Why Celebrity Sells:
A Dual Entertainment Path Model of Brand Endorsement

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This paper introduces a dual entertainment path model that integrates insights from media entertainment and transportation theory to show how links between entertainment motives (aspirational and playful) and experiences (celebrity fantasy and emotional investment) influence endorsed brand attitude. Results of two studies validate the salience of two paths. Fans, who hold parasocial bond with the celebrity, are driven by both aspirational and playful motives to engage in celebrity-induced entertainment experiences. Non-fans lack aspirational motive and are driven predominately by playful motive. In either situation, celebrity-induced entertainment experiences enhance endorsed brand attitude. This model complements the existing celebrity endorsement literature by positing entertainment as a salient dimension of brand endorser effects. Its findings provide new insights on how advertisers promote their brands.

Keywords: Celebrity Endorsement, Entertainment, Non-Fans, China Marketing.
Celebrity endorsement is a highly effective strategy to gain consumer interests and brand loyalty in a cluttered marketplace. Pringle (2004) has reported a high rate-of-return (27 times its costs) for this strategy. Studies use various paradigms, including source credibility (Hovland, Janis and Kelley 1953), source attractiveness (Kahle and Homer 1985; Ohanian 1990), meaning-transfer (McCracken 1986) and image congruence (Biswas, Biswas and Das 2006) to understand its effects. As in other persuasive communication research, most endorser studies follow the postulates of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty and Cacioppo 1980), where a celebrity’s attributes would receive either elaborate or heuristic processing depending on the attributes’ perceived relevance to the consumers’ decision-making (Petty and Wegener 2002).

To understand the effects of celebrity endorsement further, this paper draws insights from entertainment (Valkenburg and van der Voort 1994; Voderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld 2004; Zimmerman 2003) and transportation theories (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004; Tan 2008) that center on the motives and experiences of media entertainment. Compared with the ELM that is cognitive-based and celebrity-focused, this approach is entertainment-based and experience-focused. In a comprehensive entertainment model, Voderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld (2004) posit that aspiration and play are two salient motives underlying a consumer’s entertainment experiences. The aspirational motive represents one’s need for distinction and is characterized by celebrities in movies (via action heroes) and games (via sports stars). The playful motive represents one’s need for light-hearted distraction to enliven daily mundane. It can be satisfied by the fun and excitement communicated via television and other media to transform one’s mood. During these episodes, consumers fantasize about and invest their emotions in celebrities as they immerse in media narratives (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004). By placing themselves imaginatively and emotionally in an alternative world, consumers can better connect with
celebrities and fulfill their entertainment motives.

The entertainment approach contributes to celebrity endorsement literature in three ways. First, it delineates aspiration and play as two main types of motives consumers hold towards celebrities in the entertainment process. This complements current studies that regard celebrities as opinion experts and credible spokespersons (Kahle and Homer 1985; Ohanian 1990) in their buying decisions. The entertainment approach also extends studies that examine celebrities as idols (McCutcheon, Lange and Houran 2002; McCracken 1989) that consumers emulate. By expanding the set of motives, the entertainment approach helps broaden our knowledge on how celebrity endorsement works in diverse consumer segments, especially non-fans.

Second, the entertainment approach is experiential in nature. It centers on the encounters between the consumer and the celebrity in various media contexts such as movies, shows and games. The experiential emphasis gives this line of research the capacity to incorporate the contextual richness of media encounters essential to how consumers connect with celebrities. As studies on celebrity worship reveal, consumers form parasocial bonds with favored celebrities who shape their lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors (Doss 1999; Fraser and Brown 2002). To capture these contextually rich and individually specific interactions, the current study proposes that transportation effects such as fantasy and emotional investment are potential inputs in a consumer’s entertainment experiences.

Third, this approach builds a bridge between the literatures in media entertainment and brand endorsement. It complements studies that conceptualize the celebrity as a “promotional tool” or “valenced percept” (McGuire 1985) that helps transfer embedded affect onto an endorsed brand. The entertainment approach also allows researchers to understand the rich bond that consumers develop towards celebrities, as posited by the emerging relational paradigm in the
advertising literature (Hung, Chan and Tse 2011; Hung and Tse 2009). By incorporating the entertainment motives and contextual richness of entertainment experiences, this approach enables us to apply celebrity effects to both fans and the general public (non-fans).

In light of these objectives, this paper proposes a dual entertainment path model and validates its postulates through two studies in the China market. As a study context, China offers several appeals. Since 2010, it has been the fastest growing advertising market and celebrity endorsement is a popular strategy in this market (Hung, Tse, and Cheng 2012). Superstars such as Yao Ming and Jackie Chan are featured in Forbes.com in both its international and Chinese celebrity lists, thus highlighting consistencies across Chinese and global celebrity systems (Hung, Li, and Belk 2007; Jeffreys and Edwards 2010). Study 1, a content analysis of blogs on 20 sports and show business celebrities, unfolds the salience of two entertainment motives. Study 2, a survey of 400 consumers in China, examines two forms of entertainment motives (aspirational, playful), experiences (celebrity fantasy, emotional investment) and endorsed brand attitude held by fans and non-fans purported to “consume” celebrity entertainment differently (Figure 1). Collectively, the two studies outline a dual entertainment path model to celebrity endorsement.

As a pioneering study, the paper integrates insights from the media entertainment literature and offers a new perspective on celebrity endorsement. In so doing, it offers an alternative entertainment model that complements the ELM. Further, it delineates and empirically substantiates the dual entertainment path model across fans and non-fans.

**Approaches to Celebrity Endorsement**

*Theoretical Explanations of Celebrity Endorsement*

The advertising literature on endorser effects is richly proliferated, providing insights into the salience of endorser effects, the underlying processes, and the conditions under which
endorser effects may be strengthened. A dominant explanation in this area of research lies in source credibility (Hovland, Janis and Kelley 1953). It views celebrities as credible spokespersons or opinion experts in the brands they endorse, thereby providing consumers with a degree of confidence in the advertising message, raising its level of acceptance, and exerting a positive impact on attitude change and behavioral compliance.

Another approach to endorser effect lies in the source attractiveness explanation (McGuire 1985). It recognizes the likable, attractive, and meaning-embedded aspects of the celebrities that render them aspirational figures to many. By promoting source attractiveness, consumers may associate the endorsed brand with positive evaluations based on their positive opinions of the celebrity. McCracken (1989) posits that consumption of endorsed brands would further allow consumers to acquire the cherished attributes. Image congruence (e.g., Biswas, Biswas and Das 2006) and relational bonding (e.g., Hung, Chan and Tse 2011) provide additional support for the affect transfer explanation. Together, these strands of research show that the aspirational path has received strong research attention; yet, the motivation to “consume” celebrities via entertainment values (Ruggiero 2000) has not been fully recognized in the literature.

These endorsement explanations can also be understood using the ELM. Applied to the celebrity endorsement context, the ELM posits that when a celebrity’s selected attributes receive attention, consumers will elaborate and systematically process these attributes along the central route to persuasion. In so doing, the advertising message will result in persistent attitude change. In contrast, some consumers pay less attention to the celebrity’s attributes and engage in peripheral and heuristic-based processing. The resulting elaboration will be limited, allowing affect to be transferred from celebrity to the endorsed brand. The attitude change thus generated is less persistent and may not withstand counter arguments.
Whereas the ELM provides a cognitive, celebrity-focused perspective to explain the formation and revision of attitude towards the endorsed brand, a number of attempts have investigated processes beyond the ELM (e.g., narrative, rhetoric, transportation) that would facilitate the processing of advertising (Hung 2000; 2001; Shevy and Hung 2013).

Entertainment theory provides a rich set of insights and constructs to advance our understanding of celebrity endorsement effects by focusing on consumers and their media entertainment experiences. Table 1 outlines and contrasts the ELM and the Dual Entertainment Path Model proposed in this study. As postulated in Voderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld (2004), consumers are motivated to seek entertainment experiences. Studies have validated the salience of consumer motives in different media (Bartsch et al. 2006; Tamborini et al. 2010) and linked them to his/her enjoyment of media entertainment. Studies in transportation theory provide further insights on consumers’ entertainment experiences. In particular, these studies uncover that in video games and movies, consumers fantasize and embed themselves as (or with) key figures in the entertainment contexts. This allows them to unload their emotions and divert themselves from mundane chores. Their affective feelings towards key figures in entertainment would then be enhanced. Figure 1 displays the conceptual links between consumers’ entertainment motives and experiences.

**Dual Entertainment Path Model**

Media entertainment serves to satisfy diverse consumer needs. Ruggiero (2000) postulates that consumers use celebrities in a goal-oriented manner to fulfill diversion and identification needs. Diversion needs refer to individuals’ desire to escape from routines by embodying the celebrity as their emotional outlets (Holt and Thompson 2004). Identification refers to the need to construct or enhance one’s identities and values through the celebrity, who often carries and
acts out the norms, needs, and behaviors desired in our socio-cultural system (Rubin and Windahl 1986) as well as portray persons that individuals long to become (Markus and Nurius 1986). These needs induce the consumer to develop playful and aspirational motives to engage in celebrity-related entertainment activities.

**Playful Motive**

The playful motive to entertainment is characterized by the desire to relax (Zuckerman 2006). Light-hearted, less engaging pastime activities or “play” (Vorderer 2001, 2003) is intrinsically motivating to the consumer though it appears to be purposeless. Studies on leisure activities confirmed from 27,000 responses that listening to music, watching television and other relaxing activities require less activation energy\(^1\) (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Similarly, packaged entertainment with well-versed presentation contents and formats (e.g., Batman, Harry Potter) also requires less activation energy to enjoy (Zillmann 1988). These entertainment products satisfy consumers who seek a sensational experience with minimal investments of ambition, physical and mental exertions (Zuckerman 2006).

Extending these entertainment behaviors to the context of celebrity research suggests that consumers who adopt the playful motive would look to their relationship with the celebrity as casual and transitional. Their choice of celebrity entertainment relies heavily on availability (e.g., tuning in to prime time television). Consistent with their preference for packaged entertainment, these consumers attend to the celebrity’s easy-to-process proxies (e.g., Oscar Awards, Olympic Championships) that require less activation energy to process. Thus, consistent with the ELM, celebrity peripheral cues are salient to these consumers.

**Aspirational Motive**

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\(^1\) Please note that *activation energy* is often used in entertainment research to refer to entertainment products/experiences and consumer sensations. In conventional psychology literature, in particular *activation theory*, activation refers to the degree of arousal a person experiences.
Driven by the need for achievement and lifetime pursuit, the aspirational motive is characterized by the consumer’s aspirations as well as the successful and glamorous lifestyles portrayed in the media (e.g., watching *Dallas*, Ang 1996). Consumers who desire to be the likes of the celebrities may gratify their urge through conscious efforts to build and maintain a relationship with the celebrity.

Activities that allow a consumer to engage in a relationship with the celebrity require sizable investments of time, energy and financial resources accompanied by physical and mental exertion (Holt and Thompson 2004). As Csikszentmihalyi (1997) has noted, activation energy is instrumental to “flow”, an optimal experience of enjoyment. As individuals participate in celebrity-related activities, they become “transported” and immerse in the physical, social and emotional presences of the celebrity. This one-way parasocial bond helps consumers take on the celebrity’s perspective as their own (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004).

Voderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld (2004) postulate that a consumer’s playful and aspirational motives are key inputs into their entertainment experiences. Based on postulates from transportation theory (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004; Tan 2008), this study investigates how entertainment experiences (celebrity fantasy, emotional investment) fulfill a consumer’s playful and aspirational motives.

**Celebrity Fantasy**

Most consumers do not aspire to be the likes of a celebrity. Instead, they prefer a light-hearted, playful entertainment characterized by fun and sensational experiences via the mood management mechanism. Under these circumstances, their links to the celebrity rest in the avoidance of boredom and escape from reality through some forms of imaginative activities such as fantasizing and day dreaming (Peter and Valkenburg 2006). As consumers embody the
celebrity as their emotional outlets (Holt and Thompson 2004), it creates an illusion of intimacy with the celebrity (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004). This makes fantasizing about the celebrity a common form of mood management and a core strand along the playful entertainment path (Knobloch-Westerwick 2006).

Zillmann (1988; 2006) posits that this media-induced mood management mechanism follows the principle of operant conditioning. Consumers may encounter their first mood management incidences randomly (e.g., flip through a tabloid). Motivated by their enhanced mood state, they repeat the activity to increase the likelihood of a similar encounter. This suggests that the playful motive may lead to celebrity fantasy in one’s entertainment experience.

**Emotional Investment**

In lieu of light-hearted, casual entertainment, individuals’ motive for entertainment can be highly engaging. They attend games, shows, and movies to close the physical, mental, and spatial boundaries between themselves and the celebrity (Vorderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld 2004). Other activities reported in the celebrity worship literature include fan club participation, collection of mementos, and even celebrity stalking (Fraser and Brown 2002). Web information on celebrities is also instrumental in bridging the boundaries between celebrities and consumers given its interactivity and demassification characteristics (Ruggiero 2000). These activities require sizable investments of time, energy and financial resources accompanied by physical and mental exertion to maintain. As individuals participate in these activities, they become “transported” or “absorbed” into the social and emotional “presences” of the celebrity to form a one-way parasocial bond with the celebrity (Klimmt, Hartmann and Schramm 2006).

Research on celebrity endorsement has explored some of these effects via the meaning transfer mechanism. Some consumers impersonate their favorite celebrities, take on their
appearances, follow their lifestyles, and share their successes and failures. While the extent of partaking of the celebrity’s feelings and successes differ, the stronger the consumer regards the celebrity as his/her life goal, the more readily will the consumer deposit affection towards the celebrity, who fulfill wishes he/she cannot fulfill (Leitenberg and Henning 1995; Ryan and Deci 2000). Thus, the aspirational motive may entice consumers to invest emotionally in the celebrity.

Taken together, the literature identifies two distinct motives, including an aspirational motive with strong emotions and a light-hearted, playful motive that would induce consumers to receive entertainment from the celebrities. The aspiration motive is purported to be accompanied by physical and mental exertion whereas the light-hearted, playful motive is purported to require less activation energy. This study therefore proposes that:

H1: Consumer’s aspirational motive and playful motive for celebrity entertainment are negatively correlated.

Moderating Role of Fandom

Studies on media and celebrity worship recognize fans as those who connect with their focal celebrities in one-sided, imaginary parasocial bond (McCutcheon, Lange and Houran 2002). They follow celebrity news, discuss them with like-minded individuals, and partake in the celebrity’s joy and successes. These activities in turn weaken the mental and psychological boundaries between fans and celebrity, facilitating boundary crossing and allowing fans to take on the celebrity’s perspective (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004). This study is interested in contrasting fans and non-fans in their entertainment experiences via the dual path model.

Emotional Investment and Fandom

Since fans hold a parasocial bond with the celebrity, their emotional investment in the celebrity, which is indicative of their commitment and interdependence in the relationship (Rusbult, Martz and Agnew 1998), is likely to be higher than the emotional investment extended
by non-fans. This leads to an interesting issue: does the underlying motive differ between fans and non-fans as they invest emotionally in the celebrity?

Raney (2002, 2006) suggests that the strength of emotional investment is partly governed by one’s empathy. Since individuals participating in celebrity-related activities would become “transported” and immerse in the presence of the celebrity, the parasocial bond that characterizes fan-celebrity relationship allows these individuals to take on the celebrity’s perspective (Green, Brock and Kaufman 2004), making fans empathic and investing strong emotions in the celebrity. In addition, the need for achievement and life goal pursuit (i.e., aspirational motive) enhances one’s identification with the celebrity (Tyler and Lind 1992). Accordingly, the emotional investment by fans, who identify more strongly with the celebrity would likely be driven by their aspirational motive.

Aspiration may trigger an evaluative process involving a comparison of costs and benefits (Gilliland and Bello 2002). Emotional investment, on the other hand, may take place automatically when a consumer interacts with a celebrity (Zillmann 1988; 2003). Thus, in addition to the emotional investment driven by aspirational motive, the fans’ emotional investment may also be a result of their playful interaction with the celebrity.

Meanwhile, non-fans lack personal identification with the celebrity. Rather, their motive to engage with the celebrity is to satisfy mood management purposes through participation in entertaining activities. Lacking an association between their aspiration and the celebrity, non-fans’ aspirational motive would likely either exert null or at times negative effects on their emotional investment in the celebrity. In sum, there are different motives enhancing fans’ (playful motive, aspirational motive) and non-fans’ (playful motive) emotional investment in the celebrity. Building on this argument, the study proposes:
H2: The path (a) aspirational motive $\rightarrow$ emotional investment differs between fans and non-fans, but the path (b) playful motive $\rightarrow$ emotional investment does not.

**Fantasy and Fandom**

The idea of fantasy originates from Freudian psychology. It is a “repressed desire, a longing for full satisfaction, for merging for plentitude, for oneness, for full identify of self” (Hinerman 1992). Consistent with the stimulation hypothesis, people fantasize about themes that match their preferred media stimuli (McIlwraith and Josephson 1985). By fantasizing about the celebrity one adores, an individual may cast oneself into a celebrity role so that his/her identity is intertwined with the celebrity. Indeed, celebrity attachment correlates with transliminality and fantasy-proneness (Houran, Navik and Zerrusen 2005) so that ideation, imagery and other psychological materials may cross into or out of consciousness to bridge one’s ideal and actual selves (Thalbourne and Houran 2000). This allows an individual to resolve one’s crisis in self-identity and prepare oneself to take on different roles in real life through associative thinking.

Aside from identification-related fantasy, consumers may engage in a lighter form of fantasy that includes musing, mind wandering, and daydreaming (Valkenburg and van der Voort 1994). Among them is the “be with the celebrity” fantasy that casts an individual into a “one-way plus” relationship with the celebrity that is richer than the typical one-way parasocial bond. The play-acting allows people to escape, avoid boredom, and transcend the constraints of reality (Schallow and McIlwraith 1986). As discussed, fans and non-fans have different motives to engage with the celebrity. Non-fans are driven by playful motive while fans are driven by both aspirational and playful motives. Accordingly, the study posits:

H3: The path (a) aspirational motive $\rightarrow$ celebrity fantasy differs between fans and non-fans, but the path (b) playful motive $\rightarrow$ celebrity fantasy does not.

**Entertainment Experiences and Endorsed Brand Attitude**
The next step is to examine how entertainment experiences positively lead to endorsed brand attitude. Given fans’ and non-fans’ differential motives and experiences, the process they follow may differ. Regarding non-fans, who would likely take a light-hearted/playful approach to celebrity entertainment and fantasy, their engagement with the celebrity is less intense. According to social cognitive theory, individuals have a capacity for observational learning. In this regard, celebrities and their lifestyles constitute a part of the society’s symbolic communication system that shapes people’s social reality, including their lifestyles, tastes, and consumption (Bandura 2001). By observing a rich variety of models, non-fans expand their knowledge and skills that in turn allow them to self-organize and self-regulate their actions (Bandura 2001). Using celebrity endorsers as their models, they adapt their attitudes and behaviors towards endorsed brands via observation and emulation. This perspective is also recognized as a salient part of media acculturation (Shrum 1995). Thus among non-fans, their celebrity entertainment experiences would lead to positive endorsed brand attitude.

Fans, on the other hand, demonstrate a stronger case of transportation in their entertainment experiences. In addition to fantasizing, they engage in emotional investment by being empathic and taking on the celebrity’s perspective to loosen the psychological boundary between them. Building on the extended-ELM (Slater and Rouner 2002), research on entertainment shows that the audience’s parasocial interaction and identification with characters are central to a program’s persuasive outcome. This is because involvement with characters reduces reactance and counter-argument, thus generating persuasive effects that enhance attitude and behavioral changes (Moyer-Gusé and Nabi 2010; Moyer-Gusé, Chung and Jain 2011). In sum, the study posits that for both fans and non-fans:

H4: Consumer’s (a) emotional investment and (b) celebrity fantasy are positively associated with endorsed brand attitude.
Study 1

Methods: Study 1

The objective of study 1 is to differentiate between playful and aspirational motives in consumers’ experiences with celebrities. The findings would provide support (or no support) for H1, confirming the salience of two negatively correlated entertainment motives through which individuals connect with celebrities.

Tianya is one of the most popular internet forums for entertainment news in China. Web tracking at Alexa.com ranked it as #29 in China, #147 globally. Based on the number of visits and discussion threads on the website, the top 10 sports and top 10 show business celebrities were selected. For each of the 20 celebrities, a panel of two research assistants together selected the 4 most discussed threads. They then downloaded the 6 most updated discussion postings in each thread that go beyond a single word of support or disagreement (e.g., like). In total, they downloaded 480 postings, made up of 20 (celebrities) x 4 (threads) x 6 (postings).

A 6-item content-coding scheme was developed based on the dual entertainment path model, with “aspiration towards celebrity” and “fun expressed” capturing the two motives. Other codes include “celebrity talent” and “strong feelings” relevant to aspirational motive and “peripheral celebrity cues” (e.g., the looks, the ways the celebrities were dressed) relevant to playful motive. According to H1, the items would fall into an aspirational group and a playful group indicative of the two motives. The items were rated on 4-point scales (Definitely Yes, Slightly Yes, Slightly No, and Definitely No) as in Tse, Belk and Zhou (1988). The order of items was mixed on the coding sheet to reduce potential order bias. Two research assistants conducted trial coding, discussed any discrepancies and resolved their disagreements before conducting the actual coding. A third coder, also a trained research assistant, coded 20% of the
postings to provide a reliability check. The overlapped coding revealed less than 10% disagreement, in line with standards in similar content analysis in China (Hung and Li 2006).

Although H1 did not hypothesize about fandom, the item “fans” was included to provide an early indication of how the paths relate to fans (and non-fans). This item reflects the poster’s parasocial bond with the celebrity as expressed in these postings: “No matter you are sentimental or charming, Maggie [Cheung] – you’ll always be our goddess;” “Loving him [Nicholas Tse] is a habit. He has my support forever.”

**Study 1 Results**

The findings reveal some interesting insights. First, 13.7% of the postings expressed “fun expressed” while 20.8% expressed “aspiration towards celebrity” (slightly yes and definitely yes). Correlation among the items show that “aspiration towards celebrity” is positively correlated with “fans” ($r = .458, p<.001$), “celebrity talent” ($r = .260, p<.001$) and “strong feelings” ($r = .090, p<.01$) but negatively correlated with “fun expressed” ($r = -.072, p<.05$) and “peripheral celebrity cues” ($r = -.158, p<.001$). Conversely, “fun expressed” is positively correlated with “peripheral celebrity cues” ($r = .175, p<.001$) but negatively correlated with the remaining codes, including “fans”. This correlation pattern indicates two blocks, each having positive correlations among items within the block but negative correlations between blocks.

Taken as a whole, the findings provided support for H1, indicating two distinct, negatively correlated motives. As hypothesized, the aspirational motive is engaging with intense affective overtones (i.e., “aspiration towards celebrity”, “celebrity talents”, “strong feelings”). The item “fans” positive correlation with these items provides useful indication for further study. Among the postings along the aspirational path, the most intense instances were directed at Liu Xiang, the injured 110m hurdler at both the Beijing and London Olympics. His fans wrote poems and
songs to encourage him. One wrote, “Liu Xiang, we do not need a gold medal, we just need a healthy Liu Xiang” that characterized the intense affective tones of this path, where true fans would not desert the injured celebrity in spite of his failed performance. Meanwhile, the playful path is entertaining and less engaging (“fun”, “peripheral celebrity cues”). Bloggers discussed whom Zhao Wei should marry, whether Fan Bingbing had a facelift, and how Zhao Benshan could pay off his 17-seater private jet. The postings were gossip-based and not aspirational.

**Study 2**

**Study 2 Methods**

To test the remaining hypotheses, study 2 used a between-subject design with two celebrities and two respondent types (fans, non-fans). In sports, Yao Ming was chosen (the study was conducted before his retirement from NBA) and in show business, Andy Lau (a top Chinese singer and movie star) was chosen. They were ranked 3rd (Andy Lau) and 4th (Yao Ming) on the Forbes China celebrity list (http://www.forbes.com/2010/05/12/jackie-chan-yao-ming-celebrity-business-entertainment-china.html). Both celebrities have endorsed a wide range of foreign (e.g., Pepsi, Osim, McDonald’s, Sony Ericsson) and local brands (e.g., Tao-Ti, Aigo, China Unicom). Both celebrities have an extensive network of fan clubs across China.

The survey was conducted using the largest online national consumer panel in China (with over 200,000 respondents). This panel was developed and managed by an international branding research firm, Millward Brown, a member of the WPP group and a joint-venture with equal equity interest from France and China. To ensure a good coverage of respondents who are fans, hyper-links were placed in fan club websites to invite fans of these celebrities to participate in the on-line survey. In return, the respondents received bonus points that they could exchange for gifts through the research firm.
The study (1) pretested the questionnaire with 50 respondents using the online website and made minor changes before conducting the survey proper; (2) pretested with the same 50 respondents the extent they identified with the selected celebrities and the results showed no significant differences. In the survey proper, the survey also (3) included screening questions to ensure a probable balance between fans and non-fans (will discuss later); and (4) placed a number of questions using reverse-worded approach to check for systematic response biases to ensure the quality of the data.

The on-line survey lasted two weeks. Two sets of three screening questions (2 x 3 questions) examined the respondents’ fan type, one for AL (Andy Lau), another for YM (Yao Ming). The questions were: (1) I enjoy watching, reading, or listening to AL (YM); (2) My friends and I like to discuss what AL (YM) has done; and (3) The successes of AL (YM) are my successes also. These questions reflect the individual, social, and identification areas of celebrity worship identified by McCutcheon, Lange and Houran (2002). The questions were randomized and embedded among filler questions, and they showed good reliability: $\alpha_{AL}=.825$, $\alpha_{YM}=.812$. Respondents who scored $\geq 4$ (on 6-point scales; 1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree) on all three questions relating to either celebrity were categorized as fans of that celebrity. Respondents who scored $< 4$ on these questions were categorized as non-fans. This screening mechanism was built into the research firm’s computer program to allow for a balance of cell size. When a cell reaches the desired sample size, data collection would stop for that cell but remains open for others. Meanwhile, two data cleaning procedures were built into the computer program to rule out careless responding, a potential issue in internet survey. Respondents (1) whose responses revealed inconsistency in predesigned items that were reverse-worded, and (2) whose responses were the same throughout the survey (e.g. all “3”s) were deleted. Meade and Craig (2012)
recommend deleting these respondents, especially in anonymous internet surveys to ensure the quality of the data. A final sample of 400 respondents including 200 in the Andy Lau sample (100 fans, 100 non-fans) and 200 in the Yao Ming sample (100 fans, 100 non-fans) were obtained.

The respondents came from different city tiers: about a third came from tier 1 (most developed economically) cities. Their age ranged from 16 to over 45. Consistent with netizens in China, the majority were between 21 and 30. Their family income ranged from below RMB2000 to over RMB20000. About a third fell in the RMB4001 to RMB8000 range.

**Measures, Construct Reliability and Validity**

The measures of motives were adapted from similar measures in Vorderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld (2004) and Yeung and McInerney (2005). Factor analysis (with varimax rotation) confirmed two factors: “playful motive” ($\alpha=.782$, AVE = .600) and “aspirational motive” ($\alpha=.857$, AVE =.673). A shorter version of the investment size scale (Rusbult, Martz and Agnew 1998) was employed to measure emotional investment ($\alpha=.881$, AVE =.712). The fantasy scale was taken from the attachment strength scale in Thomson (2006) and adapted to a fantasy situation by beginning each item with “sometimes I fantasize to be with Andy Lau (Yao Ming) ($\alpha=.933$, AVE =.824). The endorsed brand attitude ($\alpha=.885$, AVE =.720) was adapted from a similar scale in Hung, Chan and Tse (2011). All measures were assessed using six-point scales (1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree). Details are provided in the Appendix.

Measurement validity was assessed using a two-step approach. First, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess whether there is a dominant factor underlying all the items in the study. As the first factor did not account for a majority of the variance, the findings suggest that in accordance to Harman’s one-factor method, common method variance is not be salient in
this study. Second, the convergent validity of the focal constructs was assessed using
confirmatory factor analysis. The findings show that the model provides satisfactory fit ($\chi^2 = 270.813$ (80 d.f.), $p < .001$, comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.952, incremental fit index [IFI] = 0.952, goodness-of-fit index [GFI] = 0.914, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = 0.077). All factor loadings are highly significant ($p < .001$). The composite reliabilities [CR] for all constructs are higher than .75 and all the average variance extracted estimates [AVE] are at .60 or above. Thus, the measures demonstrate adequate reliability and convergent validity. Finally, the shared variances between all possible pairs of constructs were assessed and the highest variances extracted [HVE] were compared against the AVE for each construct. In each case, the AVE is higher, indicating discriminant validity. In sum, the constructs possess adequate measurement properties.

**Study 2 Results – Moderation Effects**

Before examining each hypothesis, the overall fit of the causal model was assessed using the structural equation approach. The respondents’ socio-demographic variables act as control variables in the analysis. The causal model fits the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2_{(106)} = 375.969$, $p < .001$; CFI = 0.932, IFI = 0.933, RMSEA = 0.080). All but two of the causal paths show significant effects. In addition to full sample analysis, split sample analysis was performed for each celebrity. The results were similar in terms of significance of path coefficients and the data for the two celebrities were pooled in subsequent analyses. Meanwhile, to contrast the results between fans and non-fans (for H2a and H3a), two-group structural models were set up to test for differences based on fandom.

According to H2a,b and H3a,b, aspirational motive differs in terms of the effects (emotional investment, celebrity fantasy) it exerts on fans and non-fans but playful motive does
not. Simply put, results of the path estimates Aspirational Motive $\rightarrow$ Emotional Investment (AM$\rightarrow$EI) (H2a) and (b) Aspirational Motive $\rightarrow$ Celebrity Fantasy (AM$\rightarrow$CF) (H3b) are central to testing the moderation effects of fandom. Accordingly, the models were estimated to facilitate pairwise comparisons between constrained and unconstrained models (unconstrained versus AM$\rightarrow$EI constrained, unconstrained versus AM$\rightarrow$CF constrained).

The model fit statistics and estimates for the two focal paths are reported in Table 2. The three models show acceptable fit (CFI=.918, .916, and .918, respectively; RMSEA=.058). Regarding AM$\rightarrow$EI, the chi-square difference between constrained and unconstrained models is significant ($\Delta \chi^2 = 7.5, df = 1, p < .01$), indicating that constraining the focal path produces worse fit. The non-significant path in the combined sample ($\beta= -.001, p > .90$) suggests that the two constructs are not related in this sample, thus making a stronger case of differences between the constrained and unconstrained models. Regarding AM$\rightarrow$CF, the chi-square difference is not significant ($\Delta \chi^2 = 1.5, df = 1, p > .10$), indicating no significant differences between the constrained and unconstrained models. The path estimate for the combined sample is marginally significant ($\beta = .130, p < .10$), suggesting some association between the two constructs.

These findings provide strong support for the unconstrained AM$\rightarrow$EI model, suggesting that fandom moderates the relationship between Aspirational Motive and Emotional Investment. Yet, the findings do not provide support for the unconstrained AM$\rightarrow$CF model, suggesting that fandom does not moderate the relationship between Aspirational Motive and Celebrity Fantasy. The lack of significant moderation effect of the latter may be a result of the weak effect of Aspirational Motive on Celebrity Fantasy among fans ($\beta = .099, p < .10$) (see Table 3 for path estimates), rendering Celebrity Fantasy a more play-motivated than aspiration-motivated entertainment experience with the celebrity.
Study 2 Results – Path Estimates

Table 3 reports the path estimates for the unconstrained model. Estimates for the path AM→EI is positive significant for fans (β=.161, p<.05) but negative significant for non-fans (β=-.159, p<.05). This together with the moderation effect discussed earlier points to a clear moderation effect based on fandom, providing support for H2a. Meanwhile, estimates for the path Playful Motive → Emotional Investment is positive significant for both fans (β=.186, p<.05) and non-fans (β=.521, p<.01), providing support for H2b.

Regarding H3a, the estimates for the path AM→CF are positive significant for fans (β=.099, p<.10) and non-significant for non-fans (β=-.038, p>.30), providing marginal and full support in the respective split sample analysis. The less than conclusive findings together with the moderation analysis discussed earlier do not provide support for a moderation effect of fandom. H3a is therefore not supported. Meanwhile, estimates for the paths Playful Motive → Celebrity Fantasy is positive significant for both fans (β=.423, p<.001) and non-fans (β=.532, p<.001), providing support for H3b.

H4 hypothesizes that consumer’s (a) emotional investment and (b) celebrity fantasy are positively associated with endorsed brand attitude. This hypothesis is confirmed by significant path coefficients for emotional investment (β=0.346, p<.001) and celebrity fantasy (β=0.459, p<.001) that support H4a and H4b, respectively.2 The results reinforce the strong effects of entertainment experiences reported in the extant literature. Taken together, the results confirm the core tenet of the study, that is, the applicability of the dual entertainment path model in understanding endorser effects.

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2 Post-hoc analysis shows that the squared multiple correlation of Endorsed Brand Attitude is 0.531, indicating that entertainment experiences explain more than half of the variances related to the construct. Meanwhile, split sample analysis shows a marked difference in the same statistics among fans (0.252) and non-fans (0.590), suggesting that entertainment experiences are especially applicable to non-fans (i.e., the general public).
Discussion

This paper contributes to the celebrity endorsement literature in a number of ways. First, it establishes that entertainment, a neglected construct, is relevant and applicable to understanding how individuals “consume” celebrities via entertainment experiences. Entertainment experiences induced by parasocial bonding in turn are potential precursors for celebrity endorsement effects. Building on media entertainment and transportation theory, this paper delineates and empirically tests a model with two entertainment motives (aspirational, playful), experiences (emotional investment, celebrity fantasy), and their effects on endorsed brand attitude. The findings support the model and its postulates.

The delineation of an aspirational motive complements studies in the celebrity endorsement paradigm that regard celebrities as opinion experts, credible spokespersons, and idols that consumers may emulate. Consumers are driven by excitement elicitation directed at the celebrity, an idealized target they aspire to and identify with. Whereas this path is somewhat similar to the meaning-transfer approach, the constructs proposed in this study comprise unique entertainment experiences such as “emotional investment” and “celebrity fantasy” induced by bonding with the celebrity that are examined for the first time in the celebrity endorsement context.

The delineation of a playful motive enriches our understanding of how celebrity endorsement works. The playful path is driven by mood management needs as consumers seek entertainment to escape the boredom in daily chores. As results of this study show, the playful motive applies to all consumers (both fans and non-fans) and is therefore arguably more relevant to celebrity endorsement effects than the aspirational motive that applies to celebrity fans primarily. The effects of the playful motive on non-fans may also help draw attention to this consumer segment that has received limited research attention to date in spite of its larger
segment size than the fans segment in most, if not all, cases.

In the past, celebrity endorsement is purported to be either a cognitive process based on argument strength among highly involved consumers or an automatic transfer mechanism among less involved consumers. This study shows that entertainment experiences induce positive brand endorsement effects that can be induced by observation and modeling (social cognitive theory) or reduced reactance and counter-argument (transportation theory). This in turn establishes the salience of entertainment experiences to complement the cognitive approach purported in the majority of celebrity endorsement studies.

Over the last two decades, cross-fertilization between advertising research and media entertainment studies is rare and unsystematic, hindering knowledge transfer. By confirming the salience of entertainment in brand endorsement effects, this paper may help open up research opportunities across the two strands. One needs to recognize that entertainment is a core perspective across different research and academic domains, including leisure activities (sports, music and movie), media consumption (print, TV, and the internet) and consumer experiences (dinner, amusement park and travel). Indeed, Raghunathan and Corfman (2006) uncovered the centrality of “shared” hedonic experiences. Meanwhile, Lord and Putrevu (2009) examined the informational and transformational motives to celebrity endorsement while Zillmann and his colleagues indicated that the motivational aspects of entertainment were linked to a rich literature on mood management and affective disposition. Cross-fertilization among these lines of work may enrich future research in this area.

**Managerial Implications and Conclusion**

The dual entertainment path model also provides some managerial insights. The first insight relates to marketing to non-fans. Whereas theoretical frameworks such as meaning
transfer, image congruence, and match-up hypothesis have elaborated on the aspirational path, existing approaches for persuading non-fans (e.g., affect transfer) remain simplistic and limited. By confirming non-fans’ playful motive and interests in celebrity fantasy, brand managers can nurture, enhance, and communicate these aspects of celebrity entertainment to the average consumer (non-fans). This provides support for ads that are humorous and fun. It also explains why these ads are favorably viraled in social media.

The second insight directs at celebrity and talent agencies. Attitude, once formed, tends to be stable and less vulnerable to changes. With that said, consumers may lose interest in a celebrity who does not appear frequently in mass media to engage emotionally with consumers. Media appearances also provide opportunities for different consumer groups to enjoy and fantasize about. Indeed, brand research consultants such as Millward Brown have begun to track the entertainment values of top celebrities. The dual path model helps capture the complex dynamics of celebrity-consumer bond and point to directions that could strengthen these bonds.

A number of limitations in this study need to be recognized. As a new research endeavor, the underlying entertainment mechanisms (e.g., the nature of play, mood management, boundary-loosening between consumer and celebrity) need more research. Future research could also delineate further the different levels of engagement for various consumer groups. Exploration of these issues and replication of this study in different cultures may help develop a more comprehensive theoretical base for understanding brand endorsement effects, a central piece of a brand’s advertising strategy.
# Appendix 1

## Study 2 Measurement Items and Validity Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement Items</th>
<th>SFL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Light-hearted/playful Motive:</strong> CR = .782, AVE = .600, HVE=0.555</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  Learning the life story of Andy Lau/Yaoming is a lot of fun</td>
<td>0.673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  I feel that Andy Lau/Yaoming is easy-going</td>
<td>0.705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  I find Andy Lau/Yaoming to be personally attractive</td>
<td>0.830</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Aspirational Motive:** CR = .857, AVE = .673, HVE=0.104 |      |
| 1  I need a life goal                                    | 0.622 |
| 2  I need a role model                                  | 0.939 |
| 3  I need a career model                                | 0.870 |

| **Fantasy:** CR = 0.933, AVE = 0.824, HVE=0.445         |      |
| 1  Sometimes I fantasize to be with Andy/Yaoming. In the fantasy, I am very happy | 0.878 |
| 2  Sometimes I fantasize to be with Andy/Yaoming. In the fantasy, I can do the things I really like | 0.948 |
| 3  Sometimes I fantasize to be with Andy/Yaoming. In the fantasy, I can do whatever I want to | 0.895 |

| **Emotional Investment:** CR = .881, AVE = .712, HVE=0.401 |      |
| 1  I have put a great deal into our relationship that I would lose if I stop being a fan | 0.813 |
| 2  I miss Andy Lau/Yaoming when Andy/Yaoming is not around | 0.908 |
| 3  If Andy Lau/Yaoming were permanently gone from my life, I’d be upset | 0.807 |

| **Endorsed Brand Attitude:** CR = .857, AVE = .669, HVE=0.555 |      |
| 1  I am confident in the brands endorsed by Andy Lau/Yaoming | 0.875 |
| 2  I think the brands endorsed by Andy Lau/Yaoming have taste. | 0.862 |
| 3  I am willing to buy the brands endorsed by Andy Lau/Yaoming. | 0.706 |

Chi-square= 270.813(80 df); CFI=0.952; IFI=0.952; GFI=0.914; RMSEA=0.077
Table 1
ELM and Dual Entertainment Path Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ELM Model</th>
<th>Dual Entertainment Path Model</th>
<th>Contrast &amp; Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Orientation, Focal Construct, Target &amp; Goal</td>
<td>• Orientation: Celebrity as transmitters of source credibility &amp; source attractiveness</td>
<td>Celebrity is created by the media for public consumption</td>
<td>Stress the origin of celebrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focal Construct: Attitude</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Attitude vs. Entertainment focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Target: Celebrity</td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>Celebrity vs. Consumer-focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Goal: To form or revise attitude based on “source valence”</td>
<td>To be entertained by the celebrity</td>
<td>To understand celebrity as object for consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Formation Mechanisms</td>
<td>• High Involving: Central celeb cues are elaborated upon. Peripheral cues may also be used.</td>
<td>Consumer aspires to &amp; emulates celebrity. Entertainment motive is also involved.</td>
<td>Aspiration dominates the process. Consumer elaborates upon celeb’s central cues to emulate him/her. Consumer is also entertained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Low Involving: Peripheral cues are used but receive limited elaboration</td>
<td>Consumer enjoys playful entertainment with celebrity.</td>
<td>Playfulness dominates. Peripheral cues provide fun to consumer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mediating Effects</td>
<td>• High Involving: Systematic &amp; heuristic processing of celebrity attributes</td>
<td>Strong parasocial bond with celeb: indicated by Emotional investment</td>
<td>Processes relevant to Fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Low Involving: Heuristic processing of celebrity attributes</td>
<td>Weak parasocial bond with celeb: indicated by Fantasy</td>
<td>Processes relevant to non-Fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Brand Endorsement Effects</td>
<td>• High Involving: Source credibility &amp; image congruence enhance endorsed brand attitude</td>
<td>Strong parasocial bond (&amp; identification) with celebrity</td>
<td>Strong parasocial bond overcomes counter-argument &amp; accepts persuasion attempts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Low Involving: Source attractiveness &amp; affect transfer enhance endorsed brand attitude</td>
<td>Weak parasocial bond with celebrity</td>
<td>Observational learning (“modeling”) creates emulation interests for endorsed brands</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Testing for Fandom as a Moderator on Hypothesized Paths

(a) Path estimate: Aspirational Motive → Emotional Investment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit</th>
<th>Unconstrained Group Model</th>
<th>Constrained Group Model</th>
<th>Model Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>495.5</td>
<td>503.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td>.916</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path estimate</td>
<td>.161 (fans)*</td>
<td>-.001 (combined)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.159 (non-fans)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) Path estimate: Aspirational Motive → Celebrity Fantasy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Fit</th>
<th>Unconstrained Group Model</th>
<th>Constrained Group Model</th>
<th>Model Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>495.5</td>
<td>487.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Path estimate</td>
<td>.099 (fans)†</td>
<td>.130 (combined)†</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.038 (non-fans)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; †p < .10.
### Table 3
Standardized Structural Equation Parameter Estimates (Unconstrained Model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paths</th>
<th>Standardized Estimate (Fans)</th>
<th>Standardized Estimate (Non-Fans)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Light-hearted/Playful Motive → Emotional Investment</td>
<td>.186*</td>
<td>.521***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Aspirational Motive → Emotional Investment</td>
<td>.161*</td>
<td>-.159*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Light-hearted/Playful Motive → Celebrity Fantasy</td>
<td>.423***</td>
<td>.532***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Aspirational Motive → Celebrity Fantasy</td>
<td>.099†</td>
<td>-.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Emotional Investment → Endorsed Brand Attitude</td>
<td>.291**</td>
<td>.407***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Celebrity Fantasy → Endorsed Brand Attitude</td>
<td>.309***</td>
<td>.445***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model Fit: Chi-sq = 495.5 (212 df), CFI = .918, RMSEA = .058

Notes:
- T-tests are one-tailed for hypothesized effects. ***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05; †p < .10.

The full-sample standardized estimate for Emotional Investment → Endorsed Brand Attitude is .346, p<.001 (H4a). The full-sample standardized estimate for Celebrity Fantasy → Endorsed Brand Attitude is .459, p<.001 (H4b).
Figure 1

Dual Entertainment Path Model: Entertainment Motives, Experiences & Effects

- Light-hearted, Playful Motive
- Celebrity Fantasy
- Aspirational Motive
- Emotional Investment
- Endorsed Brand Attitude
REFERENCES


