

Silver Linings on Darkened Endorsers: The Ironic Effect of Culpability in Celebrity Scandals

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Abstract

Many brands rush to dissociate themselves from their celebrity endorsers who get involved in a scandal because they fear that negative associations may transfer from the celebrity to the brand. This research takes a closer look at this effect and suggests that consumer attitudes towards the brand vary with the celebrity's presumed culpability and the consumer's construal level (i.e., how abstractly or concretely they think). Across three experiments, we show that when a celebrity endorser is involved in a scandal in which they are culpable (i.e., responsible for the scandal), consumers who think at a concrete, low level have more favorable evaluations of the endorsed brand than those who think at an abstract, high level. Interestingly, celebrity scandals can even increase consumers' evaluations of the endorsed brand – people who think more concretely actually evaluate the brand more favorably when the celebrity is culpable in the scandal than when not.

Keywords: *celebrity-scandals; construal-level; endorsers*

Track: Consumer Behaviour