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Why reflect reality: an exploratory study on the effectiveness of traditionally attractive models and realistically attractive models in fashion and beauty advertising

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Why Reflect Reality: An Exploratory Study on the Effectiveness of Traditionally Attractive Models and Realistically Attractive Models in Fashion and Beauty Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Research on the relative effectiveness of traditionally attractive models (TAMS) and realistically attractive models (RAMS) in advertising limited and the findings inconsistent. Through a qualitative investigation of how women evaluated TAMS and RAMS in fashion and beauty adverts, we attempt to address some of these inconsistencies. Data collected from twelve focus groups of women between 14 to 65 years old in Canada, US, and UK show that factors such as viewer-source similarity, promotional copy, disposition towards models, and visual codes affect women's feelings about, and attitudes toward, the advertised brands. Brand type, however, did not influence their evaluations. Overall, we found that RAMS, and the brands with which they were paired, received more positive evaluations than TAMS. On the basis of these findings, we introduce a typology of variables likely to influence endorser effectiveness. We identify implications for marketing communication and brand management and highlight directions for future research.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ben Barry is a PhD student in management studies at Judge Business School. He previously completed an MPhil in Innovation, Strategy, and Organization at Judge and a BA in Women's Studies at the University of Toronto on a National Millennium Scholarship. Ben is the author of the Canadian bestseller *Fashioning Reality: A New Generation of Entrepreneurship* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2007) and a marketing columnist for the *Globe and Mail*.

Simon Bell is a University Senior Lecturer in marketing at Judge Business School. His PhD is from the University of Melbourne. Simon has published his research in international journals such as *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Retailing*, and *Journal of Service Research*.

INTRODUCTION

Endorsers serve a critical purpose in advertisements. They demonstrate how products function and what results they provide, in addition to acting as representatives of brands (Gauntlett 2002). Adverts, particularly for fashion and beauty products, typically use models that are physically distinct from consumers. The average female model, for instance, is a US dress size zero whereas the average US woman is a size fourteen (Wykes and Gunter 2005).

This contrast between models and consumers has fueled backlash in the mainstream press against using endorsers that represent a singular ideal of beauty. Research has more recently suggested that the predominance of young, thin, and white models in ads is having a damaging impact on the body image of women (Levine and Smolak 2002; Tiggeman 2002). The prevalence of low body image prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to call it one of the major health crisis facing Western women, faulting the ad industry for its rapid spread (Choate 2005). Women themselves have added their voices to the backlash by calling upon brands to diversity endorsers; a survey of over 3000 women from ten countries found that seventy-five percent wanted to see models of all ages and sizes in advertising (D'Agostino et al. 2004).

Some brands have begun to heed these calls for change by featuring diverse endorsers with anecdotal success. Perhaps the most well-known effort to date has been beauty brand Dove's print advertising campaigns featured models of a variety of ages and sizes. Six months after unveiling the ads, sales of the advertised product increased by 700 percent and over 200 pieces of editorial was written on the initiative in the UK (Barry 2007).

Despite Dove's success, advertisers remain skeptical about the effectiveness of diverse models and few brands have changed their practices. Some advertisers assert that Dove was success because they featured models that celebrated a healthy body image. Others suggest that the novelty of the campaign generated media attention, resulting in their

success. They contend that diverse models are a passing fad because idealized forms of beauty have always been the mainstay in advertising. Accordingly, practitioners remain unable to determine with any confidence whether Dove's success was due to the specific effectiveness of the endorsers or the hype surrounding the campaign (ibid.).

The uncertainty over endorsers is fueled by inconsistent and problematic results from existing research on the relative effectiveness of traditionally attractive models (TAMS) versus realistically attractive models (RAMS) in ads. [1] Some researchers contend that TAMS are more effective than RAMS (e.g. Richins 1991; Bower, 2001). They assert, "Advertising does not claim to picture society as it is but reality as it should be – life and lives worth emulating (Schudson 1984, 215)." Others suggest that RAMS are equally successful to TAMS, and could be more effective in particular contexts (e.g. Bower and Landreth 2001; Dittermar and Halliwell 2004). They argue, "People are more likely to be influenced by a message coming from someone with whom they feel a sense of similarity (Belch and Belch 2002, 67)."

The purpose of our paper is to help resolve inconsistencies in past research by exploring how women evaluate TAMS and RAMS in adverts for attractiveness-related products, and how their evaluations influence their feelings toward the advertised brand. Our objective is explored within five sections. We first examine existing research to discover what factors have been found to influence endorser effectiveness. Guided by this literature, we develop our research questions and preliminary conceptual model. Next, we detail our methodology and present of our findings. We conclude by examining implications and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two available studies that specially compare the relative effectiveness of TAMS

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[1] Previous research has used the terms "highly attractive models" (HAMS) and "normally attractive models" (RAMS) to refer to the two types of endorsers (Bower 2001; Bower and Lrandreth 2001; Dittermar and Halliwell 2004). I contend that such terms are problematic because they suggest that beauty can be classified according to hierarchical categories and normative standards.

and RAMS in advertising for attractiveness-relevant products. TAMS are defined as young, thin, and white fashion models whereas RAMS are defined as models who reflect the average size, age, and skin colour traits of consumers. The most recent, by Dittermar and Halliwell (2004), found that TAMS and RAMS are equally effective at increasing purchase intentions for deodorant. The former, by Bower and Landreth (2001), concluded that TAMS are more effective at increasing purchase intentions for "enhancing products," and are at least as effective for 'problem-solving' ones. While these studies make important contributions to our understanding of the use of models in advertising, there are a range of contextual factors that remain unaccounted for. We need to be cautious, therefore, in the implications we draw from the results of these studies. In the following sections we underscore three important strands of literature that we believe will provide a more detailed understanding of endorser effectiveness in advertising.

The Role of Product Type

One strand of research, called the "match-up hypothesis," examines how the convergence between the product type and the attractiveness of the endorser influences the effectiveness of the advert. The match-up hypothesis asserts that attractive endorsers are more effective for attractiveness-related products, such as jewelry, than for attractiveness-unrelated products, such as a vacuum, because viewers convert endorsers' appearance into arguments for product efficacy. Viewers are therefore more likely to perceive a fit between attractive endorsers and attractiveness-related products because they will perceive that the attractive endorser's image is a result of using the product (Kahle and Homer 1985).

Findings from match-up studies are mixed for both attractiveness-related and unrelated products (e.g. Ashmore et. al. 1992; Caballero and Solomon 1984; Joseph 1982; Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990). For instance, some studies found that attractive endorsers increased purchase intentions for attractiveness related products (e.g. Ashmore et. al. 1992) while others concluded that physical attractiveness was insignificant (e.g. Caballero et. al. 1989). Bower and Landreth (2001) aimed to clarify the inconsistency in

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match-up research on attractiveness-related products by classifying them into two groups: "problem-solving" and "enhancing" products. The former "serves to fix or hide beauty liabilities" whereas the latter "may enhance beauty through their application (Bower and Landreth 2001, 2)." As previously stated, TAMS were more effective at increasing purchase intentions for enhancing products and at least as effective for problem-solving ones.

While Bower and Landreth's (2001) results support the use of RAMS in beauty advertising, their research suffers from an important limitation. Their division of attractiveness-related products was not dependent on the function of product that motivated purchase, but on the benefits promoted in the advertising copy. Mascara, for example, is a problem-solving product when it is promoted to thicken thin eyelashes whereas it is an enhancing when it is promoted to embellish the user's eyes. In their study, however, the purchase motivation of respondents was not considered.

Match-up studies are also problematic because they tend to compare TAMS with unattractive models instead of realistically attractive ones (e.g. Kahle and Homer 1985; Kamins 1990). Bower and Landreth (2001) used realistically attractive models for comparison, but their definitions were vague; RAMS were simply classified as, "moderate weight, height, and facial beauty." (p. 2). Their lack of clarity poses difficulties for replication. Dittermar and Halliwell (2004) created RAMS by taking TAMS from fashion magazines and digitally stretching them to a dress size 14. In doing so, however, they compared real models with artificially constructed endorsers rather than authentic RAMS.

Disposition Toward Models

A second strand of research explores consumer reactions to TAMS in advertising. Within this field, some studies apply attribution theory to explore how viewers interpret endorsers. Attribution theory asserts that people infer qualities about models, and the products they endorse, based on their appearance (Mowen and Brown 1981). Research

has concluded that consumers attribute favorable characteristics to physically attractive models and negative qualities to those who are unattractive (Dion et al. 1972; Walster et al. 1966). Positive attributions lead to more favorable attitudes toward the advert, brand, and stronger purchase intentions (Petroshius and Crocker 1989; Joseph 1982).

Others have considered the nexus between physically attractive models and consumer aspirations. Wolf (1992) argues that consumers purchase beauty products to achieve the image and appearance projected by the model. Consumers seek to close seemingly insurmountable gaps between their current circumstances and those conveyed in the advertisement. The difficulty in attaining projected images is exacerbated further by the professional and technical support that is available to the models in the adverts. The regular woman does not have this support when she uses the advertised products and looks at herself in the mirror (Orbach 2005). Nonetheless, demand for the advertised product is maintained as consumers pursue these idealised images.

Within this tradition of research on model effectiveness, there are a number of studies that have explored the psychological impact of using TAMS in advertisements on consumer self-image (e.g. Park 2005; Richins 1991). This research has found that self-image is reduced as consumers compare themselves with TAMS. Exposure to the beauty ideal increases viewer concerns about body shape (Thomsen 2002) and the level of self-objectification (Harrison and Fredrickson 2004). Consumers are likely therefore to resent the images presented within advertisements and this could have unintended negative consequences for ad effectiveness. In other words, source derogation is likely to lead to a negative view of the advertised brand and decreased intentions to purchase (Bower 2001). The previous studies on TAM and RAM effectiveness, however, failed to consider sources of self-image other than size.

Viewer-Source Similarity

A third strand of research has focused on the role of viewer-source similarity in advertising effectiveness. These studies found that viewers increase their positive

responses to ads when they identify with models by perceiving shared traits (e.g. Aaker and Williams 1998; Belch and Belch; Brumbaugh and Grier 1999). Research also concluded that ads are more effective when the basis of similarity is salient (Brumbaugh and Grier 1999; Deshpande and Stayman 1994). According to social distinctiveness theory, traits are more salient when they are perceived to be deviant and/or different from the norm (e.g. Aaker et. al. 2000; Deshpande and Grier 2001). Past research on social distinctiveness has not explored the salience of beauty traits. Bower and Landreth (2001) and Dittermar and Halliwell (2004) also did not control for similarities between the sources and viewers, thereby ignoring the possible influence of salient traits. However, social distinctiveness theory suggests RAMS might be more salient than TAMS because their traits are outside of the beauty norm.
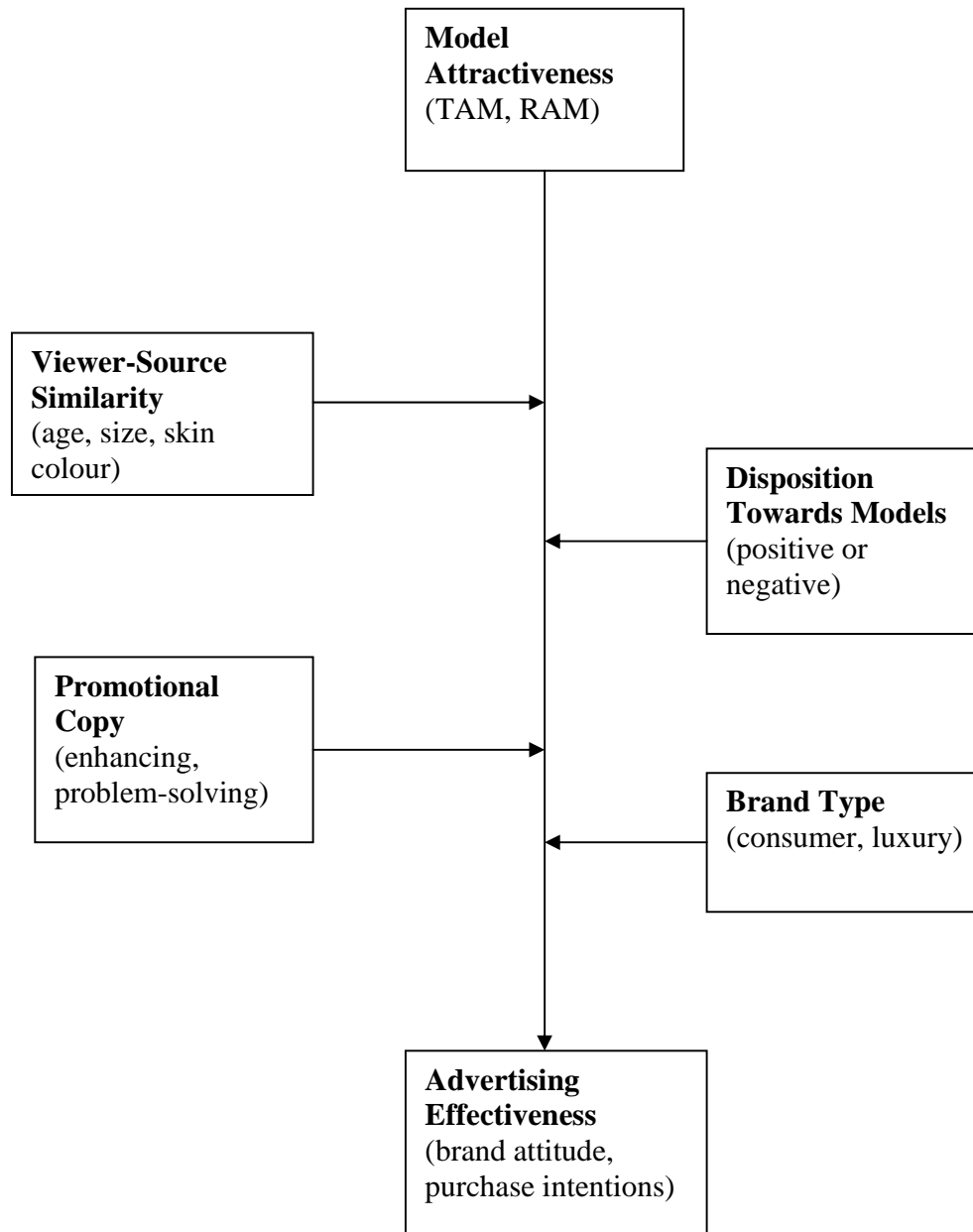
Research Questions and Preliminary Conceptual Model

The above literature review revisits the commonly accepted notion that TAMS are more effective than RAMS in advertising. We have identified a number of issues—largely overlooked in research on endorser attractiveness—that might help to explain endorser effectiveness in advertising. A primary objective of this study is to resolve some of the inconsistencies within the literature by exploring the perceptions and attitudes of women upon viewing each endorser type in ads, and how their evaluations influence their feelings towards the brand. To meet this objective, we begin by framing our study using concepts identified in the literature (see figure 1). Our research was exploratory so our framework remained open to modification and revision as we collected, analysed and interpreted the data. Nonetheless, we began by focusing on the following research questions:

1. How do women evaluate TAMS and RAMS in ads? In particular, how do viewer-source similarity, brand type and promotional message, and disposition to the models influence their evaluations? What other factors affect their evaluations?

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2. How do women's evaluations of models influence their attitudes towards the advertised brand?

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

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                              ┌─────────────────┐
                              │ Model           │
                              │ Attractiveness  │
                              │ (TAM, RAM)      │
                              └────────┬────────┘
                                       │
                                       │
  ┌─────────────────┐                  │
  │ Viewer-Source   │                  │
  │ Similarity      │─────────────────▶│
  │ (age, size, skin│                  │      ┌──────────────────┐
  │ colour)         │                  │      │ Disposition      │
  └─────────────────┘                  │      │ Towards Models   │
                                       │◀─────│ (positive or     │
                                       │      │ negative)        │
                                       │      └──────────────────┘
  ┌─────────────────┐                  │
  │ Promotional     │                  │
  │ Copy            │─────────────────▶│
  │ (enhancing,     │                  │      ┌──────────────────┐
  │ problem-solving)│                  │      │ Brand Type       │
  └─────────────────┘                  │◀─────│ (consumer, luxury)│
                                       │      └──────────────────┘
                                       │
                                       ▼
                              ┌─────────────────┐
                              │ Advertising     │
                              │ Effectiveness   │
                              │ (brand attitude,│
                              │ purchase        │
                              │ intentions)     │
                              └─────────────────┘
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METHODOLGY

Research Design

Much of the extant literature in endorser effectiveness in advertising has exclusively employed quantitative methods. While quantitative methods have a number of key advantages, they are not as well suited to discover new and unexpected insights from the data (Punch 2005). Given that so few studies on endorser attractiveness in advertising exist we felt that a qualitative research design was most appropriate to provide a broad understanding of relevant issues.

Our research involved a case study comparison of focus groups. Our qualitative approach allowed us to explore women's feelings by examining a topic from their perspective (Miles and Huberman 1994). Additionally, we were able to both confirm the importance of previously identified variables, as well as identify new variables due to the open-ended nature of focus group discussions. We selected focus groups because they provide access to the understandings that participants deem important since the moderator relinquishes a certain amount of control to group debate and dialogue (Punch 2005).

Researchers are advised to reveal their beliefs when reporting qualitative investigations (Guba and Lincoln 1994). We took a feminist empirical orientation that followed four principles: the research sought to remove power imbalances between researchers and participants; we acknowledged that researchers shape the research; we aimed to eradicate inequalities; and we valued the experiences of women (Harding 1987). A feminist orientation is suited to our study because we explored the intimate feelings of women, and therefore aimed to create an environment in which they felt comfortable to express themselves (Van Zoonen 2004).

Sampling Procedures

Most qualitative research uses purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman 1994). Our purposive sample aimed to attract women of diverse ages, sizes, skin colours, and incomes to increase the variance in evaluations of endorsers. Following a self-selected snowball method (Bryman 2004), we placed posters in student and community centres, social and fitness clubs, and grocery stores in downtown and suburban areas of London, UK, Boston, USA, and Toronto, Canada to attract a stratified sample. The posters asked women to partake in focus groups on "advertising," stated that they would be given a £20 amazon.com voucher, and asked interested parties to contact us via email or telephone.

We acknowledge the problem of external validity associated with our sample. It was limited to women who wanted to participate, and either personally saw one of the posters or was informed by someone who had seen them. As such, the ability to generalize from our findings is limited because probability techniques were not used to select a random sample. Despite this limitation, our multiple cases of diverse women minimize idiosyncrasies in the findings and improve representativeness. Moreover, we checked that each group represented a stratified sample to minimize self-selection bias (Miles and Huberman 1994). Our findings are therefore applicable to related social conditions (Firestone 1993) and have extended relevance for broader cultural meanings (Spriggle 1994).

Following Bloor et al. (2000), we conducted four groups that were composed of five women in each of the three countries segmented by the age categories of 14-19, 20-34, 35-49, and 50-65. Each group lasted 90 minutes and took place in a meeting room on a university campus. We segmented the groups by age because it is a common segmentation characteristic in marketing research (Hair et al. 2005). Participants ranged from 14 to 65 years of age and reflected a stratified sampling of age, size, skin colour, and class variables. Figure 2 lists the socio-demographic information of participants.

Figure 2: Participant Socio-Economic Information

	14-19	**20-34**	**35-49**	**50-65**
Skin Colour	Black: 6 White: 9	Black: 6 White: 9	Black: 5 White: 10	Black: 6 White: 9
Dress Size (US)	0-6: 3 7-11: 5 12-16: 6 17 and above: 1	0-6: 3 7-11: 3 12-16: 8 17 and above: 1	0-6: 2 7-11: 3 12-16: 8 17 and above: 2	0-6: 2 7-11: 3 12-16: 8 17 and above: 2
Income (US in thousands)	$25 and under: 14 $25-$50: 1 $51-$99: $100 and above:	$25 and under: 2 $25-$50: 5 $51-$99: 7 $100 and above: 1	$25 and under: 1 $25-$50: 4 $51-$99: 8 $100 and above: 2	$25 and under: 0 $25-$50: 5 $51-$99: 7 $100 and above: 3

Mock Advertisements

An important element of our research design was to expose focus group participants to mock advertisements to stimulate discussion. To create the mock adverts we first determined criteria to differentiate TAMS and RAMS. Following the two past studies on TAM and RAM effectiveness, we used size as the differentiating criterion. The Association of Model Agents (AMA) states that fashion models are a US dress size 0, and so TAMS in our study were defined as US dress size 0. We defined RAMS as a US dress size 14 because it is the size of the average US women (Wykes and Gunter 2005).

Following Bloor et. al. (2000), we enlisted an expert panel to create authentic mock adverts. We recruited five agents, each from a different agency. We instructed them to incorporate the variables identified in the literature into the ads. They selected model images from a search for "fashion models" on the largest stock photography resource, www.stockphoto.com. Additionally, we instructed them to select TAMS and RAMS in black and white skin colours because the past literature identified skin colour as a salient characteristic. These two skin colours were selected because they are the most represented across the sampled countries (Wykes and Gunter 2005).

Moreover, the AMA states that fashion models are between 16 to 24 years old (Wykes and Gunter 2005). While previous research on models did not include age, research suggests that age is an important beauty feature to women (D'Agostino et. al. 2004).

Accordingly, age was included in this study through the use of RAMS reflecting the Baby Boom generation, who are between 40 and 55 years old. The expert panel selected models with bodily positions and facial expressions that confirmed to the conventions of endorsers in ads for attractiveness-related products; all of the models were standing, staring directly at viewers, and had smiles or closed lips.

The panel designed adverts to reflect the variables of product type and purpose, selecting appropriate text, logos, and graphics to depict them. In total, they created two series of twelve individual adverts. One series featured ads depicting the product as either a consumer or luxury good and the other promoting it as enhancing or problem-solving. The separation of adverts was intended to reduce respondent fatigue. Each series featured pictures of TAMS and RAMS in the two age and skin colour combinations. Figure 3 lists the variable combinations applied in the mock adverts. Mascara was featured in the ads, selected randomly from a list of the items used by Bower (2001).

Figure 3: Variable Combinations

Series A

Model	Size	Age	Skin Colour	Message
RAM	Average	Young	White	Enhance
RAM	Average	Young	Non-White	Correct
RAM	Average	Older	White	Enhance
RAM	Average	Older	Non-White	Correct
RAM	Average	Young	Non-White	Enhance
RAM	Average	Young	White	Correct
RAM	Average	Older	Non-White	Enhance
RAM	Average	Older	White	Correct
TAM	Thin	Young	White	Enhance
TAM	Thin	Young	Non-White	Correct
TAM	Thin	Young	White	Correct
TAM	Thin	Young	Non-White	Enhance

Series B

Model	Size	Age	Skin Colour	Type
RAM	Average	Young	White	Luxury
RAM	Average	Young	Non-White	Consumer
RAM	Average	Older	White	Consumer
RAM	Average	Older	Non-White	Luxury
RAM	Average	Young	White	Consumer
RAM	Average	Young	Non-White	Luxury
RAM	Average	Older	White	Luxury
RAM	Average	Older	Non-White	Consumer
TAM	Thin	Young	White	Luxury
TAM	Thin	Young	Non-White	Consumer
TAM	Thin	Young	White	Consumer
TAM	Thin	Young	Non-White	Luxury

Data Collection and Analysis

The lead author moderated all focus groups following a semi-structured format. Participants completed a socio-demographic information form upon arrival. During the first round of questioning, I showed the participants each advert and asked them to discuss how they felt about it (the adverts were shuffled before each discussion to ensure random order). This unstructured method allowed new insights to be revealed because participants were not influenced by the questions or variables under investigation (Bloor et. al. 2000). The second round consisted of semi-structured questions that specifically explored the concepts from the literature and the second research question. I showed the participants each ad (they were shuffled again) and asked them: how did the model make them feel; did they identify with the model and how; what did they think about the copy; and what did they think about brand type. After each of question, I asked how they felt towards the brand.

While moderating the groups, I was conscious of how my social identity structured the group in order to reduce my influence and create space in which women's voices could be heard. I began groups by saying that I was in a position of learning. I acknowledged my male social identity, and explained that I did not want participants to feel inhibited

from speaking about certain feelings because of it. I also used participants' language, rather then the language discovered in the literature. I encouraged participants to question each other instead of relying on me. Being conscious of my social position was also a check on my data by limiting researcher effects (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Each group was audio-recorded and transcribed to 927 single-spaced pages. Notes were also taken during each group. We analyzed the data following the techniques of data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles and Huberman 1994). These three activities occurred concurrently throughout the analysis. We predetermined some initial codes from the literature and discovered others during analysis (Punch 2005). Our pre-specified coding framework included product type (consumer or luxury), copy (enhancing or problem solving), and viewer-source similarity (size, age, and skin colour).

Once we transcribed our data, we began to code it. We individually placed descriptive labels on data to summarize and index it. This initial coding developed 22 general categories. Together we then reviewed all the descriptions, pulling them together in smaller and meaningful themes by noting patterns, clustering themes, making contrasts and comparisons, and refining dimensions. We also created memos as we coded and categorized the data about our thoughts regarding it, such as the links between categories. Throughout the coding and memoing processes, we visually organized, compressed and assembled the information and refined these diagrams as we reduced the codes and developed links. Additionally, reading the memos helped link the categories and, in turn, draw conclusions. It is important to note that we developed conclusions from the beginning of analysis and refined them as we progressed.

We performed checks suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) to improve the validity of our analysis. We checked the meaning of outliers, followed up on surprises, and looked for negative evidence during the process of reducing our data. We also reduced researcher effects by having a graduate student trained in the qualitative research review

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the notes. We checked the accuracy of our interpretations by randomly selecting one participant from each focus group to read and respond to our written findings.

FINDINGS

Overall, participants evaluated RAMS more positively than TAMS in ads for attractiveness-relevant products, and also had more favourable brand attitudes when RAMS rather than TAMS were pictured. Our analysis uncovered that women evaluate the effectiveness of endorsers, and translate these feelings to advertised brands, according to five themes. First, women found models more effective when they shared traits with them. Second, they did not perceive the product type to influence endorser effectiveness. Third, women found that promotional copy influenced the effectiveness of models. Fourth, negative disposition towards models were stronger, the greater the gap between the model's and the respondent's physical characteristics. Somewhat unexpected was the strength of the influence that social norms and attitudes had in shaping individual respondents' affective disposition towards TAMS. The fifth theme was undetected in previous research. We found that women perceived the bodily positions and facial expressions of models to influence their effectiveness. Key differences in the findings existed between participants of different age cohorts. In the following section, we describe our overall findings and then detail each theme. We reference quotations from participants by stating in parentheses their age, skin colour, and dress size cohorts respectively.

Model Type and Brand Attitude

A general finding of our research is that respondents evaluated TAMS less favourably than RAMS, lending support to the research that suggests TAMS challenge the self-image of women (e.g., Harrison and Fredrickson 2004; Park 2005; Richins 1991; Thomsen 2002). They explained that the body shapes of TAMS appeared to be unhealthy, using the terms "too thin, "scary thin," "sickly," and "frail" to describe their size. Even the participants in the smallest size cohort remarked that they did not identify

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with TAMS because their bodies were smaller than their own. Instead, they expressed a desire to see models of a petite but healthy size. A participant (35-49, white, 0-6), who saw an older, white, TAM, remarked:

> I realize that I'm a petite, older, white woman like her but I'm healthy and toned where she's frail, almost scary thin. I'd relate to her if she also had a lean but healthy body like me.

Many participants had negative attitudes towards brands the used TAMS. They contended that these brands glamourized unhealthily thin models and were responsible for making women feel that they needed to starve themselves to be attractive. A participant (14-19, white, 0-6), who saw a young, white TAM, said: "Brands like this are making us feel like we always need to be thinner." Others suggested that these brands were "bland" and "boring" because their models were found in every fashion ad.

In contrast, the majority of respondents evaluated RAMS favourably. They explained that these endorsers were "normal," "real," and "healthy" women with whom they identified. A participant (35-49, white, 12-16), who saw an older, white RAM, remarked: "This is a model that I like because she is real. She's the type of woman we all are and always want to be." Moreover, participants explained that RAMS were empowering because they demonstrated that all were and could be attractive. A participant (20-34, black, 7-11), who saw a young, black, RAM, explained: "This woman makes me feel proud of being a real woman because she looks beautiful just being her natural shape."

Participants felt positive brand attitudes towards brands that featured RAMS. Some participants perceived these brands as "honest" and "trustworthy" because they pictured authentic images of women. A participant (35-49, white, 12-16) explained when she saw a young, white RAM: "They're trustworthy because they're showing a real woman that we look like rather than some perfected models who we'll never be." Others suggested that these brands inspired "love" because they celebrated women being confident in their natural bodies rather than trying to conform to an ideal.

Viewer-Source Similarity

As expected from the literature, viewer-source similarity tended to moderate the strength of the relationship between model type and attitude toward the ad. In other words, most women who expressed positive evaluations of RAMS (or less negative evaluations of TAMS) had stronger positive attitudes toward the brand when they shared similar ages, sizes, and skin colours with the model. By sharing these traits, they could picture how the merchandise would look on them. A participant (20-35, white, 12-16), who saw a young, white RAM, explained: "I can see myself looking just like her in that dress because we're about the same age, both white, and I think even the same dress size … everything about her looks like me."

In contrast, evaluations of RAMS had a less positive relationship with brand attitudes when participants did not share similar traits. Older and black participants particularly commented that they only "somewhat" identified with RAMS of common sizes, but of a different ages and skin tones respectively. Older women explained that age is a salient trait to share with models in fashion ads because one's age influences their style. A participant (50-65, white, 12-16), who saw a young, white NAM, said:

> She is a similar size and that's important, but I'd never wear that dress. It looks great on a young woman like her but I'm past my expiry date for something like that.

Older participants also explained that age was salient for ads showing cosmetic products because skin texture changes with age. Similarly, black participants remarked that black endorsers are more effective to demonstrate how cosmetics look on them because certain cosmetic colours are better suited for darker skin.

Some participants explained that brands using models with shared traits showed that they made products suited for women like them. A participant (50-65, black, 7-11) remarked upon seeing an older, black RAM: "If they're going to show me a model like me, then they're showing they make products for me." Other participants felt that these brands demonstrated a genuine effort to earn their business. A participant (20-34, white, 12-16), who saw a young, white RAM, said: "I like this brand because they're reaching out to me in that model by representing how I really look at my size and age."

In contrast, participants expressed less positive brand attitudes when they did not share all traits with RAMS because they felt that the brand was not specifically targeting them. They explained that they did not feel an immediate "connection" to the brand from the advert, but they would still consider its products when shopping. A participant (35-40, white, 12-16), who saw a young, white RAM, explained: "I'd check it out when shopping because she real, but I don't have a strong feel from this ad since it seems a bit young for me."

Additional evidence of the moderating role of viewer-source similarity is revealed by the fact that some participants expressed *less negative* evaluations of TAMS when the identified with specific traits. They explained that while these models were extremely thin, they "partly" or "sort of" identified with their sizes, ages, and skin colours. In particular, most older and black women, for the reasons previously detailed, expressed less negative feelings towards older and black TAMS respectively and the products that they endorsed. When a participant (20-35, black, 0-6) saw a young, black TAM, she explained: "She looks scary thin but I sort of still see myself in this girl because she's black with an Afro like me."

Furthermore, a few younger women expressed positive evaluations of TAMS because they were in the process of loosing weight and hoped to eventually have a similar body. When viewing a young, white TAM, a participant (14-19, white, 17 and above): "I don't have as good a body right now, but I'll look like her soon cause I'm dieting and running right now."

Brand Type

Participants did not initially distinguish between consumer and luxury brand types until specifically asked about them. Even upon being directly asked about the difference, they did not perceive brand type to play a role in the effectiveness of a particular endorser. Respondents across all demographics evaluated RAMS as more effective than TAMS for

both consumer and luxury brands because they demonstrated that the style was achievable to them. A participant (35-49, black, 12-16), who saw an older, black, RAM in an consumer ad explained: "It's doesn't matter whether it's high fashion or not, I want to see a real sized woman like this looking great if I'm going to see myself in what they're selling." Another participant (14-19, white), who saw a young, white, TAM, in a luxury ad stated that RAMS should be featured in ads irrespective of the price-point because women want to accurately imagine themselves in the merchandise: "No matter how much I'm spending, fashion is fashion, and I want to picture how it might look on me before even consider purchasing it."

Some women interpreted consumer brands that used RAMS as showing "respect" and "value" by featuring them in their ads. A participant (20-35, black, 7-11), who saw a young, black RAM in a consumer ad explained: "This is a brand I like because even though they know I don't have tons of cash to spend, they're still staying I'm worth looking good." They also held positive attitudes towards both brand types that featured RAMS with the same quality photography and styling as TAMS because these brands were sending a message that all women were attractive. A participant (30-49, black, 7-11), who saw an older, black, RAM in a consumer ad, remarked:

> You usually see real woman in ads for a discount store looking like they're posing for their driver's license shot but by showing this real woman looking so beautiful [this brand] is saying you can look beautiful regardless of how much money you spend.

Others liked luxury brands that featured RAMS in the same manner as TAMS because these brands define what is fashionable. Showing RAMS in an image that followed high fashion conventions showed that every woman could be part of fashion and enjoy it.

Participants held equally negative attitudes towards luxury and consumer brands featuring TAMS. They explained that showing TAMS demonstrated that brands did not value their dollars. A participant (20-34, white, 12-16), who saw a young white TAM in a consumer brand ad, explained, "I want to shop at a brand that respects that I'm spending money with them and showing some skinny girl looking great is no way of doing that."

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Older participants considered brands showing young TAMS to be disrespectful because older consumers had the income to purchase their products. A participant (50-65, white, 0-6), who was shown a young white TAM in a luxury brand, remarked: "It's a slap in the face to show this young women because she'd never have the money to shop there whereas I do."

Promotional Copy

Our division of enhancing and problem-solving products is contrary to the "match-up" literature. As we asserted in our literature review, these categories are not based upon the nature of the products, but upon how they are promoted. In our study, mascara was promoted as enhancing when the copy said that it enhanced naturally beautiful eyes whereas it was s problem solving when the copy said it corrected thin eyelashes.

Overall, participants favourably evaluated RAMS in ads with enhancing messages. They explained that the model and copy complemented each other because they both conveyed positive beauty messages about being attractive in your natural body. A participant (20-34, white, 7-11), who saw a young, white RAM, said: "This works because the model is a healthy size and the words tell women to celebrate their natural beauty features the way they are." Others noted that RAMS appear to have actually used the product because their "real" size makes them relatable to participants while still allowing the specific enhanced feature to stand out. A participant (50-65, black, 12-16), who saw an older, black, RAM, said: "She looks like she used the mascara to bring out her eyes like the ad says because they're beautiful but she's still a real size and could be any woman, like me."

Some women explained that these brands respected woman because they were representing them in an authentic way. A participant (20-35, black, 0-6), who saw an older, black, RAM in an enhancing ad said: "The brand respects women because their model and their words are saying you can look smoking no matter what size and age." Others perceived them as honest because they recognized that most women are not supermodels but could still enhance their beauty. A participant (35-49, white, 12-16)

explained when she saw a young, white RAM in an enhancing ad: "They are trustworthy because they're showing a real woman that we can look like and telling that we have it right now to look amazing like her."

Participants had mixed evaluations to TAMS in ads with enhancing messages. Some contended that TAMS were effective in ads with enhancing copy because they persuaded viewers that they too could look as beautiful as the TAMS since all women had beauty features to highlight. A participant (14-19, white, 12-16), who saw a young, white TAM in an enhancing advert, commented:

> What I like about her is that even though she is thin and perfect, the ad's not saying that we have to be thin too to be beautiful but that we all are beautiful with what we have and can bring it out like her.

Others remarked that it was hypocritical for TAMS to tell viewers that they should celebrate their natural beauty. A participant (35-49, white, 7-11), who saw a young, thin, TAM, remarked: "That girl's never had to work at trying to enhance anything about herself in her life because she has a gorgeous young body."

To some women, TAMS featured in ads with enhancing copy demonstrated that the brand communicated that all women had the potential to be as attractive as models. A participant (14-19, black, 12-17), who was a young, black TAM in an enhancing ad, said: "I'll never be thin like her but I can still be as beautiful by playing up my eyes." Others explained that the brands were deceptive because they said that women could be as attractive as models, but in reality they would never look like them. A participant (35-49, white, 17 and above), who saw a young, thin TAM, commented: "They're such liars. We all know that even if I highlight my eyes, I'll never look like her."

RAMS and TAMS were perceived to be equally ineffective in ads with problem solving copy. Some women disliked how the ads tried to persuade them to change themselves. A participant (14-19, white, 12-16), who was shown a young, black RAM in a problem-solving advert, remarked: It's saying there's another thing wrong with me that I need to fix so I can look like her." Older participants were more skeptical about ads with problem

solving copy, asserting that the products could not achieve the copy's claims because professionals rather than products fixed the beauty flaws of the models.

Many women considered these brands dishonest (irrespective of model type) because their executives knew that their products would not fix the claimed problems and produce the same result as their pictured model. A participant (20-35, white, 0-6), upon seeing a young, white TAM in a problem-solving advert, said:

> The brand is just lying to me because I'll never fix whatever problem they tell
> me I have because the model is perfect, and even if she's not she's been so
> touched up and embellished with make-up and photoshop.

They also found these brands to harm women's self-esteem by always promoting another physical flaw that needs to be fixed. Some faulted these brands for making women obsessed about appearance.

Affective Disposition towards Model

In this section, we explore participants' affective response to the models in the ads. The first sub-theme follows past research in which viewers' disposition towards models result from interpersonal comparison. The second sub-theme underscores the increasing importance of evolving social norms as a driver of individual affect towards models. This second theme was significantly stronger than we had initially anticipated.

Receiver-Source Comparison

Many of the younger participants of a variety of ages and sizes expressed a strong negative disposition when they evaluated TAMS. They explained that they compared themselves to the models, and felt badly about their bodies because they did not resemble them. Some explained that they became obsessed over their physical appearance, and undertook body-altering activities, such as dieting, to try to resemble them. A participant (14-19, white, 12-16), who was shown a young, white TAM, said: "I feel so ugly when I

look at her … I'm like so fat compared to her and no matter what I try, I'll never look as good."

Many women who experienced negative dispositions explained that they held the brands responsible for making them feel badly about the bodies by promoting one beauty ideal through their models. They felt these brands were dishonest because they featured "unachievable" models. Others considered the brands to be "offensive" and "insulting" because they claimed to have products for them yet they failed to reflect their realities.

Upon viewing RAMS, the majority of participants expressed positive emotions. Some explained that they felt empowered and attractive by seeing a "real" and "normal" sized woman in fashion adverts. A participant (20-53, black, 7-11), who saw a young, black, RAM, said: "It just makes me feel so great to see a healthy regular woman like me looking gorgeous in a fashion ad." Older participants particularly expressed positive sentiments upon seeing older RAMS because, they explained, older women are seldom pictured as attractive in the media. They explained that older women are typically represented as "frumpy grandmothers" who have forgotten about looking look. Others were excited to see attractive older models with wrinkles because, as a participant (50-65, white, above 17) explained, older models often "have the faces of twenty-year olds."

Older women were also skeptical about TAMS. They explained that the images of TAMS were constructed by experts and that no woman, TAM or not, was able in reality to look like a model. A participant (50-65, white, 0-6), who saw a young, white, TAM, said: "She's spent hours in hair and make-up, and basically been photo-shopped to perfection. It's impossible to look like that it real life, even for her." Others said that a model's job was to look perfect whereas they have "responsibilities," preventing them from giving all their time to their looks.

Social Climate

When commenting on images of TAMS, most women explained that they held prior information about the harmful impact of TAMS on women's self-image. They also said that they believed that the media was responsible for glamourizing unattainable images of women. They cited the variety of media and educational sources from which they learned about these issues. In particular, participants cited the "Next Top Model" reality television franchise for teaching them how images of TAMS are constructed by showing them the backstage transformations of regular girls to top models. They also cited the "size zero debate" for revealing the health dangers facing TAMS and the movement to ban ultra-thin models from runways. No participant claimed to be ignorant of these issues, and each commented that they had been exposed to them from at least one external source.

In contrast, many women referred to the Dove ads when shown images of RAMS. Some shared their own experiences upon first seeing these ads and the positive feelings that the ads generated. A participant (50-65, black, 7-11), who saw a young, black RAM, said: "This is like those amazing Dove ads, and I remember when I first saw them, I felt so happy and I thought, finally a company gets it." Others expressed their hope that more firms would follow suit and show regular women in ads

Participants considered brands that featured RAMS to be "respectful" of women because they were trying to undo the damage of promoting singular forms of beauty. Others explained that these brands were "leaders" because they were not afraid to go against the industry standard. A participant (20-34, white, 0-6), who saw an older, white RAM, said: "This brand is a leader because it knows what's happening in culture right now wants to be on top of it." Still other participants asserted that these brands were "good corporate citizen" because they were showing positive and empowering images of women.

In contrast, some women asserted that brands that used TAMS were "harmful" because they promoted an unhealthy image. A participant (35-40, black, 12-16), who saw a young, white TAM, said, "This brand is telling girls that they should be like this size zero stick in the ad. They're why girls starve themselves." Others perceived them to be "out of

touch" and to "lack corporate soul" because they continued to use practices that have been revealed as dangerous.

Visual Codes

A second new theme that emerged from the data was the importance of body position and facial expression of the models, which we call visual codes. These codes are an integral component of advertising design yet they have not been considered in previous research.

Some participants interpreted TAMS and RAMS that were slouched, looking away from the viewer, and had "absent" expressions as unappealing. Some perceived these visual codes as passive, suggesting that the models lacked control and power. Others interpreted these models as weak and fragile. A participant (35-49, white, 7-11), who was shown a young TAM, said: "It's not appealing to see a woman so fragile, almost breakable. She's leaned up as if she can't even hold herself up by herself." Others perceived these positions and expressions to suggest that the endorsers were unintelligent. Upon seeing a young TAM, a participant (20-34, black, 0-6) said: "She doesn't look like she has any thoughts of her own. You need some facial expression to think, right? Some indication that there's something going on."

A few women saw slouching and expressionless faces as sexual. Some negatively interpreted sexual codes, perceiving them to indicate that the model's sole purpose was to be looked upon. However, a few younger and older participants explained that these sexual positions and expressions appealed to them because they demonstrated that models celebrated their sexuality. The younger participants contended that the endorsers' obvert sexuality was their realm of power because they could exploit it to attain control in their lives. The older participants were particularly attracted to the older TAMS and RAMS that were pictured with these sexual postures and expressions. They explained that older women with sexually alluring manners remain absent in popular media. However, older women remain, as one participant (50-65, white, 12-16) explained, "women with sexual desires who want to be regarded as sexual."

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Many participants interpreted endorsers that were standing erect, making direct eye contact, and smiling as appealing. Some asserted that that these codes suggested that the models were confident and self-assured. Others explained that smiling models drew them into the ad because a smile suggested that the model was "kind," and "friendly." A participant (35-49, white, 0-6), who saw a young, black RAM, said: "Her big smile draws me in, like when you're walking down the street and someone smiles. Well, you often smile right back. It's the same thing for me with the model in the ad."

Moreover, others perceived models with positively interpreted codes to represent their ideas of beauty. To them, beauty was not the result of rigid physical attractiveness but instead of inner qualities and circumstances, such as "kindness" and "happiness." Models who were "smiling" and "glowing" represented these inner qualities and circumstances. A participant (20-34, white, 12-14), who saw a young, white RAM, further explained: "I personally like the models who smile because their beautiful insides show outside."

Participants had positive brand attitudes when endorsers were standing, making eye contact, and smiling. They explained that these brands were trustworthy because they featured women in empowering ways. Others remarked that the brands were "honest" because they represented their beauty ideas. Brands that featured smiling models were seen as "original" and "fresh" because fashion ads rarely feature women with such expressions.

Older and younger participants who interpreted sexual expressions as appealing suggested that these brands were empowering to women. Sexuality was considered to be a woman's strength and was thought to be underrepresented in advertising featuring older women. Accordingly, brands that emphasised women's sexuality showed an important aspect of femininity that needed to be celebrated. A participant (50-65, black, 7-11), who saw an older, black RAM, remarked: "This is a brand that celebrates womanhood because they're showing you're still hot after fifty, like this model."

Participants had negative brand attitudes when models were slouched, did not make eye contact, and had "absent" expressions. Some expressed resentment towards these brands for representing women in demeaning ways. Others contended that they perpetuated stereotypes that women are weak and powerless. Still others suggested that they were "boring" and "unoriginal" because it is commonplace for fashion ads to feature models in sexual and passive poses. Accordingly, as one participant (35-49, white, above 17) explained, these brands "simply fade into the visual wallpaper of all other advertising."

DISCUSSION

Implications for Theory

Our study helps to resolve the inconsistencies within existing literature on TAM and RAM effectiveness. We introduce, develop, and explore a typology of five moderating variables that influence the relative effectiveness of each endorser type. Overall, we discovered that RAMS, and the brands picturing them, received more positive evaluations than TAMS in ads for attractiveness-relevant products. Their increased effectiveness is illuminated by the influence of the five moderating variables developed in our typology and illustrated in figure 4.

The first variable found in our study to impact endorser effectiveness is viewer-source similarity. Viewers expressed more positive evaluations of endorsers with whom they shared similar age, size, and skin colour because they were able to picture how the merchandise would appear on them. In contrast, they expressed less favourable evaluations of models with whom they did not share all three traits. In particular, older and black viewers felt that sharing the same age and skin colour respectively as models was particularly important in cosmetic adverts. These findings suggest that viewer-source similarly may be a critical moderating variable for endorser effectiveness. Moreover, they suggest that certain age and ethnic cohorts may feel a stronger salience for certain shared traits and that these traits may be more potent for attractiveness-relevant products for which age and skin colour are particularly relevant.

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The second variable discovered in our study that influences endorser effectiveness is promotional copy. Viewers expressed more positive evaluations of RAMS in ads with enhancing promotional messages than they did for any other combination of endorser type and promotional message, thereby contradicting the findings of Bower and Landreth (2001). Our research suggests that ad copy may be an important moderating variable for evaluating endorser effectiveness because enhancing copy increased the effectiveness of adverts with all endorser types whereas problem-solving copy did not.

The third variable of match-up between the model and brand type was found to not influence the effectiveness of models. In other words, one particular endorser type was not more effectiveness for a consumer or luxury brand. This finding contributes to research by challenging the idea that an ideal pairing between an endorser and brand exists.

The fourth variable of affective disposition toward the model was found to influence endorser effectiveness. A few women, primarily teenagers, expressed negative self-image and negative affect when they viewed TAMS. While most viewers did not express pressure to conform to TAMS, they were critical of these images and had redefined beauty away the physical attributes of TAMS. This findings reveals that many women are not passive viewers, as has extensively been suggested (e.g. Park 2005; Richins 1991), but are savvy and self-assured viewers who are have learned to be critical of endorsers. Moreover, brands that featured RAMS received more positive responses than those employing TAMS, suggesting that a "positive affect" may exist for brands featuring RAMS and celebrating beauty according to women's understandings. Our findings underscore the importance of considering the social climate in which an ad is promoted as it plays a key role in how the endorser and, hence, the brand will be evaluated.

The fifth variable, visual codes, was previously undetected in the literature on endorsers. Our study therefore contributes this new variable as a factor influencing the relative effectiveness of TAMS and RAMS. Visual codes indicate that viewers evaluate models

based on the meanings conveyed by their body positions and facial expressions. TAMS and RAMS were more positively evaluated when they smiled, stood upright, and made eye contact with viewers rather than when they had closed mouths, slouched, and failed to make eye contact. This finding follows past research on advertising creative that asserts that emotions are communicated by models in print adverts (Brownlow and Zebrowitz 1990).

Visual codes illuminate the feminist theory of "objectification" and also demonstrate how feminist theory supports marketing research. In brief, "objectification" asserts that the bodies of female models in visual media are arranged in positions that reduce them to the status of sexual objects (Kilbourne 2000). Our research provides empirical accounts to support this theory because participants expressed how the bodily positions and facial expressions of endorsers conveyed negative meanings about women. Our study also suggests that while the visual codes of models can "objectify" women, they can empower them by conveying messages of personhood. Additionally, our research suggests that marketing theory should heed feminist theory to further understand how modern female consumers evaluate endorsers.

Our research also contributes to social distinctiveness theory (e.g. Aaker et. al. 2000; Deshpande and Grier 2001). Our finding of viewer-source similarity confirms previous social distinctiveness research that has found ethnicity to be a salient characteristic for black viewers. Our study also introduces two new traits to this theory, specifically dress size and age. This finding follows past social distinctiveness studies that suggest that viewers are attracted to traits of models that are outside the social norm.

Implications for Practice

While using TAMS may currently be a profitable strategy for attractiveness-relevant brands, our study reveals that unrealized potential may exist for brands that feature RAMS. Given the choice, the women in our study provided more positive evaluations of brands that featured endorsers who physically reflect them over endorsers who do not. To

reap the benefits from these positive evaluations, fashion and beauty marketers are advised to select models that reflect the sizes, ages, and skin colours of their target market. Our study also advises managers to picture RAMS with the same photography and fashion conventions as TAMS because consumers expressed positive evaluations when RAMS upheld fashion conventions.

We recognize that the suggestion of using models who are physically similar to consumers undermines the long held mantra of selling fashion and beauty products. Our findings, however, suggest that there has been a shift in the mindset of modern female consumer, and that most brands currently misunderstand how these consumers evaluate models. Contemporary consumers do not passively absorb the idealized images of TAMS sold to them by advertising, but instead are skeptical and savvy of the 'fantasy' that they convey. They are educated by their social environment in which, for example, a newscast condemning the negative impact of TAMS followed by backstage access to their photo shoot is part of a regular evening of television. With this information, consumers are no longer content with being driven by the aspiration of achieving what is, ultimately, the unachievable style of TAMS. Our study suggests that fashion and beauty brands urgently need to catch-up to the ideas and desires of their consumers.
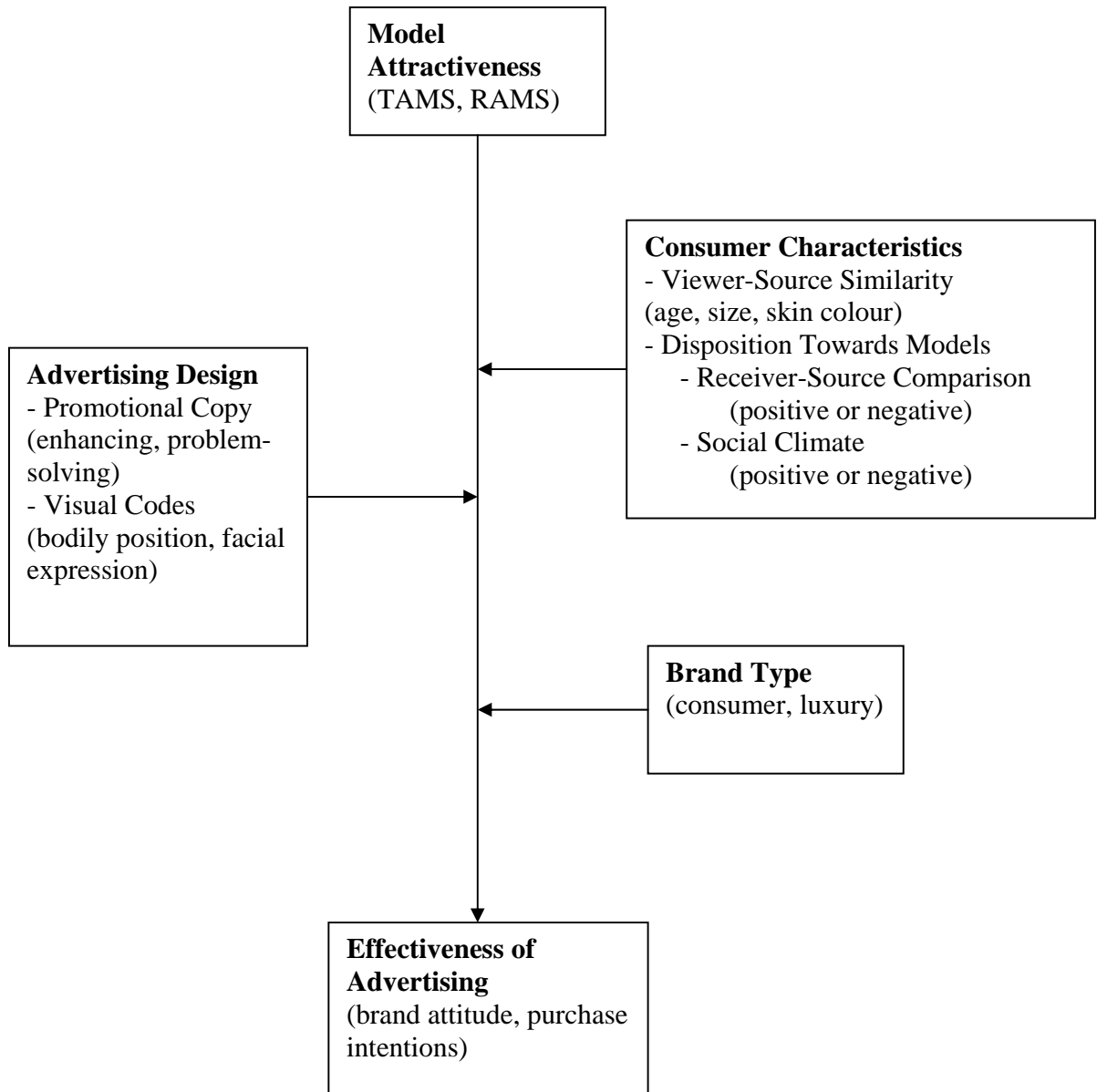
Moreover, our findings suggest that attractiveness-relevant brands may currently be causing themselves harm by featuring TAMS who meet the current criteria for fashion models as stipulated by the Association of Model Agents. Viewers hold negative evaluations of TAMS because they regard them as unhealthily thin. Even petite and young women, who desire to see their thin frames and youth reflected by models, contend that the current TAMS are unhealthy and hold negative attitudes towards brands featuring them.

Findings from our study also provide guidance on how marketers should promote and position fashion and beauty products in advertising. Our study suggests that marketers should create promotional copy that details how items can enhance and celebrate women's natural beauty in order to generate positive brand attitudes. Explaining how

they can fix beauty flaws, by contrast, ignites negative feeling from women. Marketers are further advised to develop campaign themes that promote understandings of beauty that resonate with women. This focus should promote women as beautiful as a result of their inner qualities and circumstances, rather than solely due to their physical assets.

Moreover, our research suggests that executives of attractiveness-relevant brands should envision and articulate their corporate missions and strategies to celebrate and empower women. Executives, for instance, could reformulate mission statements, corporate donations, and advertising campaigns to focus on achievable and realistic notions of beauty. By focusing on these positive aspects of womanhood, brands might be more likely to resonate with consumers and hence cultivate more favourable brand attitudes. Our research also suggests there is also an opening for fashion brands to target mature consumers because this cohort wants to be physically attractive but feels ignored in the market. Brands, for instance, could start sub-brands aimed at mature customers and launch them with adverts featuring mature models looking attractive.

Figure 4: Revised Conceptual Framework

Model Attractiveness (TAMS, RAMS)		

Advertising Design
- Promotional Copy (enhancing, problem-solving)
- Visual Codes (bodily position, facial expression)

Consumer Characteristics
- Viewer-Source Similarity (age, size, skin colour)
- Disposition Towards Models
    - Receiver-Source Comparison (positive or negative)
    - Social Climate (positive or negative)

Brand Type (consumer, luxury)

Effectiveness of Advertising (brand attitude, purchase intentions)

Limitations & Implications for Future Research

While focus groups are useful for illuminating and uncovering attitudes by providing a group context in which participants contribute to, and reflect upon, group discussion, they are also limited inasmuch as a social desirability bias might influence individual responses. To avoid this bias future researchers might conduct qualitative one-on-one depth interviews (Bloor et al. 2002). However, it is important to note that focus groups were necessary in this first exploratory stage of research to generate the broadest range of responses on the use of TAMS and RAMS in advertising.

Additionally, given that our study employed an exploratory qualitative approach, the findings are only suggestive and require confirmation. We recommend that researchers conduct a quantitative study with a random, representative sample of women to confirm our results and establish their generalisability. The study should quantify the impact of the moderating variables revealed in our study on the relationship between model type and advertising effectiveness. This research could be conducted as part of a multi-method study in conjunction with the depth interviews recommended above.

The sample of our study was limited to Western women in developed economies. It would be useful to extend this research include women from non-Western countries and emerging economies. Research on a non-Western sample is particularly relevant given the rise of globalization. Within this new economic context, Western-owned beauty and fashion brands are rapidly venturing into emerging economies and using the same adverts and endorsers used in the West (Grewal and Kaplan 2002). Scholars and advertisers need to establish whether TAMS will be embraced or rejected within these new contexts.

Three other aspects of our study would benefit from more detailed investigation. First, as stated in the findings, participants tended not to distinguish between consumer and luxury brands until specifically asked about them. The ads used in our study represented the differences through logos, fonts, and brand names, however clearly these stimuli were not strong enough for the difference to be detected. Future research using mock adverts

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should use stronger stimuli to emphasise the difference between product types. For example, real-world retailers (e.g., boutiques and discount chains) could be used to emphasise the relative positioning of the brands used in the study.

Second, scholars investigating model effectiveness should control for respondent perceptions of the social climate (as it pertains to the use of traditionally attractive models in advertising). While we did not control for this variable, we found that participants' previous dispositions toward women in advertising and other media influenced their evaluations of TAMS and RAMS. Future researchers exploring these two endorser types should explore whether this pre-disposition influences how they evaluate endorsers and their respective brands.

Third, while our mock ads promoted mascara, many participants also commented on the clothing of the models because the adverts featured full-length images. Should the mock adverts have featured headshots, our finding may have been different because participants would have been unable to see the body shape of each model. Future researchers should explore the impact of using headshots versus full-length images of models when exploring their effectiveness. They should also explore the impact of different fashion and cosmetic products on endorser effectiveness, ranging from clothing items to shoes to lipsticks.

These limitations notwithstanding, we contend that our research has provided a more general understanding of the role and relevance of traditionally attractive versus realistically attractive models in advertising, as well as some of the contingency variables that moderate their effectiveness. While further work remains to be done in this area, we believe that we have provided a conceptual platform from which academics and managers can further improve their understanding of when it makes sense to reflect reality.

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