

## Scents of celebrities: Endorsers' impact on buyers' online perfume purchase

**Mehdi MAHDAVI**

*Islamic Azad University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran*

**Belem BARBOSA**

*GOVCOPP, ISCA-UA, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal  
belem.barbosa@ua.pt*

**Zaíla OLIVEIRA**

*Unichristus University Center and Fametro University Center, Fortaleza, Brazil*

**Valentina CHKONIYA**

*University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal*

**Abstract.** *Literature has highlighted the challenges of selling experience (vs. search) products online. In addition, the role of celebrity endorsers in purchase intention and attitudes towards brands has been emphasized by scholars. This article argues that celebrities provide cues on products' sensorial characteristics that have been so far disregarded by extant literature. By choosing perfume as a complex experience product, twenty-seven participants from three countries were interviewed in order to find how endorsers could assist e-shoppers to identify fragrant characteristics in the absence of the real scent. The results of the qualitative content analysis reveal that endorsers' personality traits and lifestyle could act as predictor of the type of scent. Scent categorization based on such traits are presented. This article provides valuable contributions to both researchers and practitioners interested in online sales of experience goods. Limitations and avenues for future search are also provided.*

**Keywords:** Perfume, Celebrity Endorser, E-shopper, Experience Product, Online Shopping, Online Store

### Introduction

Despite the global proliferation of online shopping, there are still under-researched products on the Internet such as perfume. Because it is an experience product (Lim, Al-Aali, & Heinrichs, 2015; Peterson, Balasubramanian, & Bronnenberg, 1997), presenting perfume for online sales is challenging due to the fact that the real sense involved, i.e., olfaction, is absent on the Internet platform, forcing e-shoppers to try the real scent in a brick- and-mortar outlet prior to making their purchase online, or by accepting the risk of buying a product which might not satisfy their actual need. Hence, it thoroughly makes sense to seek help from other available sources of information which could possibly mitigate such perceived risks and the need for back-and-forth travels between the online and offline stores, in particular, if the e-shopper intends to buy a perfume without previous knowledge of its scent.

The authors' major argument, then, is that although the challenges of selling products online have been addressed by past research, to their best of knowledge such shortages regarding perfume has received rare attention by researchers. Therefore, this study aims to fill such gap by exploring whether perfume features and its characteristics could be induced by celebrity endorsers, whose impact as influencers on purchase behavior and decision making of consumers have been long researched and supported. As a result, the authors try to answer the following research question:

**RQ:** How do celebrity endorsers help e-shoppers identify olfactive characteristics of perfume in the absence of its real scent?

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Next, we present the theoretical background, followed by conducting a series of 27 in-depth interviews with participants from three distinctive countries of Brazil, Iran, and Portugal, who have experienced online purchase of perfume prior to this study. Finally, by presenting analysis results, discussion, conclusion, and limitations, we end this research by introducing avenues for future exploration.

## **Study Background**

### ***Selling Products Online***

Ease of locating, suitability for information search, and the opportunity to compare prices are amongst aspects that e-shoppers benefit from the online stores (Ayanso, Lertwachara, & Thongpapanl, 2010), although Phau and Poon (2000) believe that offline outlets cannot be properly replaced by the online ones when it comes to certain group of products. They continue that the Internet restricts e-shoppers to use their senses of smell and taste. In fact, the significance of personal checking of certain products prior to purchase has been underscored by researchers such as Levin, Levin, and Heath (2003). In particular, online purchase problems emerge regarding perfume and shoes, which need shoppers' personal involvement of olfactory and haptic senses, respectively (Zhang, Ge, Gou, & Chen, 2018). Such perceived risks regarding apparel, cosmetics and perfume have been also noticed by other researchers (e.g., Claudia, 2012; Kacen, Hess, & Chiang, 2013). In addition, lack of access to sales associates on the Internet (Dai, Forsythe, & Kwon, 2014) is considered another restriction for online stores.

To tackle such shortages, Peterson et al. (1997) argue that before online offering of the products/ services, specific features of individual products/ services should be considered by e-sellers. To put the issue further, based on past research, Chiang and Dholokia (2003) conclude that taxonomy of products into either search or experience goods is a common practice by researchers. Wisely, mere evaluation of products based on factual features rather than physically trying them produce some levels of uncertainty amongst e-consumers (Hong & Pavlou, 2014), and therefore, this critical aspect lowers purchase intentions among e-shoppers (Chiang & Dholokia, 2003).

Given the general challenges of online purchase of experience goods, particularly perfume, next, the role of celebrity endorsers as potential facilitators of online purchase of perfume is discussed.

### ***Celebrity and Endorsement***

Celebrities' images are ubiquitous and consumers are overwhelmed with them endlessly (McCormick, 2016). A celebrity endorser who is defined as a recognizable person contracted

to advertise for a product or brand, have been used by companies to improve a brand's appeal (McCracken, 1989). In fact, Biswas, Biswas, and Das (2006) state that creating more believable advertisements while making a more effective advertisement communication is a reason why companies employ celebrities as endorsers. Consistently, impacts on consumers' attitudes, attention and consequently their purchase intentions are the factors celebrities are deemed to exert once hired by a company (McCormick, 2016). Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) believe that unknown products could be transferred to well-known ones through endorsements by celebrities advertising such products. In fact, they state that such endorsement add value to the product/service itself and the brand name. Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) conclude that most of studies dedicated to celebrity endorsement investigate post-endorsement brand attitude, perception of quality, and purchase intention of brands. There are also older studies suggesting that evaluation of brands is positively affected by endorsement through celebrities (e.g., Atkin & Block, 1983).

Tantisenepong, Gorton, and White, (2012, p.59) further state that "Match up", which is defined as the "fit between product and celebrity", is a significant theme, to be paid attention before endorsers selection. It is, hence, believed that the qualities possessed by the endorsers are more likely to be passed onto the product they are advertising while the consumers perceive the fit between the endorser and the endorsed product (Thwaites, Lowe, Monkhouse, & Barnes, 2012). For instance, Till and Busler (1998) have exemplified a few appropriate and inappropriate fit between the endorser and the endorsed product/ service. While they believe Elizabeth Taylor is a good match for White Diamonds perfume, choosing Michael Jordan for WorldCom communication is not that effective. Research has also revealed that greater degrees of brand evaluations are outcomes of higher levels of match between the celebrity endorser and the brand/ product they advertise (e.g., Choi & Rifon, 2012). Match between the celebrity endorser and their target consumers, and also the product/ brand they endorse, together with their perceived image by the audience, have been also explored by Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg (2001).

McCormick (2016) also believes as the familiarity between the endorsers and consumers begin even before they act as the spokesperson, it is imperative that the endorsers are perceived as positive figures, both as an ordinary person and an endorser. She concludes that further to the need for congruency between the advertised product and the celebrity endorser, in order to create a tight connection between the brand and consumer, choosing a recognizable celebrity endorser is essential. In her study, it was revealed that millennial participants have little purchase intention of advertised product by an unfamiliar endorser compared to familiar ones, although it was shown that they were interested in further evaluations and consideration of that specific advertisement. Ohanian (1990) considers attractiveness, trustworthiness, and knowledge of endorsers regarding the product they endorse as their source of credibility, which are perceived by the consumers. In line with the above mentioned dimensions, recognition, likeability, and friendliness have been shown to add to endorser's effectiveness (Miciak & Shanklin, 1994).

Categorization of celebrities as traditional, e.g., movie stars, musicians, athletes, and as "digital", e.g., bloggers, vloggers, and "Instafamous" personalities, has been also mentioned (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). They have shown that Instagram celebrities are influential for young female users when the purchase behavior is assessed. They also conclude that traditional celebrities are less powerful to impact these female consumers compared to non-traditional endorsers such as bloggers and YouTube personalities. McCormick (2016)

suggests that idolization of celebrities is a common part of millennials identity development. Congruently, Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) infer that it is likely that individuals, in order to receive similar degree of positive feedback as of celebrities from other Instagram users, mimic their favorite celebrities success and behavior. Also, it is noteworthy that recruiting celebrities as endorsers differs from country to country. For example, Choi, Lee, and Kim (2005) have highlighted characteristics differences such as profession, gender, and age between celebrity endorsers in South Korea and the US. From the financial motivations standpoint, Rossiter and Smidts (2012) have found that as consumers believe that celebrities are “paid” to endorse products, perceived trustworthiness is less likely to produce positive effect of their endorsements. Consistently, Bergkvist, Hjalmarson, and Mägi (2016) report that if motivations to endorse a product are not only financial benefits but also the quality of that product, consumers’ attitudes towards the product/ brand would be positively affected. Furthermore, companies should be cautious while recruiting celebrities in terms of the number of endorsements per each endorser as Hung, Chan, and Tse (2011) have shown that consumers might be less affected by the endorsements if they perceive a given celebrity is too busy with advertising too many brands/ products.

Lifestyle and misbehavior of the celebrity have also been the center of attention by some scholars. For example, Um (2013) and White, Goddard, and Wilbur (2009) conclude that brands evaluations could be negatively affected by celebrity endorsers’ wrongdoing. Zwilling and Fruchter (2013) have considered celebrity’s personality traits in order to find the most suitable endorser for a given brand. Campbell and Warren (2012) infer that when a celebrity is hired to advertise a brand/ product, consumers apply the meanings and personality traits pertinent to that endorser to the brand they advertise. Their study shows that a celebrity endorser’s negative personal traits are more likely than those positive traits to transfer to the endorsed brand.

Till and Busler (1998) argue that products used by individuals to add to their attractiveness could be more effectively advertised once endorsed by attractive celebrities. They state that consumers could be more affected by physically attractive celebrities endorsing cosmetics. It is rational to consider the fact that the more attractive the endorser is, the more expert he/she is.

In a study specifically designed to explore the concept of “match up” between the celebrity endorser and endorsed product, i.e., perfume, Tantisenepong et al. (2012) used projective techniques in order to understand the type of consumers the product, i.e., perfume, is aimed at. To meet the purpose, they chose two well-established brands: Gucci Envy Me and Christian Dior J’adore. Based on the likelihood of contrasting occasions, they chose four celebrity endorsers for their research: Jennifer Aniston and Amy Winehouse were associated with Gucci Envy Me, while Queen Latifah and Emma Watson were selected for the related ads to Christian Dior J’adore (Tantisenepong et al., 2012). Some of ads-related reactions of the participants include phrases such as “ I would buy it...”, “ ...Buy me...”, “ ...too old..”, “ ...would not try...”, “ ...buy it, use it...”, “ ...worthy of buying...”, and “ ...I would try it...”. The results of their study show significant alternations of target market in absent and presence of celebrity endorsers perceived by the participants: While females in their 40s were perceived suitable for Christian Dior J’adore in the absence of celebrity endorser, adding Emma Watson to the ads, lowered the perceived suitable age to the 20s. Queen Latifah also lowered the perceived appropriate age, though to the lesser extent compared to Emma Watson case. Hence, such endorsement could influence a brand repositioning (Tantisenepong et al., 2012). These

findings simply imply that a perfume could be chosen by looking at an endorser, and thus, evaluation of the match between s/he and the perfume, in absence of the physical product.

Fleck, Korchia, and Le Roy (2012) believe that when it comes to certain products such as perfumes and cosmetics, celebrities become indispensable parts of advertisements. For instance, they highlight the famous soccer player Zinedine Zidane's endorsement of Dior. They infer that due to the continuous product launch in cosmetics and perfume industry, it is vital to familiarize consumers not only through explanation of product features, but also by hiring celebrities who endorse such products. Considering endorsers' fame and "match up" factors, Ilicic, Baxter, and Kulczynski (2016) have made a few suggestions. For example, Nicole Kidman appealed to older participant, endorsing the classic perfume Chanel No.5. Furthermore, they state that attractiveness-related products are more suitable to be endorsed by those celebrities who generally have romantic bonds with consumers. They also recommend Brad Pitt for Chanel No.5.

Although Janssens and De Pelsmacker (2009) state that perfume studies in the area of marketing are rare, they point out the existence of considerable amount of research in other areas such as psychology, cosmetics and sensory studies. By reviewing past research, Janssens and De Pelsmacker (2009) briefly state that there are generally three factors that influence consumers' perfume preference and choice. First, situational or personal factors, such as consumer's eye or hair color, gender, age, season or occasion. Second, emotional factor, for example, past experiences associated with certain odors. And third, consumer's personality, which is generally determined by genetics and socialisation processes. They also believe that it is possible to relate certain perfume with specific people's social classes. They even put the issue further and claim that the "ideal personality" might influence consumers' perfume choice, which the authors believe can be reflected in celebrity endorsers.

Thus, it is arguable that cues on the celebrity's identity, characteristics, and personality, while ascribing certain characteristics to certain scents, can provide relevant information on the scent characteristics of the perfume, helping the audience decide whether that perfume endorsed by the celebrity is suitable for them by comparing his/her personality with that of the endorser.

## **Method**

### ***Design***

In order to tackle the research question proposed for this article, an exploratory approach was adopted, as the contributions in the field regarding perfume as an experience product are scarce. The semi structured interview had as first question: Can you anticipate a perfume scent based on the celebrity that announces it in advertising? The questions included mentioning four well-known public figures (actors and model) who also appear on ads, so that interviewees could further elaborate their associations between perfume's scent characteristics and celebrities. The chosen celebrities were Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, George Clooney and Giselle Bundchen. Participants were asked to describe the type of scent they relate to these public figures, and what would be the scent of a perfume they advertised. Follow-up questions were used whenever necessary to further explore the Interviewees' point of view, namely asking for examples and further detail on the scent characteristics.

The study was conducted in three different countries: Brazil, Iran, and Portugal. Selection of these three distinct countries was made based on the official figures presented by the International Telecommunication Union (<http://www.itu.int>) and the Organization

for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2017), which show a growing trend in terms of internet access and online purchase in the three countries.

### ***Sampling, ethics, and analysis procedures***

Having identified consumers with the experience of online perfume shopping through the authors' both professional and personal networks, the authors invited the subjects to participate in face-to-face interviews. The sampling method was purposive and non-probabilistic, while guaranteeing profile diversity in terms of gender, age, education occupation and online buying experience. The refusal rate was low, considering that only two consumers from Brazil did not accept to participate in the study due to agenda incompatibility.

Before conducting the interviews, all the subjects in the three countries were informed on the purpose of the study, rough length of the interviews, preparation of data, and intended results dissemination. In order to enable the authors to transcribe the data, all the interviews were audio recorded. Anonymity and volunteer participation as well as confidentiality of participation were emphasized by the researchers ahead of the interviews. Participants provided their informed consent prior to data collection. All identifications were omitted or replaced by pseudonyms. After the conclusion of the analysis, all copies of the audio-records were destroyed. The interviews were conducted in March 2019. The average length of each interview was twenty minutes.

While considering the purpose of the research and its narrow scope, which implies that research can be based on quite small samples (Bryman, 2016), the main criteria to define the sample dimension was data saturation. As the study involved participants from three different countries, data saturation within each country was also considered. As explained by Bryman (2016), there is not a consensus on the minimum number of participants in the case of purposive sampling, although some authors may recommend a least twenty interviews. Due to the narrow focus of this research, data saturation was reached at the seventh (Portugal) or eighth interview (Brazil and Iran). Data analysis confirmed that data saturation was achieved globally (not only within but also across subsamples). Consequently, the study comprises nine interviews in each country, and twenty seven interviews in total, guided by data saturation achievement.

Data was subject to an inductive content analysis, that is, considering the scarcity of contributions from the literature review, data guided the codification. In fact, suitability of content analysis for both written and verbal messages has been highlighted by scholars such as Cole (1988). In addition, Neuendorf (2002) underscores the long history of implementing content analysis in different scientific areas such as business, which is the theme of this research. Cavanagh (1997) adds that fewer content-related categories could be extracted from words via content analysis. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) state that content analysis aims to create a summarized description of a phenomenon, and therefore, the results of such analysis are concepts and categories. They continue that both qualitative and quantitative data can benefit from content analysis, either through inductive or deductive approaches. Lauri and Kyngäs (2005) stress that if the knowledge is scarce or fragmented, inductive approach should be implemented, which moves from the specific to the general, and finally forms a general statement (Chinn & Kramer, 1999). In order to conduct the inductive content analysis, the authors followed the procedure suggested by (Mayring, 2000). In short, first, based on the extant literature and the research question, criteria of definition was formulated

which guided the authors to consider the written material collected in the interviews. Following these criteria, the transcriptions worked through and the categories gradually deduced. And finally, categories were revised and reduced to main categories.

**Sample characteristics**

Twenty-seven consumers of perfume from three distinct countries (nine participants from each country) with experience of purchasing perfume online, participated in a qualitative study. Their characteristics are presented in Table 1. Both females (n=16) and males (n=11) participated in the research from the countries of Brazil, Iran, and Portugal. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 59 years old (Mean= 34.1) with 59% identified as female, 37% had post-graduate education, 33% had graduate and 30% had under-graduate degree. As reported by the participants, 59% were frequent buyers of perfume on the Internet, compared to 41% of those with occasional habit of buying fragrance products.

*Table 1. Sample characteristics*

Code	Age	Gender	Education level	Occupation	Online Shopping activity	Buy perfume online
BR1	42	Female	Post-graduate	Teacher	Frequent	Occasionally
BR2	48	Female	Post-graduate	Manager	Frequent	Frequently
BR3	27	Female	Undergraduate	Clerk	Frequent	Frequently
BR4	47	Female	Graduate	Clerk	Occasional	Occasionally
BR5	34	Female	Post-graduate	Psychologist	Occasional	Frequently
BR6	33	Male	Graduate	Business Owner	Frequent	Occasionally
BR7	47	Female	Undergraduate	Beautician	Frequent	Occasionally
BR8	50	Female	Undergraduate	Hairdresser	Occasional	Occasionally
BR9	49	Female	Post-graduate	Purchasing manager	Occasional	Occasionally
IR1	30	Male	Post-graduate	Self-employed	Frequent	Frequently
IR2	22	Male	Graduate	Pilot	Occasional	Frequently
IR3	29	Male	Post-graduate	Teacher	Occasional	Occasionally
IR4	28	Male	Undergraduate	Clerk	Frequent	Frequently
IR5	24	Male	Graduate	Student	Frequent	Occasionally
IR6	28	Female	Post-graduate	Accountant	Occasional	Occasionally
IR7	28	Male	Post-graduate	Coach	Occasional	Frequently
IR8	35	Male	Graduate	Business Owner	Frequent	Frequently
IR9	24	Female	Graduate	Beautician	Occasional	Frequently
PT1	22	Female	Undergraduate	Student	Frequent	Frequently
PT2	24	Male	Graduate	Student	Frequent	Occasionally
PT3	26	Female	Post-graduate	Translator	Frequent	Frequently
PT4	59	Female	Graduate	Unemployed	Occasional	Occasionally
PT5	24	Female	Undergraduate	Clerk	Frequent	Frequently
PT6	20	Female	Undergraduate	Student	Frequent	Frequently
PT7	48	Male	Undergraduate	Shopkeeper	Frequent	Frequently

PT8	24	Female	Graduate	Clerk	Frequent	Frequently
PT9	50	Male	Graduate	Business Owner	Frequent	Frequently

Source: Authors' own contribution

## Results and discussion

As expected, the topic was particularly challenging for the interviewees. Several (BR5, BR8, IR3, IR6, PT5, PT9) refused the idea of inferring scent from the celebrity that announces it, although recognizing that it provides cues on the personality of who wears that perfume (BR5, BR8), the perfume intensity (BR5, BR8, PT5), and the warmness/freshness if its scent (IR6, PT5). Moreover, some participants (e.g., IR4, IR8; PT1) noted that for them the celebrity in the ad is not an important aspect when choosing an unknown perfume, although they suggested that some consumers “buy perfume just because of that celebrity” as mentioned for instance by Interviewee IR4.

Moreover, Interviewee BR1 stressed that scent inferences, similar to product quality inferences, depend mostly on the fact that the celebrity is “someone that you believe in”. In line with this thought, Interviewee IR1 considered that celebrities are not totally reliable when it comes to evaluate the products they advertise “I believe celebrities advertise a product to make money, although I think they can be helpful, but not very reliable.” Moreover, some interviewees were particularly skeptical regarding product endorsement. As Interviewee IR5 explained:

I believe they are just paid to sell a product. If Jolie advertises a perfume, I would say that the perfume is expensive because this celebrity is famous. I won't associate product qualities to the endorsers because they are paid to advertise.(Interviewee IR5)

These contributions are in line with the extensive literature that explores celebrity endorsement in advertising: post-endorsement brand attitude, perception of quality, and purchase intention of brands (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016), value transfer from the endorser to the products (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), idolization of celebrities (McCormick, 2016), and financial motivations in endorsement (Bergkvist et al., 2016; Rossiter & Smidts, 2012). Indeed, as mentioned in these pages, although some participants in this study believe that endorsers are mainly motivated by financial incentives offered by the companies, consumers still could associate quality aspects of endorsed perfume to the celebrity. Apparently, Idolization by consumers could act as a catalyst to create such willingness to pay for the endorsed product.

Also in accordance with the extant literature (e.g., Choi & Rifon, 2012; Erdogan et al., 2001; Tantisenepong et al., 2012; Thwaites et al., 2012; Till & Busler, 1998), several consumers stressed that celebrities choose wisely the products they endorse, in order to guarantee consistency and hence to protect their own image. Indeed, and in opposition to the apparent skepticism of few participants, Interviewee BR3 argued that celebrities choose carefully the products that they advertise, as “it depends on the celebrity, it will suit that kind of person who is advertising”. In that sense, participants expect that celebrities chose products that fit their image, and that includes the type of perfume and its fragrant characteristics, hence expecting congruency between their image and the products they



advertise. Interviewee PT3 further considers that companies also choose celebrities whose image matches the perfume being advertised, which results in “giving a sign on the aroma”.

Overall, most participants in this study acknowledged associations between celebrities and scents, which are presented in the next section. As Interviewee BR3 explained, the fact that a celebrity choose to endorse a perfume “gives a signal of the kind of aroma”. It is important to note that even amongst the interviewees that clearly refused associating celebrities with scent characteristics of an unknown perfume, their narratives provided clear links between celebrity and scent characteristics (e.g., intensity, freshness) that were common themes across all interviews.

### ***Celebrity perceived personality and perceived scent consistency***

According to several participants in this study, celebrities have marked personalities and lifestyles that induce the characteristics of the products they advertise, including perfume scent. Interviewee BR1 stated that “the indication of the type of perfume scents (...) depends on [the celebrity’s] personality”, and consequently, several participants in this study stressed that celebrity’s lifestyle offers relevant cues on the fragrant characteristics of the perfume. Interviewee BR4 mentioned that she considers “what is this person's life like, it's a busier or quieter life, if she is under lots of spotlights, she needs her perfume to last longer, she will have contact with many people” and these images portray scent characteristics such as perfume intensity. Interviewee BR7 agreed with this perspective and said that “I associate strong personality persons with strong perfume, the type of smell that lasts even after the person left”. Consequently, participants considered that the celebrity offers information on the “type of people for whom [the perfume scent] is suitable” as synthesized by Interviewee IR8.

One example of the association between celebrity’s personality and perfume scent was provided by Interviewee IR2 who said that:

Depending on his/her personality, I can guess if that perfume is bitter, cool, etc. For example regarding [my favorite actor] Marlon Brando, his personality conveys to me that this perfume is bitter and it is suitable for people who are calm and have less energy than usual people. (Interviewee IR2)

Hence, these results corroborate the extant literature that highlights the importance of conformity between the celebrity image and the characteristics of the product being advertised: impacts of celebrity’s wrongdoing (lifestyle) on brand evaluations (Um, 2013; White et al., 2009), personality traits as criteria for endorsers selection (Zwilling & Fruchter, 2013), and transfer of endorser’s traits to the brand/ product (Campbell & Warren, 2012). In the case of perfume scent, participants demonstrated to make a parallel between celebrity’s image and perceived lifestyle and olfactory characteristics of perfume, which is particularly reflected by the Interviewee IR2 above.

### ***Scent cues provided by celebrities***

One of the most prominent scent cues provided by celebrities that were mentioned by the participants in this study was perfume intensity. Participants often chose adjectives such as strong, soft, intense, to describe perfume scent in accordance with perceived personality of a celebrity. For instance, Interviewee BR1 said that

George Clooney is a stronger, prominent scent. Brad Pitt would have a lighter smell, but also provocative, insinuating. Both give the idea of being remarkable men. (Interviewee BR1)

Participants were also able to associate fragrant types with certain celebrities, and thus having a clearer sensation of the perfume scent they would be associated with in advertising. Interviewee BR3 considered that “George Clooney would be (...) a woody type perfume. Giselle is floral scent”, while Interviewee IR7 suggested that Brad Pitt’s perfume would have a vanilla component “which goes for people who want to be different”.

*Table 2. Scent cues provided by ads with celebrities*

<b>Intensity</b>	Intense, light, soft, strong, vibrant
<b>Fragrance family</b>	Floral, fresh, fruity, woody
<b>Fragrant components</b>	Coffee, pepper, vanilla
<b>Other adjectives</b>	Bitter, cool, conservative, hot, provocative, sensual, sophisticated, sporty, sweet, warm

Source: Authors’ own contribution

In general, most participants in this study could express their opinions and feelings regarding possible associations between a perfume scent type and a given celebrity endorser. The results are partially consistent with findings of Tantisenepong et al. (2012) who used projective techniques in order to find the suitability of endorsers for the target groups.

## Conclusion

The dominant idea amongst participants in this study was that an unknown perfume advertised by two distinct celebrities will smell different. Moreover, while several participants refused or devalued the importance of the celebrity to infer the scent of an unknown perfume, almost all of them spontaneously classified an unknown perfume at least in terms of intensity just based on a celebrity that would appear in the perfume’s ads. Some participants were able to infer fragrant families and components just based on a known celebrity. Back to the research question proposed earlier, the findings of the current study suggest that despite the difficulty of conveying perfume characteristics merely by looking at the celebrity endorser, consumers are still capable of receiving scent signals from the endorsers through parallel mechanisms, that is, by ascribing some certain personality traits of the endorser and his/ her life style to perfume characteristics, they can still decide whether that perfume suits them. In fact, built upon the existing literature, celebrities play significant role in terms of transferring even a less known product to a hot sale (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017) as their lifestyles and personal affairs are always under the spotlight of the consumers (Um, 2013). Adding that the existence of idolization among some consumers (McCormick, 2016), the authors strongly believe that in the absence of the real scent of perfume in online stores, e-shoppers can still guess and understand a given perfume features through the endorsers. As it is evident from Table 2, one can see how participants in this study could associate the study’s celebrities with different levels of intensity, scents families, scents components, and other terms widely used in perfumery and by consumers.

## Implications for managers

The perfume sector is facing a particularly challenging scenario, considering the high competition, the growing importance of e-commerce, and the additional difficulties that are posed by experience products. Indeed, in a market with recurrent launch of new products, increased online sales, and still reluctance of customers to buy unknown experience goods online, possible strategies to transmit the scent of a perfume may offer relevant opportunities to leverage market shares. This article demonstrates that celebrities have some degree of transmitting perfume scent to consumers. Indeed, while some will refuse the idea of inferring scent based on the characteristics of the celebrity, this study demonstrates that celebrities provide clear scent cues – which include fragrant families and components for some consumers.

Two main implications are suggested by these findings. Firstly, perfume companies should carefully choose the celebrities according to the fragrant characteristics of each perfume. In line with the findings of Hung et al. (2011), this suggestion contradicts a management practice of having a celebrity endorsing a whole brand of perfume, which may be an ineffective strategy in case the brand has a diversified offer of perfume scents. For instance, a fresher/lighter summer version of a perfume should therefore be endorsed by a different celebrity from the one endorsing its warmer version. Secondly, this study suggests that celebrity endorsement has varied efficacy depending on the consumers' profiles, not only in terms of their acceptance and skepticism regarding celebrity endorsement, but also considering their inferences in terms of scent. Indeed, a segment of consumers will associate an unknown perfume with fragrant types based on their knowledge of the celebrity (e.g., lifestyle), which ultimately helps them decide if the perfume is worth considering, by comparing the inferred scents with the consumers' personal taste and scent preferences. Hence, this segment of consumers (whose dimension is so far unknown) needs careful celebrity endorsement strategies in order to convey valuable and rigorous messages to effectively describe the perfume scent.

## Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although this research sheds light at a less explored sector of online shopping, there are still limitations that should be considered before interpreting and generalizing the findings. Results built upon the participation of only twenty-seven interviewees from three countries should be treated cautiously. Hence, it is suggested that by employing more subjects from diversified regions/ cultures around the world, the same approaches together with other quantitative methods assess this theme. Participants were only asked to give their opinions based on their knowledge of each endorser, while the authors believe that exposing the subjects to real ads would reveal more dependable results. Another suggestion would be asking the subjects to match some personality traits to some perfume features and using those associations to choose a desired available celebrity. This study employed participants from three distinct countries with different cultures, therefore, cultural aspects were not taken into account in analyzing the results. Hence, a future study avenue could consider such cultural differences in subjects' opinions about personality traits of endorsers that might influence them while considering purchasing a perfume just based on the endorsers' quality. Also, in another study, subjects could be asked to match some certain scents to the endorsers'

physical appearance such as his/ her eye and hair color, hairstyle or general shape of the body. And eventually, modern technology such as EEG and fMRI could investigate the real-time reactions in consumers' brain while asking to match a certain type of scent to the advertising celebrity.

## Acknowledgment

This work was financially supported by the research unit on Governance, Competitiveness and Public Policy (UID/CPO/04058/2019), funded by national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

## References

- Atkin, C., & Block, M. (1983). Effectiveness of celebrity endorsers. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 23(1), 57-61.
- Ayanso, A., Lertwachara, K., & Thongpapanl, N. (2010). Technology-enabled retail services and online sales. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 50(3), 102-111.
- Bergkvist, L., & Zhou, K. Q. (2016). Celebrity endorsements: a literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(4), 642-663 .
- Bergkvist, L., Hjalmarson, H., & Mägi, A. W. (2016). A new model of how celebrity endorsements work: attitude toward the endorsement as a mediator of celebrity source and endorsement effects. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(2), 171-184.
- Biswas, D., Biswas, A., & Das, N. (2006). The Differential Effects of Celebrity and Expert Endorsements on Consumer Risk Perceptions. The Role of Consumer Knowledge, Perceived Congruency, and Product Technology Orientation. *Journal of Advertising*, 35(2), 17-31.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, M. C., & Warren, C. (2012). A risk of meaning transfer: Are negative associations more likely to transfer than positive associations? *Social Influence*, 7(3), 172-192.
- Cavanagh, S. (1997). Content analysis: concepts, methods and applications. *Nurse Researcher*, 4(3), 5-16.
- Chiang, K.-P., & Dholokia, R. R. (2003). Factors Driving Consumer Intention to Shop Online: An imperial Investigation. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(1& 2), 177-183.
- Chinn, P. L., & Kramer, M. K. (1999). *Theory and Nursing: A Systematic Approach*. St Louis: Mosby Year Book.
- Choi, S. M., & Rifon, N. J. (2012). It Is a Match: The Impact of Congruence between Celebrity Image and Consumer Ideal Self on Endorsement Effectiveness. *Psychology & Marketing*, 29(9), 639-650.
- Choi, S. M., Lee, W.-N., & Kim, H.-J. (2005). Lessons from the rich and famous: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Celebrity Endorsement in Advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 34(2), 85-98.
- Claudia, I. (2012). Percieved risk when buying online: Evidence from a semi-structured interview. *Economics Series*, 22(2).
- Cole, F. L. (1988). Content analysis: process and application. *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, 2(1), 53-57.

- Dai, B., Forsythe, S., & Kwon, W. S. (2014). The Impact of Online Shopping Experience on Risk Perceptions and Online Purchase Intentions: Does Product Category Matter? *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 15(1), 13-24.
- Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68(March), 1-7.
- Elo, S., & Kyngas, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107-115.
- Erdogan, B. Z., Baker, M. J., & Tagg, S. (2001). Selecting Celebrity Endorsers: The Practitioner's Perspective. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 41(3), 39-48.
- Fleck, N., Korchia, M., & Le Roy, I. (2012). Celebrities in Advertising: Looking for Congruence or Likability? *Psychology and Marketing*, 29(9), 651-662.
- Hong, Y., & Pavlou, P. A. (2014). Product fit uncertainty in online markets: Nature, effects and antecedents. *Information systems research*, 25(2), 328-344.
- Hung, K., Chan, K. W., & Tse, C. H. (2011). Assessing Celebrity Endorsement Effects in China: A Consumer-Celebrity Relational Approach. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 51(4), 608-623.
- Ilicic, J., Baxter, S. M., & Kulczynski, A. (2016). The impact of age on consumer attachment to celebrities and endorsed brand attachment. *Journal of Brand Management*, 23(3), 273-288.
- Janssens, W., & De Pelsmacker, P. (2009). Smells like me - personality and perfume choice. *International Journal of Market Research*, 51(4), 1-13.
- Kacen, J. J., Hess, J. D., & Chiang, D. (2013). Bricks or Clicks? Consumer Attitudes toward Traditional Stores and Online Stores. *Global Economics and Management Review*, 18(1), 12-21.
- Lauri, S., & Kyngas, H. (2005). *Developing Nursing Theories (Finnish: Hoitotieteen Teorian Kehittäminen)*. Vantaa: Werner Söderström, Dark Oy.
- Levin, A., Levin, I., & Heath, C. (2003). Product Category Dependent Consumer Preferences for Online and Offline Shopping Features and Their Influence on Multi-Channel Retail Alliances. *Journal of Electronic Commerce research*, 4(3), 85-93.
- Lim, J.-S., Al-Aali, A., & Heinrichs, J. H. (2015). Impact of satisfaction with e-retailers' touch points on purchase behavior: the moderating effect of search and experience product type. *Marketing Letters*, 26(2), 225-235.
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2). Retrieved August 2, 2019, from <http://qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-e/2-00inhalt-e.htm>
- McCormick, K. (2016). Celebrity endorsements: Influence of a product-endorser match on Millennials attitudes and purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 32, 39-45.
- McCracken, G. (1989). Who Is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 310-321.
- Miciak, A. R., & Shanklin, W. L. (1994). Choosing celebrity endorsers. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 3(3), 50-60.
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2002). *The Content Analysis Guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

- OECD (2017). OECD Digital Economy Outlook 2017, OECD Publishing, Paris, Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264276284-en>
- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and Validation of a Scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3), 39-52.
- Peterson, R. A., Balasubramanian, S., & Bronnenberg, B. J. (1997). Exploring the Implications of the Internet for Consumer Marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(4), 329-346.
- Phau, I., & Poon, S. M. (2000). Factors influencing the types of products and services purchased over the Internet. *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy*, 10(2), 102-113.
- Rossiter, J. R., & Smidts, A. (2012). Print advertising: Celebrity presenters. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(6), 874-879.
- Tantisenepong, N., Gorton, M., & White, J. (2012). Evaluating responses to celebrity endorsements using projective techniques. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 15(1), 57-69.
- Thwaites, D., Lowe, B., Monkhouse, L. L., & Barnes, B. R. (2012). The Impact of Negative Publicity on Celebrity Ad Endorsements. *Psychology and Marketing*, 29(9), 663-673.
- Till, B. D., & Busler, M. (1998). Matching products with endorsers: attractiveness versus expertise. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 15(6), 576 - 586.
- Um, N.-H. (2013). Celebrity Scandal Fallout: How Attribution Style Can Protect the Sponsor. *Psychology & Marketing*, 30(6), 529-541.
- White, D. W., Goddard, L., & Wilbur, N. (2009). The effects of negative information transference in the celebrity endorsement relationship. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 37(4), 322-335.
- Zhang, T., Ge, L., Gou, Q., & Chen, L. (2018). Consumer Showrooming, the Sunk Cost Effect and Online-offline Competition. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 19(1), 55-74.
- Zwilling, M., & Fruchter, G. E. (2013). Matching Product Attributes To Celebrities Who Reinforce the Brand. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 53(4), 391- 410.