson used within the television advertisements shown. The dependent variable was the perceived acceptance of deceased celebrities as spokespersons. Differences in responses were examined according to subjects’ gender and age. The questions asked conformed to the semantic differential scale of measurement in which a statement is followed by a series of seven-point scales representing differing opinions. (Wimmer and Dominick, 1953, p. 55)

### Summary of Findings

The research found that in every adjective statement the younger group ranked the commercial more positively than the older group. Group one had a mean score of 5.52 as opposed to group two who had a mean score of 3.99 when asked to rank commercial A according to Tasteless-Tasteful. Similarly ranked was Irresponsible-Responsible with group one having a mean score of 5.02 and group two 3.77. Although there was a significant difference between both groups as to Unimportant-Important, both ranked commercial A lowest in this particular criteria statement with group one having a mean score of 4.38 and group two 3.38.

The third question concerning commercial A asked subjects to rank the celebrity, in this case John Wayne, who appeared in the advertisement in question. A significant

difference was found between both groups when asked to rank the celebrity as trustworthy, competent, and believable based on the seven-point scale with 1 representing Not, and 7 representing Very. "Trustworthy" scored the highest difference between the two groups with group one having a mean score of 6.02 and group two 4.65.

The final page of the questionnaire asked subjects to indicate to what extent certain celebrities were representative of their era. The seven-point scale was used with 1 representing not, and 7 representing very. Group one identified most closely with Brad Pitt. Tom Hanks followed, and then came Meg Ryan. The celebrities which were found to be least representative of group one were Lucille Ball, receiving the lowest overall mean score of 2.58, followed by Cary Grant with a mean score of 2.69. The celebrities ranking slightly higher were Clint Eastwood, Goldie Hawn and John Wayne.

When asked the same question regarding celebrity representation of era, group two identified most closely with John Wayne receiving a 5.55 mean score, followed closely by Lucille Ball and Cary Grant. The lowest rating of era representation was Brad Pitt who ranked a mean score of 2.46. Meg Ryan and Goldie Hawn also received lower scoring.

This portion of the questionnaire was only provided to seek out whether or not persons of any age identify with celebrities of their particular era. The results show that for the most part celebrities were ranked higher when they were closer in age to the respondents.

## Conclusions

While there could be many reasons that the findings turned out as they did, it is the belief of this researcher that three factors were in place: peoples' basic need to hold on to prior opinions rather than embrace new ones which relates to the theory of self-perception; peoples' identification with the stars of old (social comparison) in cinematic venues rather than pitching products; and a general distaste of the technology which makes deceased celebrities appear to endorse products without their consent. Additionally, the technology making deceased celebrities appear to endorse products is relatively new and many persons are still getting used to this practice of advertising (Boedeker, 1977, p. 7). All of these factors, it is estimated, combined to create the anticipated results. Of course, this study did not perform a comprehensive analysis of the reasons participants answered as they did, but the consistency of the results, combined with the supplemental research showing this type of ad to create a backlash, seem to validate its results.

## Recommendations

Since the findings showed only a difference in opinion to the commercials and celebrities, and not why subjects answered as they did, it may be of some interest to researchers to query more deeply, for instance through the use of qualitative measures such as focus groups. This particular research could delve deeper. For example where someone answered with a small number on the scale of "trustworthy", researchers might

ask why. Perhaps it is not the manipulative technology that viewers distrust as much as the uncomfortable sense that the celebrity might not have endorsed such products while alive. It may therefore increase trustworthiness in the public eye if advertisers included a disclaimer of sorts at the bottom of the screen following such a commercial, for instance, “Mr. Wayne’s image was reproduced with the permission of his estate, the John Wayne Archival Collection”. It is presumed that this act would not contain as much integrity as not using his image at all unless he were alive to endorse the product personally, but perhaps it would help viewers to know that at least his estate approved of the image being used.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

Future research may include qualitative studies, opinion polls, focus groups or otherwise, that allow for open ended commentary. This might add a more thorough insight into the questions asked concerning deceased celebrities in advertisements.

Also, a wider range of commercials might be employed for the testing of subjects in order to gather a more widely sampled opinion. More test subjects would also help to further the range of test results.

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## STUDY INTRODUCTION

Good day, my name is Dan Crutcher. I am a graduate student doing thesis research for a Masters degree in Mass Communication here at Oklahoma State University. My advisor is Dr. Tom Weir

My job title is Senior Graphic Designer at Educational Television Services. I presently work as a chief animator on programs such as the Eddie Sutton Show, and the ETS Art Department that I work for, in general, works on many television productions that I am involved with.

One of the current projects that we are involved with is commercial advertisements such as you might see with Coca-Cola or Pepsi or McDonalds et cetera. Understanding what persons like or dislike is important to know when entering this field of endeavor. With your help I will be able to complete this study and see if my hypothesis on the subject is provable.

The purpose of this study is to examine attitudes toward advertising. Advertisers will always need to know the opinions and attitudes toward ad campaigns in order to shape future advertising. One of the benefits of this research is that advertisers and computer animators could benefit from knowing how certain demographics respond to their use of digitally manipulated images. Since advertisers use consumer feedback in their marketing research, the study could be extremely beneficial to them. Computer animators

looking for work will know what kind of market to design for if they know who positively responds to such approaches.

Sampling procedures will consist of one 12-minute video with recorded material from NBC. This material was recorded during a period of regular Tuesday evening broadcasting. The video shows three groups of advertisements with the end of a local newscast and the beginning of a sitcom. The only change made to the NBC broadcast was the replacement of several advertisements with other advertisements. A questionnaire will be handed out after the video ends. This consists of questions about advertising spokespersons used in the different types of advertisements shown. In all I believe that this will take no more than thirty minutes of your time and possibly as little as twenty. I do not see any foreseeable risks or discomfort for participants taking this study.

It is important for this study to have participants that are of all ages over eighteen. I am asking college students as well as persons of middle age and the elderly to participate. Your involvement in this is completely voluntary. If for any reason you wish to not participate you are under no obligation to do so. If you find that you wish to stop taking the survey after you begin you may stop at any time. You are under no obligation to participate in any way and you may participate to what ever degree you wish. In order to protect your identity, please do not identify yourself on this questionnaire. Under no circumstances will the identification of anyone taking the survey be known to anyone including myself. Again, please do not write your name on the survey. Because it is so important that you are anonymous to this study, there cannot be a consent form for you to sign. In order to receive the required consent there is the

following statement at the top of the questionnaire. **By participating voluntarily in the completion of this survey, I am providing my consent. I understand that there will be no personal identifiers associated with my participation.** By reading this and taking the survey you are providing this research with your consent to participate.

After watching this brief video I will pass the surveys out and you may take them. Pencils will be provided. Thank you very much for your participation. If there are any questions please feel free to ask them at this time. If you prefer to speak privately I can be reached at 744-5960 in the daytime, and Dr. Weir can be reached at 744-8270, also during normal business hours. An additional contact is Sharon Bacher, IRB Executive Secretary, Oklahoma State University, 203 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078. Her work number is 744-5700.

By participating voluntarily in the completion of this survey, I am providing my consent. I understand that there will be no personal identifiers associated with my participation.

## Commercial A



**This celebrity is:**

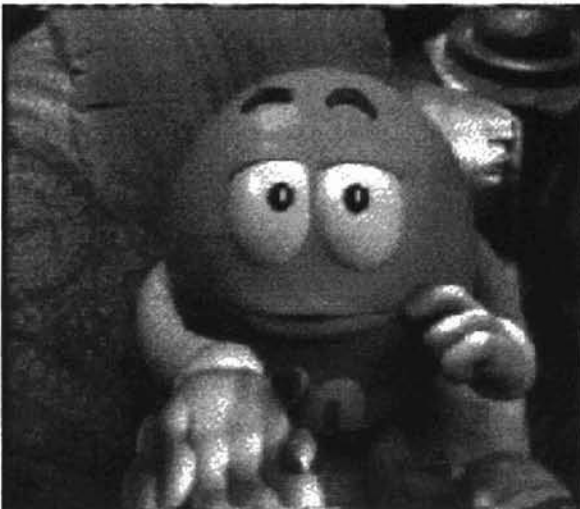
- Sean Connery
- Gary Cooper
- John Wayne
- Cary Grant
- Don't Know

## Commercial B



**This celebrity is:**

- Carrie Fisher
- Halle Berry
- Judy Garland
- Loretta Young
- Don't Know



**Which Product does this animated character represent?**

- Oreos
- Planter's Peanuts
- Skittles
- M&M's
- Don't Know



## Questionnaire

1. Please rank your response to commercial **A** along the following criteria.
- |               |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |             |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| Dislike       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Like        |
| Bad           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Good        |
| Tasteless     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Tasteful    |
| Dishonest     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Honest      |
| Unenjoyable   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Enjoyable   |
| Irresponsible | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Responsible |
| Boring        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Interesting |
| Weak          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Strong      |
| Indecent      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Decent      |
| Ineffective   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Effective   |
| Unimportant   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Important   |
2. Rank the believability of the advertisement.
- |     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |      |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
| Not | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
3. Rank the celebrity who appears in the commercial as:
- TRUSTWORTHY**
- |     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |      |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
| Not | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
- COMPETENT**
- |     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |      |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
| Not | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
- BELIEVABLE**
- |     |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |      |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
| Not | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Very |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------|
4. Rank your opinion of the product advertised
- |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |          |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------|
| Dislike  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Like     |
| Bad      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Good     |
| Inferior | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Superior |
5. Please list your age \_\_\_\_\_
6. Please list your gender \_\_\_\_Male \_\_\_\_Female

## Questionnaire

- 1. Please rank your response to commercial along the following criteria. B**
- |                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |                    |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
| <b>Dislike</b>       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Like</b>        |
| <b>Bad</b>           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Good</b>        |
| <b>Tasteless</b>     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Tasteful</b>    |
| <b>Dishonest</b>     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Honest</b>      |
| <b>Unenjoyable</b>   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Enjoyable</b>   |
| <b>Irresponsible</b> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Responsible</b> |
| <b>Boring</b>        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Interesting</b> |
| <b>Weak</b>          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Strong</b>      |
| <b>Indecent</b>      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Decent</b>      |
| <b>Ineffective</b>   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Effective</b>   |
| <b>Unimportant</b>   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Important</b>   |
- 2. Rank the believability of the advertisement.**
- |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |             |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| <b>Not</b> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Very</b> |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
- 3. Rank the celebrity who appears in the commercial as:**
- TRUSTWORTHY**
- |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |             |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| <b>Not</b> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Very</b> |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
- COMPETENT**
- |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |             |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| <b>Not</b> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Very</b> |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
- BELIEVABLE**
- |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |             |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| <b>Not</b> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Very</b> |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------|
- 4. Rank your opinion of the product advertised**
- |                 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |                 |
|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| <b>Dislike</b>  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Like</b>     |
| <b>Bad</b>      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Good</b>     |
| <b>Inferior</b> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | <b>Superior</b> |

**Please circle the number which indicates to what extent the following celebrities are representative of your era?**

**Goldie Hawn**

**Not            1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very**

**John Wayne**

**Not            1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very**

**Meg Ryan**

**Not            1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very**

**Cary Grant**

**Not            1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very**

**Tom Hanks**

**Not            1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very**

**Brad Pitt**

**Not            1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very**

**Lucille Ball**

**Not            1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very**

**Clint Eastwood**

**Not            1       2       3       4       5       6       7       Very**

VITA

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Master of Science

Thesis: DECEASED CELEBRITIES IN ADVERTISING: AN EXAMINATION OF EFFECTIVENESS ON TWO AUDIENCES

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