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This study was conducted to test alternative explanations for the powerful positive effect of the presenter's facial attractiveness on persuasion found by Patzer (1985). The explanations tested are: (a) a "conscious Patzer effect" whereby the attractiveness of the presenter prompts conscious cognitive-response inferences about the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness; (b) a "subconscious Patzer effect" whereby attractiveness persuades via beliefs about the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness but without conscious cognitive responses; (c) an "affect transfer effect" whereby attractiveness increases liking of the presenter which in turn transfers to a more favorable attitude toward the brand; and (d) a "role-model identification effect" whereby attractiveness increases identification.

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Abstract

This study was conducted to test alternative explanations for the powerful positive effect of the presenter's facial attractiveness on persuasion found by Patzer (1985). The explanations tested are: (a) a "conscious Patzer effect" whereby the attractiveness of the presenter prompts conscious cognitive-response inferences about the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness; (b) a "subconscious Patzer effect" whereby attractiveness persuades via beliefs about the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness but without conscious cognitive responses; (c) an "affect transfer effect" whereby attractiveness increases liking of the presenter which in turn transfers to a more favorable attitude toward the brand; and (d) a "role-model identification effect" whereby attractiveness increases identification.

Purpose of the study

Physical attractiveness – which is primarily determined by a person's facial attractiveness and is automatically and rapidly evaluated "at a glance" (see Olson and Marschuetz, 2005) has a very powerful influence on the person's ability to persuade others, even when the person is not trying deliberately to persuade. For example, physically (facially) attractive students receive better grades in school, are more likely to be hired as a result of job interviews, tend to be paid more when they get the job, and are much more likely to win political elections than their less attractive peers (see Hamermesh and Biddle, 1994; Cialdini, 2009). Facially attractive presenters also have a persuasive advantage in advertising – particularly, as might be expected, when endorsing beauty-enhancement products (supportive studies in chronological order are those by Friedman and Friedman, 1979, Ohanian, 1991, and Praxmarer, 2006).

Powerful as it may be, it is not clear how the presenter's physical attractiveness persuades. There are four main possibilities (see Figure 1) that may singly or jointly explain the process.

(a) Conscious Patzer Effect
Patzer (1983, 1985) amassed plenty of evidence that highly attractive individuals are perceived by others – who don't know them – to have many positive personality characteristics (for a recent meta-analytic review, see Langlois et al. 2000). Patzer theorized that physical attractiveness works through a conscious (i.e., receiver-aware) process of inference that the presenter is both expert and trustworthy (and used attribution theory to explain these effects). Expertise and trustworthiness are, of course, the two defining characteristics of source credibility (see McGuire, 1969 and also Rossiter and Percy's 1987, 1997 VisCAP model of presenter effects). It should be noted that Patzer wrongly included liking of the communicator as a component of source credibility. This is wrong because liking is a component of the other main source presenter characteristic, which is attraction (again see McGuire, 1969 and Rossiter and Percy, 1987, 1997). If the "conscious Patzer effect" is the main process by which physically attractive presenters persuade, then this process should be evidenced by significant mediating effects for conscious and spontaneous cognitive responses about the presenter's high expertise and about the presenter's high trustworthiness which, in turn and respectively, should flow through to subsequent belief ratings of high expertise and high trustworthiness of the presenter, via step (a) in the figure.

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The process, in summary, is physical attractiveness perception → cognitive responses about the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness → beliefs about the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness → brand purchase interest.

FIGURE 1: Possible paths and steps (parenthesized) explaining the effect of the presenter's physical attractiveness on persuasion.
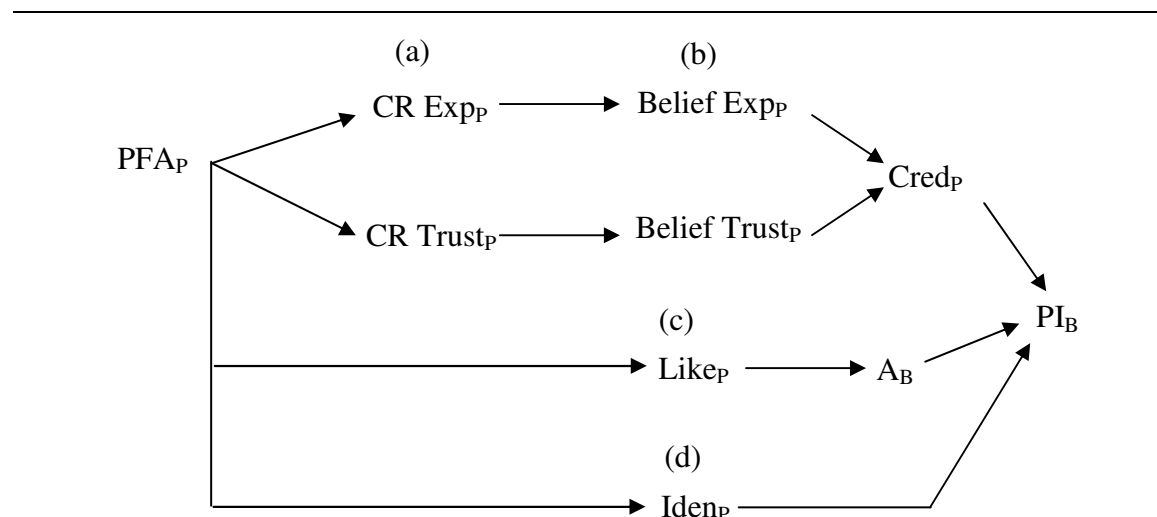
PFA_P: Physical (facial) attractiveness perception of the presenter
CR Exp_P: Cognitive response indicating that the presenter is an expert (open-ended)
CR Trust_P: Cognitive response indicating that the presenter is trustworthy (open-ended)
Belief Exp_P: Belief that the presenter has *high* expertise
Belief Trust_P: Belief that the presenter is *highly* trustworthy
Cred_P: Credibility of the presenter
Like_P: Likability of the presenter
Iden_P: Identification with the presenter as a role model
A_B: Attitude toward the brand
PI_B: Brand purchase interest

(b) Subconscious Patzer Effect
A fascinating aspect of the effect of physical attractiveness on persuasion is that receivers are apparently unaware that they have been susceptible to it and when it is pointed out to them, they vehemently deny that it could have happened. This was evidenced most dramatically in an early study of the federal election in Canada (reported in Cialdini, 2009, p. 146) where it was found that not only did facially attractive candidates receive more than two and a half times as many votes as facially unattractive candidates but, when questioned afterwards, none of the voters thought that the candidates' attractiveness had any influence on their vote and almost three-quarters of them strongly objected to the interviewer's implication that it could have influenced their vote. This raises the possibility that the Patzer effect could be "subconscious," that is, that it could occur without the receiver's awareness. However, it would still have to be a "Patzer effect" because voters would only rationally vote for a candidate if they thought the candidate was an expert in political matters and was honest (trustworthy). If the "subconscious Patzer effect" is the explanation of how physical attractiveness works, then there should be a direct effect of physical attractiveness on the expertise belief and the trust belief that is not mediated by conscious cognitive responses

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about the presenter's expertise and trust. This process would operate via step (b) in the figure, bypassing step (a). In summary, the path is physical attractiveness perception → beliefs about the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness → brand purchase interest.

(c) Affect Transfer Effect

The physical attractiveness of the presenter could alternatively operate noncognitively – through "affect transfer" or, more technically, "1-trial human evaluative conditioning" (see Rossiter and Bellman, 2005). Research on the physical attractiveness effect has shown that facially attractive people are automatically rated (by strangers) as more likable and also that high facial attractiveness "primes" fast positive evaluative reactions of "goodness" (see Olson and Marshuetz, 2005). Liking of the presenter could therefore transfer directly to a favorable evaluation of the brand, which should increase brand purchase interest. The path in this "affect transfer" process would therefore be physical attractiveness of the presenter → liking of the presenter → attitude toward the brand → brand purchase interest.

(d) Role-model identification effect

Liking, the previously discussed effect, is one of the two components of source or presenter attraction (again see McGuire, 1969 and Rossiter and Percy's VisCAP model). The other component of attraction is role-model identification (called just "similarity" by McGuire, 1969 and "ideal-self similarity" in the VisCAP model). In Rossiter and Percy's VisCAP theory of presenter characteristics, role-model identification is postulated as overriding and supplanting "mere" likability when the brand choice proposed by the presenter is "high risk," or highly involving. The "role-model identification effect" therefore constitutes a separate path via step (d) (see figure) which does not operate through brand attitude but rather represents a process something like "I'll buy whatever this positive role model recommends" in order to appear to be more similar to the role model. This process can therefore be summarized as physical attractiveness perception → role-model identification → brand purchase interest.

There is a fifth possible (and very likely) process not shown in the figure that would explain how physical attractiveness works and this is by increasing attention to the advertisement. An unpublished study by Huhmann, Franke, and Mothersbaugh (2009) found that the inclusion of a person or people in magazine ads increases the average attention (Starch noted) score from 49% without people to 53%, and that the inclusion of a celebrity in the ad, the vast majority of whom are highly facially attractive, boosted the average attention score to 69%. However, attention to the ad can only increase persuasion through its "multiplier" effect on one (or more) of the above processes and, in itself, it is not an explanation of how physical attractiveness works. Accordingly, in the present experiment, attention to the ad is therefore controlled by applying the usual "laboratory" situation of forced exposure.

The present study distinguishes the four most plausible explanations of why physically (facially) attractive presenters are persuasive. All four explanations are tested simultaneously because it is possible that more than one path or process is statistically significant.

Method

Stimuli

A study with print ads was conducted to test the alternative explanations. The explanations are deliberately tested by using celebrity presenter ads for a luxury product – men's and women's expensive wristwatches – because this should provide the strongest test of the two cognitive paths represented by the "conscious Patzer effect" and the "subconscious Patzer effect." The general Patzer effect is hypothesized by Patzer (1985) to work for any presenter

and all types of products and hence it should work even for a highly "transformational" (social approval or prestige) product and it should work when the presenter is a famous celebrity who is more likely to be identified with as a positive role model than to necessarily be perceived as highly credible. Existing "real-world" advertisements for wristwatches showing highly (facially) attractive celebrity presenters are used for this study. The celebrities are Brad Pitt and Uma Thurman (both for TagHeuer).

In this paper the effects of *perceived* (measured) presenter attractiveness are studied (see PFA_P in Figure 1). Previous studies show strong individual differences in attractiveness judgments and demonstrate that interjudge agreement is usually moderate to low (Hönekopp, 2006; Little and Perrett, 2002; Thornhill and Gangestad, 1999). Therefore, an attractiveness manipulation is not essential for the estimation of the proposed effects since this perception will be measured per individual.

Main study: Sample, Procedure, and Measures

112 students participated in the main study (44% female). Subjects were only confronted with a same-sex ad, because role model identification is more likely to occur for same sex presenters (male consumers, for instance, do usually not want to appear similar to a female presenter). Participants were asked to look at the ad as they would normally do and then to fill in the questionnaire.

To establish whether or not advertising receivers make conscious inferences from a presenter's attractiveness to their expertise and trustworthiness the questionnaire measured cognitive responses first. Participants were asked to write down the thoughts that they had while looking at and reading the ad (CR Exp_P and CR $Trust_P$ in Figure 1). All remaining variables of interest (see Figure 1) are concrete and clear to the raters. Therefore, single-item measurers were used (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007). In order to avoid common method bias, the measures were also very different from each other. Facial attractiveness of the presenter is measured with a bipolar seven-point rating scale ("very unattractive," "quite unattractive," "slightly unattractive," "neutral," "slightly attractive," "quite attractive," "very attractive"). The presenter's perceived expertise (respondent's belief) is measured on a four-point unipolar scale ("none", "limited/or just average", "better than average", "true expert"). Perceived trustworthiness is measured on a three-point unipolar scale ("I would never trust this person", "It depends – I might trust this person if the product they are advertising is inexpensive, but not trust this person if the product is expensive", "I would trust this person whatever the product is"). Likeability of the presenter is measured on a bipolar eleven-point scale ("very dislikeable" to "very likable"), and identification with the presenter as a role model is measured on a bipolar eleven-point scale with the end labels "not at all" and "yes, definitely". Perceived quality of the brand (represents A_{Brand} in this study) is measured on a bipolar eleven-point scale with the end labels "very poor quality" and "absolute top quality". Finally, brand purchase interest is measured on an unipolar four-point scale (… how much interest do you have in owning this particular brand … "not interested," "somewhat interested," "moderately interested," "definitely interested").

Results

Although many participants rated the two presenters as highly attractive, no one explicitly mentioned the presenter's expertise or trustworthiness. The cognitive responses observed do not provide evidence for a conscious effect of the presenter's attractiveness on perceived expertise and trustworthiness.

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Because conscious inferences about the presenter's expertise and trustworthiness were absent, we estimated the model (Figure 1) without CR Exp_P and CR $Trust_P$ using partial least square. Table 1 shows the path coefficients (standardized).

The effects of a presenter's attractiveness on perceived expertise and trustworthiness are significant (bypassing conscious inferences). Thus, the results of this study suggest a subconscious Patzer Effect (however, the attractiveness effect on perceived trustworthiness is not significant for female subjects). Furthermore, perceived attractiveness boosts perceived likeability of the presenter and role-model identification.

The results of this study also suggest that the presenter's expertise and role-model identification do not influence brand purchase interest.

Table 1: Results (path coefficients)

	All subjects	Female subjects (Uma Thurman)	Male subjects (Brad Pitt)
$PFA_p \rightarrow$ Belief Exp_p	.31***	.42***	.25**
$PFA_p \rightarrow$ Belief $Trustp_p$	.24***	.16	.28***
$PFA_p \rightarrow Like_p$	.54***	.68***	.47***
$PFA_p \rightarrow Iden_p$	.55***	.68***	.56***
Belief $Exp_p \rightarrow PI_B$	.03	.06	-.01
Belief $Trust_p \rightarrow PI_B$	.21**	.21*	.22**
$Like_p \rightarrow A_B$	.26***	.14	.33***
$A_B \rightarrow PI_B$	.32***	.22*	.33***
$Iden_p \rightarrow PI_B$	.07	.07	.11

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$

Conclusions

Several studies have observed positive effects of a presenter's attractiveness on persuasion. However, previous research has not demonstrated which of the potential processes (paths) explain(s) the positive effect of a presenter's attractiveness on persuasion. This study contributes to a better understanding of *how* the presenter's facial attractiveness persuades. Our results demonstrate that a presenter's attractiveness increases perceived presenter expertise and trustworthiness in a subconscious way—with no conscious inferences as suggested by Patzer (1985), and that perceived attractiveness boosts likeability of the presenter and role-model identification.

This research produced a few additional interesting results. Expertise and role-model identification did not influence purchase interest. This is contrary to the VisCAP model (Rossiter and Percy 1987, 1997). Furthermore, the celebrity presenter's trustworthiness influenced persuasion which is contrary to Rossiter and Bellman's (2005) celebrity presenter model.

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