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When Opinion Leaders Endorse Products — What Marketers Take Advantage of and Consumers Misconceive

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Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the influence of opinion leaders, the elements of credibility, and draws on endorsement literature to illustrate how opinion leaders are perceived as credible sources in the market. The paper proposes a new type of opinion leader — the celebrity expert endorser (CEE). The CEE is characterized by the typical opinion leader behaviour in the form of information dissemination and the inherent motivation to collect information to pass it on to opinion seekers. However, the CEE also cooperates with marketers, manufacturers, and corporations and engages in some form of endorsement. As a result, the CEE walks a fine line between opinion leadership and endorsement, which makes it difficult for consumers to interpret the disseminated information. Two marketing strategies, representing common practices in the industry, serve as examples of how marketers utilize the influence of opinion leaders and how these strategies lead to distorted perceptions of consumers.