

# The Impact of Dispositional versus Situational Attributions on Consumer Responses to Noncelebrity Testimonial Advertising

## 기질적 귀인과 상황적 귀인이 비유명인 증언식 광고에 대한 소비자반응에 미치는 영향

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This research investigates the role of causal inferences about the endorser's motivation - specifically, dispositional versus situational attributions - and their impact on persuasion of noncelebrity testimonial advertisements. Based on the correspondent inference theory and the relevant literature, it is posited that consumers will generate predictable patterns of attributional responses to testimonial messages, which in turn will influence ad and brand evaluations. An experiment with 335 consumer panelists, after a pilot experiment with the college student sample, has been conducted. Results suggest the greater impact of dispositional attributions than situational attributions on persuasion of noncelebrity testimonial messages and general evocations of situational attributions regardless of the levels of endorser credibility and dispositional attributions. On the basis of the findings from this study, theoretical and practical implications are discussed, as are directions for future research.

Key words: attribution, endorsement, involvement, consumer attitude, testimonial advertising

### I. Introduction

Advertisers have frequently used product

endorsements to influence consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions of their brand (Friedman, Termini and Washington 1976; Homer and Kahle 1990; Kamins 1989). It has been a

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common belief that endorsements in advertising can be a powerful tool because they generate immediate trust among consumers, who look for clues to make them confident of their purchase decisions (Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg 2001; Shimp 2002). Consumers tend to believe what others say about a product more than what an advertiser says about its own product. As a result, testimonials by someone else, such as celebrities, experts, and ordinary consumers, are deemed to offer greater credibility than self-proclamations (Clow and Baack 2001).

Although the Korea Advertising Review Board (KARB) in South Korea and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the U.S. treats testimonials and endorsements identically for its regulatory function, it is appropriate to regard testimonials as one specific type of endorsement. As indicated in the American Advertising Federation (AAF)'s platform on advertising ethics and principles, testimonial advertising limits its definitive scope to involving verbal statements spoken by a party other than the sponsoring advertiser that reflect real and honest opinion about or experience with the product being advertised. That is, in testimonial advertising, the endorser is supposed to provide supportive claims based upon his/her belief in and expertise or personal experience with the product. From this point of view, the information value of the endorser's testimonial message may be valid only to the extent that consumers believe the endorsement

to be genuine (Sorum, Grape, and Silvera 2003).

This research investigates how consumers generate causal inferences regarding product endorsements in testimonial advertising and how these inferences affect communication effectiveness. It is important to note that this study is concerned with testimonial messages conveyed by *noncelebrity* endorsers, while prior endorsement research has usually focused on *celebrity* endorsers (e.g., Atkin and Block 1983; Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell 2000; Kahle and Homer 1985; Nam 2001; Ohanian 1991; Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson 1994). Despite growing uses of ordinary consumers as product endorsers and the inherently different characteristics between celebrity and noncelebrity endorsers, very few attempts have been made at the effects of noncelebrity endorsements in advertising and their determinants. Also, the traditional attribution perspective needs to extend its applicative scope by incorporating more empirical results with quality consumer samples and in-depth implications in a changing marketing environment into the theoretical domain. In these respects, the present study is expected to enable findings about consumer processing of endorsement messages and its consequences to make better generalizable over a variety of product endorsement conditions and a wide range of consumers, thereby retesting and revitalizing the theoretical standpoint of causal inferences.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Celebrity versus Noncelebrity Endorsements

Selecting an appropriate endorser for a brand is always an important decision for advertisers. In testimonial advertising, it is a frequent practice to employ celebrities, such as well-known actors, entertainers, and athletes, due to their familiarity and attention-gaining power (Ohanian 1991; Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson 1994). Celebrities' high profiles, popularity, and personalities help brands stand out from the surrounding clutter, thus improving brand image and enhancing the persuasive effects of marketing communications (Atkin and Block 1983; Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg 2001).

Noncelebrities, such as typical consumers, industry professionals, and company employees (including CEOs), are also often chosen as product endorsers in testimonial advertising because of their similarity to the target audience or perceived expertise with the product category advertised (Ohanian 1990; Sorum, Grape, and Silvera 2003). In particular, typical consumer endorsers are expected to induce a heightened sense of familiarity among target consumers, thus having referent power and being deemed as credible (Hass 1981; Sorum, Grape, and Silvera 2003). For this reason, it has not been unusual for ordinary

consumers to appear in testimonial advertising in South Korea, like many other countries, as seen in the cases of TV commercials of Dove and White (a hygienic band brand).

While several studies have attempted to compare the differential effects between celebrity and noncelebrity endorsers, their results are mixed. For instance, Friedman, Termini, and Washington(1976) found no significant differences among four types of endorsers - celebrity, typical consumer, expert, and company president - on believability measures; while a later study by Friedman and Friedman(1979) found that ads using a celebrity endorser would lead to higher believability and more favorable ad and product evaluations than ads using a typical consumer or expert endorser. In any case, noncelebrity endorsements have received relatively scant attention despite its widespread uses in advertising, thus justifying further exploration of the relevant issues.

### 2.2 Dispositional versus Situational Attributions

Noncelebrity endorsements provide the context in which message believability can be affected by consumer perceptions about the endorser's motives to promote the advertised brand. Consumers may suspect whether the endorser truly recommends the brand or acts primarily for money or other external benefits.

If consumers are suspicious of the endorser's motives, such as perceiving the endorser's lack of true belief in the product, they will be less receptive to persuasion (Cronley et al. 1999; Settle and Golden 1974; Smith and Hunt 1978; Sorum, Grape, and Silvera 2003). Attribution perspectives seem to be useful in understanding such consumer perceptions of the endorser's reasons for promoting the brand and their persuasive outcomes.

Attribution theory, developed largely by social psychologists, seeks to describe the cognitive process involved when an individual assigns an observable event to its underlying causes (Forkes 1988; Heider 1958; Kelly 1976; Kelly and Michela 1980; Settle and Golden 1974). According to this theory, causal analyses are inherent in an individual's need to understand social events, such as why another person communicates as he/she does (Heider 1958; Jones and Davis 1965; Kelley 1967). The basic premise of attribution theory is that an observer's response to the actor's behavior depends largely on how the observer views the causes of the behavior (Bemmels 1991; Heider 1958; Kelly 1967). Therefore, a consumer's attributions concerning why the communicator (e.g., endorser) takes a particular position in a message has an important impact on how the consumer responds to the message (Gotlieb and Sarel 1991).

The correspondent inference theory, a specific attribution model, is more suitable to

explain or predict a consumer's attributional process in a communication context than the general attribution theory (e.g., Cronley et al. 1999; Smith and Hunt 1978; Sorum, Grape, and Silvera 2003). This theory, proposed by Jones and Davis(1965), is concerned with particular types of attributions rather than causal inferences in general (Smith and Hunt 1978). Specifically, the theory addresses the situations in which a person naively attributes an event either to actual dispositions of the actor (e.g., real affection toward the product) or to situational constraints (e.g., money).

A *correspondent* inference will be made when a person attributes an event to the actor's dispositions (internal causes). The term "dispositional attribution" has been used to represent this kind of causal inference (Gilbert and Malone 1995; Jones and Davis 1965; Jones and Harris 1967). On the other hand, if a person attributes an event to environmental or situational factors (external causes), his/her causal inference will be *noncorrespondent* because there is no perceived relationship between the event and the actor's actual dispositions (Jones and Davis 1965; Smith and Hunt 1978). This condition points to a "situational attribution". Despite the conceptual opposition of dispositional and situational attributions, they may independently occur as several researchers empirically found (e.g., Bierbrauer 1979; Pilkonis 1977).

## 2.3 Attributional Antecedents

### 2.3.1 Endorser Credibility

Testimonial advertising is the communication context in which dispositional and situational attributions reflect the endorser's motivation for his/her endorsing behavior. Thus, the endorser becomes an attributional object in this type of advertising, suggesting that the evocation of attributions and their direction might be affected by the endorser's characteristics. It is a general expectation that an endorser's credibility will positively affect attitude change and product evaluations (e.g., McGinnies and Ward 1980; McGuire 1985; Ohanian 1991; Sternthal, Dholakia, and Leavitt 1978). One of the underlying questions for this study is whether such endorser credibility also influences the receiver's perception of the endorser's motivation to support the brand.

Source credibility, the term comprising endorser credibility, refers to the receiver's perception that the source is knowledgeable ("expertise") and the source's opinions are unbiased ("trustworthiness") (Dholakia and Sternthal 1977; Gotlieb and Sarel 1991; Ohanian 1990). Credibility seems to be an important property particularly for noncelebrity endorsers because they tend to lack attractiveness and familiarity, in contrast to celebrity endorsers. The probable effect of endorser credibility on causal inferences can be explained by the

discounting principle, which represents an observer's belief about how causes are related (e.g., Kelley 1973). Hunt, Keman, and Mizerski's (1983) study suggests that a credible endorser can discount the receiver's expectation that the endorser has bias in his/her product description. That is, when the endorser is perceived as credible, a receiver of a testimonial message is likely to believe the endorsement is motivated by true confidence in the endorsed brand (dispositional attribution) rather than self-interest such as money and public exposure (situational attribution). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Endorser credibility will positively influence the evocation of dispositional attributions and negatively influence the evocation of situational attributions in the context of noncelebrity testimonial advertising.

### 2.3.2 Product Involvement

Product involvement, which signifies a person's perceived relevance with a particular product class (Zaichkowsky 1985), often becomes a motivational drive of cognitive activities (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo 1986), including generation of causal inferences (e.g., Bemmels 1991; Smith and Hunt 1978; Weiner 1986). However, product involvement may not have a direct impact on what sort of attributions -

dispositional or situational attributions - will occur because involvement itself is unlikely to guide a certain direction of message-relevant thinking (e.g., favorable or unfavorable, believable or unbelievable). Product involvement will instead play a moderating role in the persuasive situations, as many involvement studies have suggested (e.g., Maoz and Tybout 2002; Muehling, Laczniak, and Stoltman 1991; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983). Based on its probable association with endorser credibility in consumers' information processing (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo 1986), product involvement is assumed to influence the direction and strength of the endorser credibility's effect on attribution evocation. Thus, the following hypothesis is drawn:

H2: Product involvement will moderate the effect of endorser credibility on the evocation of dispositional or situational attributions in the context of noncelebrity testimonial advertising.

## 2.4 Attributional Consequences

According to the perspectives and findings from attribution research, causal inferences may affect the perceiver's thought, emotion, expectancy, motivation, attitude, or behavior (e.g., Harvey and Weary 1984; Kelley and Michela 1980; Settle and Gorden 1974; Weiner 2000). In the field of advertising research,

however, the consequences of causal inferences have been discussed and tested in a rather simple domain. Typical consequences (i.e., dependent variables) of attributions examined in advertising research include consumers' attitude toward to the ad and the brand being advertised (e.g., Cronley et al. 1999; Sorum, Grape, and Silvera 2003; Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson 1994). Also, attitude toward the endorser (e.g., Cronley et al. 1999), purchase intention (e.g., Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson 1994), advertiser truthfulness (e.g., Smith and Hunter 1978), and brand confidence and expectancy values (e.g., Settle and Golden 1974) have been tested as the perceptual or attitudinal outcomes. All these attributional consequences universally focus on persuasive effects of the advertising content manipulated.

Since this study is concerned with the persuasive outcomes of dispositional and situational attributions in the testimonial advertising context, the investigative scope of attributional consequences is limited to the primary indicators of advertising effectiveness, which include attitude toward the advertisement (hereafter ad attitude), attitude toward the brand (hereafter brand attitude), and behavioral intention. These three factors have been consistently used as barometers of persuasion in the advertising context (e.g., Goldsmith, Lafferty and Newell 2000; Gill, Grossbart, and Laczniak 1988; Kamins 1989) and well reflect the receiver's attitudes and expectations that

Kelley and Michela(1985) proposed as the major dimensions of attributional consequences.

Dispositional and situational attributions are likely to have directional effects on ad/brand evaluations. Dispositional attributors will positively evaluate the ad and the advertised brand, based on their congruent association between the object (e.g., testimonial messages) and what the object is supposed to be (e.g., testimonial messages must reflect the endorser's real experience with and/or belief in the advertised brand). On the other hand, situational attributors will generate unfavorable evaluations about the ad and the brand, because their attribution of the endorsing behavior to self-motivations will lessen the probability that they trust the testimonial messages. This assumption seems to be particularly plausible in the advertising environment where a noncelebrity endorser speaks for a brand to give consumers the impression of truthful recommendations - compared to celebrity endorsements by which the endorser's well-known image, authority, and attractiveness is apt to dilute the influence of perceived endorser motivations. Hence, the subsequent hypotheses are drawn as follows:

H3: Dispositional and situational attributions will have significant and differential effects on persuasion in the context of noncelebrity testimonial advertising.

Specifically,

H3-a: Dispositional attributions will positively influence attitude toward the ad, whereas situational attributions will negatively influence attitude toward the ad.

H3-b: Dispositional attributions will positively influence attitude toward the brand, whereas situational attributions will negatively influence attitude toward the brand.

H3-c: Dispositional attributions will positively influence behavioral intention, whereas situational attributions will negatively influence behavioral intention.

### III. Method

#### 3.1 Pretests

To construct a valid set of experimental instruments, a series of pretests were conducted with college student samples (68-72 respondents for each test) in the U.S. Based on results from three pretests, the researchers determined product class (athletic shoes), endorser's occupation (aerobics instructor for high endorser credibility, sales representative for low endorser credibility), and fictitious brand name (Stellar) for stimulus advertisements so that treatment variables could be successfully manipulated and a possible confounding effect

of brand name preference on the attitudinal measures could be minimized. Particularly, to determine distinguished levels of endorser credibility, one of the pretests surveyed the perceived expertise and trustworthiness over 30 occupations, following prior studies that had typically differentiated the endorser's occupation for source credibility manipulation (e.g., Gotlieb and Sarel 1991; Homer and Kahle 1990).

### 3.2 Experimental Design and Stimuli

The main experiment employed a 2 (high and low endorser credibility) x 3 (high, moderate, and low product involvement) between-subject factorial design. Endorser credibility was manipulated on two treatment conditions (high vs. low), while the variable was also controlled in one experimental group. On the other hand, product involvement was not manipulated and instead was measured on multi-item scales and then split into the different groups based on their statistical values. It is because the individual variance on this factor was expected to be considerable when participants would be drawn from the consumer panelists whose age and lifestyle are likely to vary to a greater extent than those of the college student sample. Basic equivalencies over the multiple experimental cells were successfully achieved ( $\chi^2=3.697$ ,  $p=.449$ ).

The experimental stimuli were full-color, full-page, magazine-style advertisements that

employed a typical testimonial approach with a single endorser. For the noncelebrity endorser in the stimulus advertisements, a fictitious female character named Lisa Jones was created. For the manipulation or control of endorser credibility, the occupational label of the endorser (i.e., aerobics instructor, sales representative, and no occupational label) was differentiated over the experimental groups. However, the endorser's image, overall layout, and message frame were held consistent for the three different advertisements in order to prevent the potential confounding effect of any uncontrolled variables.

### 3.3 Participants and Procedure

Using a consumer panel sample is a critical component of the main experiment. It was expected that the sample drawn from a heterogeneous group of consumers, who vary by age, gender, and occupation, would enhance external validity of the findings. A random stratified sample of 1500 online consumer panelists were selected from the Zoomerang database, a division of Market Tool Inc., which possesses over 2 million registered adult members of the nationwide consumer panel in the U.S.. The initial sample comprised 1250 males and 1250 females; and 1125 panelists aged under 45 (75%) and 375 panelists aged over 45 (25%). These ratios are compatible with those reported in the Simmons consumer



data(2004) concerning the purchase of athletic shoes in the last 12 months (male:female = 45:55; Under 45:Over 45=79:21). Those initial mail recipients also varied in their race, occupation, educational level, household income, and state in which they currently reside. With an effort to make such demographic characteristics equivalent over the groups, each potential participant was randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions on the factor of endorser credibility (i.e., initial 500 panelists per group): a high endorser credibility condition

a low endorser credibility condition, and a *controlled* endorser credibility condition.

A week after the questionnaire (including a stimulus advertisement) in the electronic file had been sent out to the selected consumer panelists, a total of 356 responses were collected (response rate: 23.7%). However, responses contrary to the treatment of endorser credibility were excluded from the final data. After this filtering process, 335 participants were determined as the final sample for statistical inference (116 for the high endorser

<Table 1> Demographic Profiles of the Sample

Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	168	50.1
Female	167	49.9
Age Group		
18 - 24	26	7.8
25 - 34	109	32.5
35 - 44	124	37.0
45 - 54	31	9.3
55 - 64	31	9.3
Over 65	14	4.2
Occupation		
College Student	11	3.3
Homemaker	39	11.6
Skilled Worker	22	6.6
Sales	18	5.4
Professional	101	30.1
Management	49	14.6
Self-employed	33	9.9
Unemployed	13	3.9
Other	49	14.6
Total	335	100.0

credibility group, 112 for the low endorser credibility group, and 107 for the control group). <Table 1> shows the demographic profiles of the experimental subjects. The equivalence over the three experimental groups by gender and age was ensured through two Chi-square tests (gender:  $\chi^2=.116$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.944$ ; age:  $\chi^2=3.647$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p=.962$ ).

### 3.4 Dependent Measures

For the manipulation check and the mediation tests of attributions, endorser credibility was measured using 10-item, seven-point, semantic differential scale proposed by Ohanian(1990). The scale was anchored by "expert/not an expert," "experienced-inexperienced," "knowledgeable-unknowledgeable," "trustworthy/untrustworthy," "honest/ dishonest," etc., and found to be internally reliable ( $\alpha=.967$ ). Product involvement was measured on Zaichkowsky's (1994) revised personal involvement inventory, which consists of 10-item, seven-point, semantic differential scale anchored by "important/unimportant," "relevant/ irrelevant," "appealing/unappealing," "needed/not needed," and so on.

To measure dispositional and situational attributions, participants were asked to rate how much they agree or disagree with each of the listed causes of the endorsement. Although people make causal inferences naively by natural activation of attributional thinking (Heider 1958), such attribution measurements

under the forced condition was necessary to evoke the participants' dormant inferential activity and thereby to ensure a sufficient number of attribution responses for statistical analyses. Dispositional and situational attributions were measured on separate rating scales because, as Pilkonis(1977) found, these two kinds of attributions can independently occur although they are conceptually inverse. The participants thus evaluated their level of agreement or disagreement on all the statements regarding the endorser (Lisa Jones)'s motives to endorse the brand: for the measurement of dispositional attributions, "to convey her real belief in the brand," "to express her feeling about the brand based on her actual experience," and "to speak about brand benefits based on her knowledge about the product"; and for the measurement of situational attributions, "to earn money," "to become better known," and "to receive non-monetary compensation (e.g., free products)."

Ad attitude and brand attitude were evaluated with 10 seven-point semantic differential items each, which were adapted and slightly modified from MacKenzie and Lutz(1989)'s attitude study. The scale was anchored by "good/bad (in general)," "pleasant/unpleasant," "interesting/boring," "favorable/unfavorable," "useful/useless," "convincing/unconvincing," etc., and was also internally reliable for both attitudes ( $\alpha=.958$  for ad attitude;  $\alpha=.967$  for brand attitude). Behavioral intention, a

more inclusive measure than purchase intention, was measured on six descriptive items with a seven-point Likert scale. They included "the next time I purchase athletic shoes, I will buy *Stellar*," "I will consider using *Stellar*," "if a special sale is offered, I will buy *Stellar*," "I will search for more information about *Stellar*." A reliability test confirmed that these items were also internally consistent ( $\alpha = .919$ ).

## IV. Results

### 4.1 Manipulation Check

A one-way ANOVA test followed by LSD post-hoc tests confirmed statistically significant differences among the three groups - high versus low endorser credibility groups plus a control group - in the mean values of perceived (not manipulated) endorser credibility composite scores ( $F_{(2,334)} = 23.566$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A comparative order of the mean values was also consistent with the intended treatment and control of the endorser credibility factor ( $M_{\text{high}} = 4.599$ ;  $M_{\text{low}} = 3.724$ ;  $M_{\text{control}} = 4.117$ ). Hence, it was verified that both manipulation and control of endorser credibility were successfully implemented.

### 4.2 Basic Comparisons

A paired samples t-test was conducted to find which type of attributions were greater in an individual's processing of testimonial messages. According to the results, situational attributions were more greatly evoked than dispositional attributions ( $M_{\text{dispositional}} = 3.966$ ;  $M_{\text{situational}} = 4.879$ ;  $p < .001$ ). In addition, the two types of attributions were found to be not correlated to each other ( $r = .006$ ,  $p = .911$ ). Although this finding is inconsistent with the conceptual opposition of dispositional and situational attributions, such a mutual exclusiveness justifies separate measurements of each type of attributions on the independently developed scales.

### 4.3 Attributional Antecedents (H1 and H2)

A MANCOVA was used to test the first two hypotheses, controlling the potential effects of gender and age on dependent variables. As shown in <Table 2>, endorser credibility positively and significantly affected the evocation of dispositional attributions, but not that of situational attributions (dispositional:  $F = 8.400$ ,  $p = .000$ ; situational:  $F = 2.107$ ,  $p = .123$ ). Therefore, H1 was partly supported as the result confirmed a significant treatment effect of endorser credibility on only dispositional attributions.

The analysis, however, found no significant interaction effect between endorser credibility and product involvement for both types of attributions (dispositional:  $F=8.22$ ,  $p=.512$ ; situational:  $F=.393$ ,  $p=.814$ ). Thus, H2 that posited the moderating effect of product involvement on endorser-generated attributions was not supported. Instead, it was revealed that product involvement had significant main effects on the evocation of dispositional attributions (dispositional:  $F=8.330$ ,  $p=.000$ ; situational:  $F=1.772$ ,  $p=.172$ ). All these findings were assured by additional statistical tests using one-way ANOVA (including a control group on endorser credibility).

#### 4.4 Attributional Consequences (H3)

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the differential effects of dispositional and situational attributions on

ad/brand evaluations. The results indicate that all the dependent variables were positively and significantly influenced by both types of attributions. Specifically, as presented in <Table 3>, attributional effects were significant for ad attitude, brand attitude, and behavioral intention, accounting for 22.2%, 28.2 %, and 29.8% of total variance respectively. Another notable finding is that dispositional attributions had much greater impact than situational attributions on all three dependent variables ( $\beta_{dis}=.452$ ,  $\beta_{sit}=.130$  for ad attitude;  $\beta_{dis}=.497$ ,  $\beta_{sit}=.183$  for brand attitude;  $\beta_{dis}=.536$ ;  $\beta_{sit}=.100$  for behavioral intention).

Although such positive impacts of dispositional attributions are consistent with the theory-based expectation, it is surprising that all directions of situational attribution effects are also positive, which is contrary to the hypothesized assumptions. Thus, all three parts of H3 are partly supported, as the effects of

<Table 2> Effects of Endorser Credibility and Product Involvement on Attributions (Results of MANCOVA)

Variable	SS	df	MS	F-value	Sig.
Endorser Credibility (EC)					
<i>Dispositional</i>	22.064	2	11.032	8.400	.000
<i>Situational</i>	3.663	2	1.831	2.107	.123
Product Involvement (PI)					
<i>Dispositional</i>	21.880	2	10.940	8.330	.000
<i>Situational</i>	3.081	2	1.540	1.772	.172
EC x PI (Interaction Effect)					
<i>Dispositional</i>	4.319	4	1.080	.822	.512
<i>Situational</i>	1.366	4	.341	.393	.814

\* Covariate: Gender, Age

〈Table 3〉 Effects of Dispositional and Situational Attributions on Ad/Brand Evaluations  
(Results of multiple regression analyses)

Variable	B	SE	Beta	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Ad Attitude						
<i>Dispositional</i>	.393	.042	.452	.000	.222	.217
<i>Situational</i>	.162	.060	.130	.008		
Brand Attitude						
<i>Dispositional</i>	.367	.034	.497	.000	.282	.277
<i>Situational</i>	.195	.049	.183	.000		
Behavioral Intention						
<i>Dispositional</i>	.532	.046	.536	.000	.298	.294
<i>Situational</i>	.143	.066	.100	.030		

only dispositional attributions are coherent with those implied in the proposed hypotheses in their direction.

## V. Discussion

### 5.1 Conclusions and Implications

A primary purpose of this study was to examine the role of endorser-generated attributions in persuasive effects of noncelebrity testimonial advertising. Based on correspondent inference theory and several prior findings, dispositional and situational attributions were separately assessed in terms of their antecedents and consequences. Most results from this research are noteworthy.

First, our experiment found differential effects of endorser credibility on an individual's level of dispositional and situational attributions.

That is, dispositional attributions were more likely evoked when an endorser's credibility is higher; however, endorser credibility did not significantly influence situational attributions. These findings indicate that endorser credibility determines the likelihood of a perceptual congruence between the testimonial message and its motivational force (i.e., the probability of evoking dispositional attributions), while situational constraints surrounding the product endorsement, such as the endorser's desire to make money and/or self-image publicity, are commonly attributed as the endorser's behavioral motives regardless of the level of credibility he/she has.

Such endorser credibility effects on attributions can be inferred from the finding that dispositional and situational attributions are unlikely to occur interdependently, which was suggested by an extremely low correlation between them ( $r=.006$ ). In other words, a

higher level of dispositional attributions is not necessarily associated with a lower level of situational attributions; and vice versa. An individual may thus attribute the endorser's motivation to both brand confidence and money-making. This result suggests the occurrence of "correspondence bias," which refers to the tendency to draw dispositional attributions even when the perceiver recognizes any situational constraint(s) on the actor's behavior (Gilbert and Malone 1995), in the testimonial advertising context.

It is another important finding in relation to the point above that consumers tend to have a higher level of situational attributions than dispositional attributions when they are exposed to testimonial advertising. Because most adult consumers are sophisticated receivers of advertising, it is likely that they normally and potentially perceive that people will endorse a particular brand for self-interested motives rather than because of their true belief in the brand. From our experimental study, we might conclude that this perceptual propensity would seldom change even though the endorser's credibility is high and even though dispositional motivations for the endorsement are highly attributed.

Interestingly, this study found significant and positive main effects of product involvement on both dispositional and situational attributions. The involvement literature suggests that a highly involved person (whatever the object of

involvement is a product class or an advertisement) is more likely to engage in message-relevant cognitive activities than a less involved person (e.g., Michael 1994; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983). Thus, involvement may work as a drive to evoke attributional thinking when consumers see an advertisement. The reason why the level of involvement could determine the strength of each dispositional and situational attributions might be also inferred from no significant interrelation between the two types of attributions. That is, it can be reasonably assumed that when people are highly involved in a certain product class, they will make a strong causal inference about the endorser's motivation no matter whether the attributional direction is dispositional or situational.

Noticeably, dispositional attributions appeared to have a greater impact on ad/brand evaluations than situational attributions. As reported earlier, all the values of dispositional attributions were consistently much higher than those of situational attributions for ad attitude, brand attitude, and behavioral intention although the variation of a situational attribution measure was smaller than that of a dispositional attribution measure. Based on this result, it is concluded that dispositional attributions are likely to be the better predictor of testimonial advertising effects than situational attributions.

It is another interesting finding that, like

dispositional attributions, the level of situational attributions positively influenced all three dependent variables. While the corresponding hypotheses about the situational attribution effects were rejected by those results, it is questionable how situational attributions could have positive (also statistically significant) impacts on the multiple indicators of persuasion because consumers are unlikely to have positive attitude and behavioral intention when they attribute the endorsement motivation to situational factors. To understand this unexpected result, it should be noted that such positive effects of situational attributions were significant when this attribution factor operated in conjunction with dispositional attributions in each regression model. Additional statistical tests using one-way ANOVA, which examined the independent effects of situational attributions, did not support the same impacts on the three dependent variables in a positive direction. These findings suggest that situational attributions can predict persuasive effects only when they are conjoint with predictive capacity of dispositional attributions (i.e., when both attribution factors are regressed in the equation models for prediction).

The results above on the effect of situational attributions suggest a new theoretical proposition regarding a positive association between attribution strength (in combination of dispositional and situational attributions) and attitude. That is, the more strongly an individual attributes

the endorser's behavior, the more positive attitude toward the message and the message sponsor (i.e., brand or advertiser) the individual is likely to have. This proposition, however, will not be simply addressed by a direct relation between attribution strength and attitude; instead, it seems appropriate to assume that one or more moderating factors, which were untested in this study, might influence their causal link. Nevertheless, the highly positive effects of dispositional attributions on ad/brand attitude and behavioral intention clearly support a theoretically and empirically drawn implication with regard to the role of correspondent inferences.

Results from the present study also provide managerial implications for advertising practice. Above all, a strong impact of dispositional attributions on the effectiveness of noncelebrity testimonial advertising puts forward the need to refine advertising techniques to enhance consumer belief that the endorser is promoting the brand based on his/her true opinion and experience. Findings suggest that consumers generally perceive situational factors surrounding the endorsement; however, such perceptions significantly affect neither making dispositional attributions nor ad/brand evaluations. Thus, advertising practitioners need to consider how they can stimulate their target consumers to have dispositional attributions when they select an endorser and build a message strategy.

Findings about endorser credibility effects

indicate that an endorser in testimonial advertising should be credible to maximize persuasive effects. However, it may be somewhat complex to determine what makes an endorser "credible" because sub-dimensions of endorser credibility - expertise and trustworthiness - are not always internally consistent. For example, a peer endorser who is perceived as trustworthy may lack expertise with the product class he/she is endorsing, while the opposite case is possible for a CEO or expert endorser. Unless an ideal selection of an endorser with high expertise and high trustworthiness is easy to fulfill, advertising practitioners would need to estimate which property of the endorser will be more important in promoting their brand: e.g., should be the endorser perceived as knowledgeable? Or is it more crucial to be perceived as honest? To do so, they also have to take into account the prospective endorser's visual image, occupational background, and perceived fit with the product class so that their advertisement can highly evoke dispositional attributions, which likely lead to persuasion on the part of target consumers.

Lastly, many findings and indications from the present study bring up the issue of generalizability over the contexts of both celebrity and noncelebrity endorsements. This is because they differ in the ways advertising messages are processed and achieve persuasion despite their similar format in message

presentation. For example, consumers may commonly form positive attitude toward the brand endorsed by a celebrity they like without processing testimonial messages spoken by the celebrity; but this is unlikely to be an ordinary case for noncelebrity testimonial advertising. Although this study does not provide comparative data regarding celebrity versus noncelebrity endorsement effects, such predictable differences strongly suggest the need for advertising practitioners to develop different criteria in selecting and presenting their product endorsers for each approach of celebrity and noncelebrity endorsements.

## 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

Despite many significant findings and implications, several limitations are involved in this research. First, consumer attributions about the endorsement were measured on a *forced* condition. Participants were asked to evaluate statements regarding particular motives for the endorsement; thus, attributional thinking of some participants must have been not voluntarily activated and, for this reason, the situation in which no attributions are evoked in processing advertising messages was not considered and tested in this research. Despite its purposes of attaining an acceptable level of statistical power and encouraging participants to bring out their latent attributional thoughts, this condition might damage the construct



validity of the attribution measurements. Second, this research conducted the experiments using only one advertising medium. Magazines, the medium in which our stimulus advertisements were assumed to be shown, differ from other types of advertising media in their capability for information and image delivery, as well as consumer habits with the medium. Therefore, the results from this study should be cautiously projected to the situations in which testimonial advertising appears in different media outlets, such as television, radio, and the Internet.

The present study suggests several directions for future research. Although cognitive processing of advertising messages is not always requisite for persuasion (e.g., Moran 1990), a still considerable amount of advertisements seem to be created with the hope that consumers actively read or view and think about the central message therein. If consumers' attributional thoughts can significantly influence the persuasive effects of testimonial messages (as empirical findings from this research suggests), the ongoing importance of this perceptual activity cannot be ignored in future advertising research. Also, comparative assessments of celebrity versus noncelebrity endorsement effects will help both advertising scholars and practitioners better understand similar or different aspects of these two major streams of endorsement strategies. Replicate studies using the consumer sample of other countries including South Korea must be

another valuable domain for further research because, by doing so, any cultural differences with regard to the issues discussed in this study can be practically assessed. Finally, it is recommended for future research to establish more reliable and valid scales to measure attribution-related variables and then to apply those scales to evaluating the test-retest reliability of our results. All these efforts will make us confident of the current and future findings on the role of consumer attributions in the marketing communication context.

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# 기질적 귀인과 상황적 귀인이 비유명인 증언식 광고에 대한 소비자반응에 미치는 영향

한 규 훈\*

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## 국문요약

본 연구는 비유명인모델이 출연하는 증언식 광고에 있어서 모델의 제품보증 동기에 대한 소비자의 귀인(attribution)이 그들의 광고태도, 브랜드태도, 그리고 행동적 의도에 어떤 영향을 미치는지 알아보고자 하였다. 상응추론이론 및 선행연구의 결과에 기초해서 비유명인모델의 제품보증 메시지에 대해 소비자가 가지는 동기 추론의 유형을 기질적 귀인(모델의 신념이나 경험에 기초한 증언)과 상황적 귀인(금전적 보상이나 유명세를 목적으로 한 증언)으로 나누고, 각 귀인의 형태는 상호 대별되는 광고효과를 낳을 것이라 예측하였다. 또한, 기질적 귀인이나 상황적 귀인을 발생시키고 그 정도에 영향을 미치는 잠재요인으로서 정보원 신뢰도와 제품관여도를 설정하여 그 유효성을 검증하고자 하였다. 대학생 표본을 대상으로 한 예비조사 이후 다양한 연령대의 소비자 335명을 모집하여 본실험을 실시한 결과, 비유명인의 제품보증 상황에서도 정보원 신뢰도의 수준에 상관없이 상황적 귀인의 발생이 보편적인 것으로 나타났다. 또한, 가설을 통해 예측한 것과는 달리 상황적 귀인이 부정적 광고효과를 유발하지 않는 것으로 드러났으나, 기질적 귀인이 상황적 귀인보다 효과변인에 대해서는 훨씬 더 큰 영향력을 미친다는 사실도 발견되었다. 본 연구를 통한 주요한 결과에 근거하여 이론적·실무적 시사점을 논하고 후속연구에 대한 방향성을 제시하였다.

핵심개념: 귀인, 제품보증, 관여도, 소비자태도, 증언식광고

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