Human Created Spokespersons and Negative Publicity
A Theoretical Exploration

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Human Created Spokespersons (HCS) has in recent years become increasingly common in advertising campaigns. These characters, such as ICA-Stig, are visible on a daily basis in media and are well known faces for consumers. While HCS’s used to be visible only in advertisements, they are now figures of public interest and subjects of publicity. In this thesis we conduct an experimental study on the effect negative publicity aimed towards a HCS has on the brand it represents. The results show that brand attitude is significantly negatively affected with the introduction of negative publicity, and furthermore, that the effect to a large extent can be explained by a decrease of trustworthiness towards the HCS. This study adds a theoretical dimension to the area of HCS’s in advertisements and shows that companies of today need to consider a wider set of aspects in the choice of HCS. Even though spokespersons add many positive aspects to a campaign, negative publicity towards them can hurt the brand they endorse.

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Created spokespersons have been used for a long time in the advertisements of companies’ brand building efforts. Since General Foods introduced the first documented created spokesperson in 1921, the tremendously popular Betty Cooker, the theoretical concept of created spokespersons has since then covered many different characters, both human and animated. Among Swedish companies human created spokespersons has in recent years become increasingly popular. They are visible on a daily basis in nationwide media and are well known faces for consumers. On the Swedish market we find - among several others - “the Telia-Dad”, “ÖB-Carl” and “ComHem Judith and Judith”. The most familiar created spokesperson however is probably “ICA-Stig”, who has been featured in well over 300 episodes of ICA’s successful TV-commercial soap opera since it was first aired in 2001.

In recent times we find indications that the full picture of human created spokespersons is not complete. Previous research (Tom, 2011; Till & Shimp, 1998; Louie & Obermiller, 2002; Hunter, 2008) shows that using created spokespersons when applying endorsement strategies in brand building efforts is “safe”. This is in comparison to the closely related concept of celebrity endorsement, where the issue of negative publicity is highly present. But cannot spokespersons generate publicity?

In early December 2007 it was revealed that Sweden’s largest food retailer, ICA, had been remarking old minced meat with new date marks to be able to sell it. The television program that revealed the scandal interviewed the person behind the created spokesperson of ICA, Hans “ICA-Stig” Mosesson. He was referred to as “the symbol and front figure for ICA”. When being asked on his reaction to the event, he expressed his
concern and stated that he “hoped this is a tragic exception to the norm that ICA is a retailer to be trusted” (Mossesson, 2007). As this example shows, the created spokesperson has transformed into a public person whom is human and tangible, and as proven by the interview, a subject of publicity.

Based on the new created spokesperson, being real, tangible and public, we argue that even though spokespersons are, by theory, considered safer than celebrity endorsers, they as well can be subjects to negative publicity. The created spokesperson today is well recognized among consumers and is a part of the brand they endorse, but they are also a person of public interest when being off stage, or, in private. Therefore, we are intrigued whether created spokespersons, such as ICA-Stig, can be a potential risk to the brand they represent if negative publicity is aimed towards them.

This study aims to contribute with an additional dimension to the field of created spokespersons used in advertisement. Previous research (Tom, 2011; Till & Shimp, 1998; Louie & Obermiller, 2002; Hunter, 2008) has mainly focused on created spokespersons and the benefits of using such. But there is a lack of insight in how they can affect a brand negatively, for example in the case of negative publicity aimed towards the spokesperson. Therefore, we aim to address what implications negative publicity towards a created spokesperson has on both the created spokesperson and brand.

**Spokespersons & Celebrities**

Previous authors have a broad scope of what to include within the concept of created spokesperson, and therefore we find it necessary to clarify our view. While previous definitions have included characters such as celebrities, customers and employees (Stafford et al, 2002; Tom, 2011), we define a human created spokesperson (HCS) to be: *a character, embodied by a real person, created for the sole purpose of promoting a product or brand*. Furthermore the HCS should provide a direct association to a brand in the eyes of the consumer.

The overall literature on endorsement and negative publicity mainly come from the area of celebrity endorsement. Therefore, we find it necessary to define the term and provide a quick overview of the advantages of using this form of endorsement.

A celebrity endorser is defined by McCracken (1987) as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement”. Celebrities can make advertisements more believable and build a congruent image between the brand and the consumer (Till & Shimp, 1998). Celebrity endorsement can also give increased recognition and create a more positive attitude towards a brand (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995; Kamins & Brand, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983).

As celebrity endorsers and created spokespersons are related concepts, sometimes we refer to them collectively. In these cases the term endorser is used.

**Theoretical Discussion**

**Negative Publicity**

When we as people are to evaluate a target or object, negative information will have greater impact than positive (Fiske, 1980). The reason for this has been theorized to be the greater usefulness negative information has to consumers. For instance when consumers categorize companies or products, negative information is a direct cue to evaluate them as negative or of low quality. Positive information however, is released about both good and average companies and is therefore not as helpful to consumers. (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000)

On a brand and company level the research on negative information and publicity is of great interest, not least since the media is inclined to report bad news rather than good news (Dennis & merril, 1996). Publicity, in contrast to information produced by a company, is also considered a credible source of information (Kirshenbaum &
As negative information is believed to attract great attention (Fiske, 1980), together with that consumers will construct their evaluations based on the information, leads negative publicity to be a serious issue for companies. While the company itself, or their actions, can be the source of such negative information, there are also many cases when their endorsers are to blame (Till & Shimp, 1998; Louie & Obermiller, 2002; Hunter, 2008).

The research on negative publicity of endorsers has mainly focused on celebrities (Mizerski, 1982; Stafford et al, 2002; Till & Shimp, 1998; Tom et al, 1992; Louie & Obermiller, 2002). The research proves that negative publicity aimed at a celebrity whom is connected to a company will in the eyes of the consumer directly affect the company negatively. This is confirmed by Louie and Obermiller (2002), who state that negative events, where the endorser is clearly to blame, can hurt a company’s image both in the short and long run.

The reason negative associations “transfers” from endorser to brand is most commonly theorized to be through the two being associated to one another. However, it has also been suggested that brand attitude will decrease as a result of the endorser becoming a less efficient communicator after negative information has been published. Finally, cognitive dissonance theory explains how a person might shift attitude towards a brand, as consumers might find it discomforting liking a brand that a disliked person is associated with (Smith, Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, & Loftus, 2003). Each of these three aspects is discussed in the following section.

**The Link**

The transfer of negative information from a celebrity to a brand has a prerequisite: negative information will only transfer when the associative link between celebrity endorser and brand is strong (Till & Shimp, 1998). This linkage is based on two factors. The first is inspired from Pavlovian theory and classic conditioning where a link between two entities becomes stronger the more often they occur together (e.g. clouds and rain). The second is the number of associations consumers hold towards both the brand and the celebrity endorser separately (ibid). Accordingly, the number of different associations, images or thoughts held towards a celebrity will influence the linkage between the brand and the celebrity (ibid). For example a celebrity to whom individuals hold many beforehand constructed associations are less likely to be connected to a brand than a celebrity with a smaller beforehand constructed association set. For instance, using a famous actor such as Brad Pitt as an endorser, who has portrayed multiple characters and whose face can be seen weekly in gossip magazines, will not mean that consumers will think of the brand he endorses when they see him.

So, according to Till and Shimp (1998), given that the conditioning between the celebrity endorser and the brand is strong, and that the number of beforehand constructed associations to the celebrity is limited, then, subsequent negative information about the endorser will be transferred to the brand to a larger extent than if the number of beforehand constructed associations to the celebrity endorser are many. In essence, consumers will feel less positive towards a brand if the brand and endorser, in terms of associations, are hard to distinguish.

Later studies, however, have shown that the reaction chain might not be quite as straight lined as Till and Shimp (1998) suggests. For instance, Louie and Obermiller (2002) showed how both the degree of negativity of the published event and whether or not the endorser was to blame affected the outcome of negative publicity. That is to say that “negative” is relative, and the more negative the event is, the worse will the effect be. Also, a person can be involved in negative publicity without being to blame, and in such events the effect on both endorser and brand will be smaller (ibid).

For this thesis, negative events will be classified as those where an endorser is clearly to blame and where the event is of such magnitude that the general public views it negatively.
Dissonance & Consistency

Including what we today know of the relation between consumers and brands to the discussion of negative publicity, the issue of how negative publicity actually will affect a brand becomes even more complex. Fournier (1998) showed in her study how consumers relate to brands in a similar pattern to how they relate to people in their general surrounding, and a strong relationship is known to affect how information is processed. With a strong relationship it is likely that a consumer will show resistance towards counter attitudinal information, with a consequential reaction of either distorting the information (Davidsson & Hunter, 2009) or by not processing it (Ahluwalia et al, 2000). A similar reaction is also likely in terms of the endorser, where the attitude a consumer holds towards the endorser will partly determine the reaction to negative information (Louie & Obermiller, 2002). These effects are closely related to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Smith, Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, & Loftus, 2003). Being one of the most studied phenomena in psychology it essentially describes how “people have a drive toward(s) cognitive consistency, meaning that two cognitions, or thoughts, that are inconsistent will produce discomfort, which will in turn motivate the person to remove the inconsistency and bring the cognitions to harmony” (Smith , Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, & Loftus, 2003, s. 626). The discomfort can take many forms, for example when behavior and attitude don’t align, or when current beliefs and attitudes are challenged by new information. In these situations dissonance theory (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999) shows how people will change attitudes, actions and/or beliefs in order to release the pressure. In relation to negative publicity the theories of cognitive dissonance provides an understanding not only when negative information will influence brand attitude but also why. The following section, discussing balance theory (Hummon & Doreian, 2003), shows how.

Early Dissonance

The earliest theory of cognitive dissonance is balance theory (Heider, 1956). The theory explains how people seek balance in their relations to other people and objects, and that on a cognitive level, people will seek to restore unbalanced situations and make them balanced (Cartwright & Harary, 1956). The theory is best explained through a model consisting of a Person = P, Another Person = O and an Attitude Object = X, where all relations is viewed from P’s perspective. As seen in Figure 1, a person will be in balance when it has the same attitudes towards an object as a liked person, or has a separate attitude than a disliked person. Consequently, unbalanced situations are those when a person has the same attitude towards an object as a disliked person or separate attitude than a liked person. (Hummon & Doreian, 2003)

The usage of balance theory in this thesis has the following structure; P represents the consumer, O the spokesperson, and X the brand. To exemplify; if the relation or attitude the spokesperson has to the brand is positive, then the consumer can hold either positive attitudes to both spokesperson and brand, or negative attitudes to both, otherwise the cognitions would be in unbalance. When negative information about the spokesperson is introduced, the consumer with only negative attitudes will not be affected, while the consumer with both positive attitudes will end up in a situation of unbalance with positive attitudes towards the brand and negative attitudes towards the spokesperson. To return to a state of balance, the consumer then only has the option to change attitude towards the brand. This theory, in contrast to what has been discussed with associations, explains that the consumer is forced, on the basis of balanced cognitions, to change the attitude towards the brand, rather than associating the negative publicity about the endorser, to the brand.

So, as consistency and dissonance theory explains, unless the attitude towards the brand is positive, the negative publicity towards the HCS should lead to a
increase in the attitude towards the brand. Based on this the following hypothesis was developed.

**H1: Negative publicity towards a HCS will lead to negative attitudes towards the brand.**

**Communication Effectiveness**

Combining the discussion by Till and Shimp (1998) of linkage between endorser and brand being attributed to conditioning, with the number of associations and the importance of relationships discussed in balance theory, it becomes apparent that how consumers feel and interpret the relationship between spokesperson and brand also has importance for the outcome of negative publicity. In communication effectiveness the fit between endorser and brand is crucial, where an ill-fitted character will fail to communicate in a successful manner (Byrne, Whitehead, & Breen, 2003). The link between endorser and brand has to be accepted, and this acceptance is a function of the endorser’s ability to communicate successfully (Ohanian, 1990).

In simple terms communication effectiveness is the power of an endorser to effectively communicate a message to their audience (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Coming from two stems of research, source credibility and source attractiveness, communication effectiveness is measured along three dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness. In their research of source credibility Hovland, Kelly and Irving (1953) explain trustworthiness as the consumer’s confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the claims he or she finds most correct. Expertise on the other hand is explained as the level to which consumers perceive the communicator as a person holding valid claims. Source attractiveness is a compiled measure consisting of the communicator’s likeability, similarity and familiarity to the consumer (McGuire, 1985). Likeability is the liking a consumer feels for the communicator based on physical appearance and behavior, whereas similarity is the similarity or resemblance between consumer and communicator. Finally, familiarity is the level to which the consumers feel he or she knows the communicator based on exposure (McGuire, 1985).

The communicative power of an endorser also has to do with how consumers use endorsers to build identity constructions. In the measurement scale of source credibility developed by Ohanian (1990) trustworthiness for example is measured by such attributes as reliability, honesty and sincerity. The attributes become effective not only because the endorser possess them, but also because the consumer identifies with, or want to possess them (Davidsson & Hunter, 2009).

A communicator with high level of both credibility and attractiveness will have greater impact on the consumer in terms of both the ability to change attitude and to increase purchase intention. While
all three measures of communication effectiveness will impact brand attitude, trustworthiness specifically has been shown to have a direct effect on brand attitude, while expertise and attractiveness affects indirectly (Hunter, 2008; Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 1998; Ohanian, 1990). However, while source credibility is well empirically supported, source attractiveness has somewhat mixed results. Still, trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness is regarded the most important measures in evaluating the effectiveness of a communicator (McGuire, 1985). The link between communication effectiveness and negative publicity is also important. When negative information is presented about an endorser, their source credibility is lowered, thus making them less effective communicators of a brand (Klebba & Unger, 1983).

The prior findings of Klebba & Unger (1983) and of Yoon, Kim, & Kim (1998) together provide a foundation to explain both why and how change in attitude in the case of negative publicity can occur. Therefore, we develop the following hypotheses:

H2: Negative publicity about a HCS will decrease its communication effectiveness.

H3: A decrease in the HCS’s communication effectiveness will lead to a consequential decrease in brand attitude.

Influence on Brand Attitude

The measurement scale of brand attitude, developed by MacKenzie, Belch and Lutz (1986), belongs to research of how attitudes towards an ad mediates attitude towards a brand, which in turn affects purchase intention. Similarly, the theories on communication effectiveness, as discussed earlier, measures the effectiveness of a communicator in terms of communicating a brand and how it affects both brand attitude, ad attitude and purchase intention. In this research, trying to understand what effect negative publicity towards a HCS has on a brand, it is necessary to include measurements not only of the brand, but also on the perception of their advertisement. However, purchase intention, only being a dependent variable to brand attitude, is not included.

Attitude towards the ad (Aad) works as a mediator of the advertisements effect on brand attitude and purchase intention (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986). And a favorable attitude toward the advertisement is known to transfer to the brand and influence choice and behavior (Till & Shimp, 1998). Even though the research is old in this context, it still makes up for current standards on the topic. Lutz (1985) established a definition of Aad as “a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion” (Solomon, 1992, s. 135). Insight in the attitude that consumers hold towards the ad is essential when determining how the consumers’ look upon the relationship between a brand and its HCS. This is due to that the attitude towards the ad will directly affect the attitude towards the brand (Homer, 1990). This is further determined by Gardner (1985) who demonstrated that Aad acts as a mediator of brand attitudes for brand evaluation. These results imply that we can expect a direct link between Aad and Attitude towards brand to emerge consistently (Homer, 1990). Thus, in accordance with prior findings in the link between brand attitude and ad attitude we expect that a decrease in Aad will lead to a decrease in Abr.

H4: Decrease in Aad will lead to a consequential decrease in Abr.

Methodological Overview

For this study a causal design with a laboratory experiment is chosen, using a between group design. One group is exposed to a staged negative event through reading a fictive article, while one group answers the same survey without the staged negative event. The differences in the results between the two groups represents a theoretically generalizable answer to how negative publicity aimed towards a spokesperson affects a brand.
Laboratory Experiment

Given the nature of experiments, the general opinion is that its major strength lie in establishing internal validity, however, this sometimes comes on the expense of external validity (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The tradeoff between internal and external validity is often necessary, as in this case where control over all factors influencing respondents is a major issue. Thus internal validity has to be prioritized.

In this study we apply a between group design (Levin, 1999), also known as ‘simulated before and after design’ (Tull & Hawkins, 1993). In between group design, two different groups are controlled; one being treated to neutral information and the other treated with the variable of interest, in this case, negative publicity.

Using between group designs is beneficial when controlling for several types of errors often associated with experimental designs (Tull & Hawkins, 1993). These include premeasurement error, interaction error and reactive error (Burns & Bush, 1999). A special note should be made in regards of reactive error as the laboratory situation is known to bring out the “problem solver” in people where respondents try to find out the nature of the experiment (Tull & Hawkins, 1993). For example, if the same group is investigated twice, first through a general survey, and then through the same survey with added negative publicity, the true intent of the experiment could easily be understood. In these situations, respondents are known for complying with the best interest of the researcher and not respond in the way they normally would, but rather in the way they think they should (Tull & Hawkins, 1993). Even though this type of error is also possible in between group designs, the possibility is lessened. However, using a between group design also means losing control over subject variables (Levin, 1999), meaning that even though the two sample groups are statistically the same, the researcher cannot ensure that the two groups are holding the same average attitudes. This issue is met through randomization and at the cost of increasing the number of participant respondents (Levin, 1999). Through randomization the differences between groups is eradicated and systematic differences become unsystematic (Cook & Campbell, 1979). For the sake of this study, randomization is critical, as respondents are believed to hold varying attitude towards the HCS we use.

Theoretical Generalizability

As this study explores the possibility of negative publicity towards a HCS affecting a brand, our key concern is not statistical generalizability, but theoretical generalizability. Therefore we argue along the lines of Mook (1983) who states that in the cases of theoretical generalizability the main concern is not whether something typically does happen as in statistical generalizability, but whether something can happen. With this in mind the respondent groups chosen for experiment was optimized for the conditions to establish theoretical generalizability. These conditions include the use of homogeneous rather than heterogeneous groups (Levin, 1999). Though this goes against standard statistical thought, if one is trying to establish if something can happen, the key concern is to optimize the testing conditions where one can see causality. And as heterogeneous groups will make the error variance higher, a homogeneous group is considered a better choice (Levin, 1999). This means that instead of making this study on a random sample, a convenience sample is actually preferred. In our case a convenience sample of undergraduate university students was used with sample size set to meet the standards of the central limit theorem using the statistical rule of thumb of above 30 respondents per group (Sounderpandian & Aczel, 2006).

Manipulation

For the experiment two sources, a homepage and an article, providing the same negative publicity, was chosen to increase the likelihood that respondents found the publicity trustworthy. The
fictive negative publicity was based on the conditions presented by (Louie & Obermiller, 2002) where the spokesperson is clearly to blame and the publicity concerns a topic to which the general public would consider negative. The HCS was chosen to fit the conditions of Till and Shimp (1998) with strong conditioning between HCS and brand, and few other associations to the HCS than that of the brand. In this thesis the HCS chosen is ICA-Stig as he, according to us, represents the strongest HCS on the Swedish market today. Furthermore, the negative publicity aimed towards him (Appendix 2) was chosen to be racist statements.

The main variables in the questionnaire was “attitude towards the brand” and “attitude towards the ad” developed by MacKenzie, Belch and Lutz (1986) and the three variables of source credibility; trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise, developed by Ohanian (1990). All variables were measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale.

In the experiments conducted we used Robson’s (2002) four threats to reliability as guidelines, including participant error, subject or participant bias, observer error and observer bias. To reduce the threat of participant error, the experiment was conducted in a neutral time in a laboratory setting, where all respondents were under observation by the researchers. To minimize participant bias, the respondents were encouraged not to interact with others during the test and follow the instructions received at hand. Lastly, due to the nature of the test, the respondents were asked to complete each page before preceding the test in order to avoid subject bias.

### Results & Discussion

#### Control & Overview

The initial test for normal distribution indicated that our data, specifically concerning some of our standardized variables was not normally distributed. As our sample is considered to be between small and medium (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010), not fulfilling the demand for normal distribution would seriously affect further analysis. However, after factor analysis and creating summated scales of our five variables the distribution was normal. Still, as initial results could become a topic of discussion, all tests were double-checked with non-parametric techniques, specifically the Man–Whitney U-test complementing the standard T-test (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Gender, Male/Female</th>
<th>Age (mean)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8/35</td>
<td>22,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6/35</td>
<td>23,5</td>
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**Table 1. Respondents**

The total number of respondents was 92, group 1 containing 47 respondents and group 2 containing 45. With both verbal reminders and reminders in the introductory material for each survey each question was answered by each respondent, thus the data had no missing variables and showed no systematic non-response. However a total of 8 respondents, 4 from each group, had to be removed due to holding other associations to the spokesperson than ICA-Stig being a spokesperson as it would have endangered the validity of the study. Such associations included personal relation, the rock band National Teatern and the soap opera “Andra Avenyn”. Also, in the group treated with negative publicity the respondents did not understand the nature of the experiment and thus effects of potential reactive error did not have to be taken into consideration.

In each group the distribution between men and women was highly unequal, with a majority of female respondents. However, each group almost had the exact same percentage of females vs males. Also our main concern is that each group is homogenous and alike, rather than being representation of the outside world, therefore this distribution does not present a problem. Also the age distribution in each groups was as planned very similar with a mean difference of 1 year.
between the two groups. With each of the five variables created after factor analysis, comparisons were made between the two groups. Given the nature of our experiment, any significant statistical difference in the results between the two groups is attributed to the introduction of negative publicity. In this case all means of the compiled measures was affected negatively. Table 2 shows the extracted means for each measure before and after negative publicity. The difference between the groups is significant in all cases with the smallest change in mean values found in source attractiveness, alsoICA-Stig scores well below in this measure compared to the other measures of communication effectiveness.

### Result Hypothesis 1

With the introduction of negative publicity aimed towards the HCS ICA-Stig, a consequential significant negative effect on the brand attitude towards ICA was detected \((t (69.6) = 6.97, p=0.00)\). Though Levene’s test for equality of variance turned out to be significant, the difference in mean values between the groups still turned out to be significant under non-assumed equal variance. Also, the difference in mean scores between the groups can be considered high with an effect size \(d\) of 1.53, well above Cohen’s (1998) recommendation of medium effect size at 0.06 and large at above 0.14. 

\[ H1: \text{Negative publicity towards HCS will lead to negative attitudes towards the brand. Failure to Reject} \]

### Discussion Hypothesis 1

From a theoretical perspective, we find indications that a HCS show many resemblances with a celebrity endorser. HCS today are well known personas with a high level of awareness and recognition among consumers. The theories of celebrity endorsement states that negative publicity aimed towards a celebrity endorser negatively affects attitude towards the brand. As the results show, this theory seems to be congruent with that of the HCS; when the HCS becomes a subject of negative publicity it has significant negative effects on attitude towards the brand.
Trying to make sense out of this finding, the result can be argued to be somewhat contradictive seen from the perspective of cognitive dissonance. In the case of a strong and positive relationship between consumer and brand (or consumer and consumer for that matter), the consumer is likely to show resistance to attitude change and instead distort the negative publicity. In such a way the consumer would have protected their attitude. Such a result would not have been unexpected as the respondents also turned out to be frequent shoppers at ICA, and to change an attitude which goes against behavior often produces discomfort. Still the attitude towards ICA changed.

When discussing this finding we find it important to account for whether the amount of change could have been even more extensive. As the results show, the Abr could still be argued as relatively high after negative publicity was introduced. We argue that the negative effects on Abr could have been even more extensive if the Abr would not have been as positive to start with. A less popular brand would probably have been affected more negatively. Also, in the test it was stated that ICA did not fire ICA-Stig when the scandal was revealed. Celebrity endorsement theory however states that the effect on the brand will be more extensive if the celebrity is not fired (Hunter, 2008). This might also be an underlying factor of the amount of effect and impact on change in Abr, meaning that if ICA instead had fired ICA-Stig, the impact would have been less significant.

**Result Hypothesis 2 & 3**

In regards to the three compiled measures of communication effectiveness: source attractiveness, source expertise and source trustworthiness, each was explored through independent sample t-tests. Each measure was found to have a significant negative change with the introduction of negative publicity with source trustworthiness (t (82) = 4,855, p = 0,00) having the largest change in mean value M.D = 1.18, while source attractiveness (t (82) = 2,994, p = 0,004) had M.D = 0,92 and source expertise (t (82) = 4,498, p = 0,00) had M.D = 0,95. Interestingly, the change on attractiveness led this measure to become the only being on the negative side of 3,5 of the 7-point scale. All in all, as with each measure communication effectiveness has
decreased with the introduction of negative publicity.

**H2: Negative publicity about a HCS will decrease its communication effectiveness. Failure to Reject**

So, as communication effectiveness and brand attitude has decreased, in hypothesis 3 we investigate if the one has any predictive power on the other. With the use of multiple regressions we evaluate whether the change in source attractiveness has any predictive power to the change in attitude towards brand. As shown in table 3 (p.10), the three measures of communication effectiveness can explain about 26% of the change in brand attitude, which is a significant effect. However, as seen by the standardized Beta, source expertise and source attractiveness does not add significantly to the model, though source attractiveness is close to significant. This, in combination with the prior knowledge that ICA-Stig has his main strength in trustworthiness, makes for an interesting finding as his main strength also has the most negative impact on brand attitude.

**H3: A decrease in the HCS’s communication effectiveness will lead to a consequential decrease in brand attitude. Failure to reject.**

**Discussion Hypothesis 2 & 3**

In regard to the perceived communication effectiveness of ICA-Stig we note high scores both on source trustworthiness and expertise with a considerably lower score on attractiveness. These results indicate, based on the prior findings of Yoon, Kim, and Kim (1998), that ICA-Stig has a high level of impact on the ICA brand. Given these scores, specifically regarding trustworthiness, it is therefore logic that the ICA brand suffers for a decrease in brand attitude when negative publicity is introduced. As it seems, the strong trustworthiness of ICA-Stig is linked to ICA, and when his trustworthiness is lessend, so is ICA’s. And as trustworthiness is a major part of a brand, the decrease effects brand attitude.

The results also add insight to the overall relationship triad between ICA, ICA-Stig and the consumer. From initial findings we know that the relationships in all cases are positive. In figure 2 we see how the relationships have changed after negative publicity has been introduced.

Applying balance theory to this situation, the change in attitude towards ICA is a reaction to the unbalanced situation created of holding a negative attitude towards ICA-Stig, while holding a positive attitude towards ICA.

![Figure 2. Change in Balance triads](image)

As the relationship between ICA and ICA-Stig is positive, the only reactions accessable to the consumer was to either distort the negative information they were given, or to change their attitude towards ICA. In this case they chose the latter. However, though both brand attitude and the attitude towards ICA-Stig decreased, it didn’t go all the way to what could be considered negative. So, while the change in attitude probably followed the logic of figure 2, the fact that source credibility still remained at a positive level leads us to believe that the highly positive attitude towards ICA in a sense "saved" ICA-Stig. Thus, as both the relation between ICA-Stig and ICA is positive, and the consumers attitude towards ICA is positive, a negative attitude towards ICA-stig would create unbalance. So, instead of distorting information completely, the consumer has taken a new path, and significantly changed attitude, but not all the way to negative.
Result Hypothesis 4

With the introduction of negative publicity a decrease in both attitude towards the ad (t (82) = 4.057, p = 0.00), and as mentioned, in attitude towards brand was found. In a similar fashion to the test of hypothesis 3, regression was used to test whether the change in brand attitude could be explained by the change in attitude towards the ad. The results show how Aad only helps to explain 10% of the change in Abr. However, though the predictive power is small, it is still significant and with a Beta of 0.308.

H4: Decrease in Aad will lead to a consequential decrease in Abr. Failure to Reject

Finally, we also conducted a multiple regression, finding out if our finding was consistent with Yoon, Kim, and Kim’s (1998) where source attractiveness has a significant influence on Aad. As table 3 show, the source credibility model has a significant impact on Aad, however, each of the individual variables does not. Still, though not being significant, our results are inconsistent with earlier research (Kim, Yoon, & Kim, 1998) as it shows that trustworthiness, rather than attractiveness, affects Aad the most.

Discussion Hypothesis 4

With the negative information aimed at ICA-Stig, the Aad changed significantly, followed by an expected change in Abr, which is congruent with the theory of Homer (1990). However, given the nature of our experiment, with negative publicity aimed towards an advertising character being the central issue, the relatively small effect Aad had on Abr we find to be somewhat surprising. Even though it is logic that negative publicity in itself, rather than Aad, explains most of the change in Abr, the earlier research on Aad (Homer, 1990; Lutz, 1975; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986) give it relatively high importance to the changes to Abr. A possible explanation to this could be that ICA-Stig in the eyes of the consumer is more connected to the brand of ICA directly than to the commercials, and thus the Abr, rather than the Aad, is effected the most. Still, other factors should also influence the change in both Abr and Aad.

The earlier findings of Yoon et al. (1998) suggest that source attractiveness should have high impact on Aad for the consumer. However, our finding suggest otherwise. In the case of ICA-Stig it is trustworthiness, rather than attractiveness, that has an effect on Aad. Even though neither of the variables have significant impact, trustworthiness is close enough to support the argument. Given this result, we argue that since ICA-Stig has a low score in attractiveness and a high score in trustworthiness, negative publicity towards him consequently leads to having higher impact on Abr than the Aad. This also provides a logic explanation to the relatively small effect that we can detect on Aad.

General Discussion & Conclusion

Earlier theories on created spokespersons suggest that they are “safe” characters to use for endorsement. (Mizerski, 1982; Stafford et al, 2002; Till & Shimp, 1998; Tom et al, 1992; Louie & Obermiller, 2002). The past truth has been that as long as the created spokesperson is an effective communicator, the company and brand can be certain of a positive outcome (Byrne, Whitehead, & Breen, 2003; McGuire, 1985; Klebba & Unger, 1983). But the created spokesperson of yesterday has changed and today HCS’s are persons of public interest and objects of publicity. As our results show, HCS no longer necessarily represent a “safe endorsement strategy”, rather they, just as celebrities, are potential threats to companies if negative publicity is aimed towards them. A logic question then would be if the HCS today has turned into a celebrity endorser? Based on the earlier provided definition of celebrity endorsement (McCracken, 1989) the answer is no; a celebrity uses his or her fame and personally traits on the behalf of a company, while a HCS’s fame solely stems from the brand. Furthermore, the HCS has no
other traits and associations than what it has been given by the company. So, a more nuanced answer to the difference between celebrity endorser and HCS would probably be that with time a HCS becomes something like a company celebrity, a person whose fame and traits is based on a brand.

From our results we argue in line with Till and Shimp (1998) that an effective HCS is the one to whom individuals have few other association than the brand they endorse. On the negative side, such HCS’s are also the ones who is the greatest potential threat as they, according to our results, stand close to the brand they represent. Specifically, trustworthiness of the HCS is the most potent characteristic, however, just as previous studies have shown, trustworthiness also has the greatest impact in brand attitude. Based on this it is wise for companies to employ HCSs that are diverse in terms of their credibility, and not overly strong in one specific characteristic. It is highly likely, that if ICA-Stig was less trustworthy and more attractive, he would affect the ICA brand less in the case of negative publicity, without necessarily being a less effective communicator.

To conclude, negative publicity aimed towards a spokes person can, in a situation with a highly associated HSC lead to that the brand is effected, furthermore, the better the brand attitude is to start with, the smaller will the effect be on the HCS.

**Limitations & Future Research**

Although there are critical implications for advertising industry and company management suggested by the result, there are several limitations to this study. As discussed earlier, this study aimed at theoretical generalizability, and to see whether negative publicity towards a HCS could affect a brand. Having conducted this study with a fairly homogeneous and geographically alike population of university students such affect, as far as theoretical generalizability goes, has been proven. Though statistical generalizability is far from reached, there are still several issues we find important to discuss. We are aware that a larger population of heterogeneous nature might not have generated the same results and it would certainly have contributed with a higher level of generalizability. Therefore, to make our findings applicable to the industry, future research on this topic should first aim at statistical generalizability. In addition, the study only considers one selected HCS, ICA-Stig, and cannot represent a general result for all HCS’s. Also, the chosen HCS is a male and thus the study is limited in that regard. Future research should therefore include a selection of different HCS, and examine the effects of HCS gender in order to establish a more generalizable result. Management could then use this knowledge and be more certain and reflexive when deciding which type of HCS to use, and what the characteristics of it should be to minimize the impact of negative publicity.

Furthermore, the negative publicity we created, which was based on the conditions of Louie and Obermiller (2002), is certainly an influencer of the result. Therefore, negative publicity of different degrees, both where the endorser is to blame and when it is not, should be tested.

Finally, celebrity endorsement research has shown that firing the endorser after negative publicity can minimize the effects on the brand. As a HCS is closely related to celebrity endorsers, but yet not the same sort of character, the means a company can use to minimize the effects of negative publicity should be looked into.

**Bibliography**


Appendix 1

Master of Science in Marketing & Consumption

Undersökning för masteruppsats
Vi vill börja med att tacka dig för att du ställer upp på vår undersökning. Innan du börjar är det några få saker vi vill att du tar hänsyn till för att säkerställa validiteten i undersökningen:

- Använd bläckpenna till att fylla i enkäten
- Inga alternativa hjälpmedel är tillåtna
- Prata eller diskutera inte frågorna med din omgivning
- Svara ärligt
- Om du inte kan svara, var god lämna fältet blankt
- Du får inte gå tillbaka i enkäten och fylla i efterhand
- Om det är något du inte förstår, räck upp handen så hjälper vi dig

I tillägg bör vi nämna att vi i undersökningen använder en bipolär skala som sträcker sig från 1-7, där vardera representerar extrema värden.

Återigen, din medverkan betyder mycket för oss!

Bästa hälsningar

/ Henrik och Stefan
Kön:
Man
Kvinna

Ålder:
18-24
25-29
30-34
35<
Vem är det här och hur känner du till den här personen?

Svar:
Om du inte visste vem personen på föregående sida var, ber vi dig lämna in enkäten och tackar dig för din medverkan.

**Generellt hur tycker du om ICA-Stig?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dåligt</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Bra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Jag gillar ICA-Stig´s personlighet:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instämmer inte alls</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Instämmer helt</th>
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**I ditt tycke är ICA-Stig:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Okunnig</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Intressant</td>
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**När jag tänker på ICA-Stig i förhållande till ICA så är han:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icke expert</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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**Forts. När jag tänker på ICA-Stig i förhållande till ICA så är han:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opålitlig</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Trovärdig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Min sammantagna känsla för ICA är:**
I sin helhet, hur tilltalande är ICA:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inte alls tilltalande</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>Mycket tilltalande</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Hur ofta handlar du på ICA?

- [ ] Aldrig
- [ ] En gång i månaden
- [ ] Två gånger i månaden
- [ ] En eller flera gånger i veckan.

Vad är din sammantagna reaktion till reklamen ovanför?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ofördelaktig</th>
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</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Generellt, hur effektiv tycker du reklamen ovanför är?

| Extremt ineffektiv | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Effektiv |

Vad tror du är syftet med den här studien?

☐ Jag vet inte
☐ Jag tror jag vet

Om du tror att du vet syftet, skriv ned ditt svar här:
Appendix 2