EFFECTS OF SUSCEPTIBILITY TO NORMATIVE INFLUENCE AND TYPE OF TESTIMONIAL ON ATTITUDES TOWARD PRINT ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT: In two experiments, we show how a consumer's susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) offers useful insights into the effectiveness of two types of testimonials: a typical person endorsement (Study 1) and a celebrity endorsement (Study 2). Specifically, we suggest that two variables moderate testimonial effects—SNI and product attribute information. Results show that in forming their evaluations, high-SNI consumers place a greater emphasis on the testimonial than on the attribute information. In contrast, low-SNI consumers are more influenced by attribute information. A mediation analysis shows that advertising attitudes for high-SNI consumers are mediated by testimonial thoughts, whereas the attitudes for low-SNI consumers are mediated by their attribute thoughts. Theoretical and managerial implications are presented.

Testimonials are a popular advertising tactic. For example, in a content analysis of 95 green television ads, Iyer and Banerjee (1994) found that testimonials represented the third most common advertising tactic (15% of ads), after emphasizing corporate responsibility (37%) and emotional appeals (27%). Similarly, in a content analysis of 659 ads from the United States, France, and Taiwan, Zandpour, Chang, and Catalano (1992) found that testimonials were widely used internationally. As expressed in *Advertising Age,* "Other creative tactics and techniques change with the fashions of the day, but the testimonial is such a workhorse selling tool that it never goes out of style" (2001, p. 10). Likewise, Shimp, Wood, and Smarandescu state that consumer goods marketers "often feature testimonials as the centerpiece of their advertising or promotions efforts" (2005, p. 94). Yet despite this popularity, and the enthusiasm with which articles in the popular press advocate the use of testimonials (e.g., Bly 2005; Buck 2005; Hibbard 2003; Leduc 2005), some important gaps exist in our understanding of how consumers respond to the *typical person* testimonial ("TP testimonial"), which is the focus of this research. TP testimonials involve an unknown person, who is presumably representative of the target market, endorsing the product in an advertisement. Thus, they differ from celebrity endorsements or expert endorsements (e.g., a doctor endorsing a medical product).

While previous research on TP testimonials has found interesting insights regarding, for example, the moderating effects of product type (e.g., Feick and Higie 1992; Friedman and Friedman 1979; Friedman, Termini, and Washington 1976), endorser type (e.g., Friedman and Friedman 1979; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983), endorser physical attractiveness (e.g., Patzer 1983), or target–endorser similarity (e.g., Feick and Higie 1992; Price, Feick, and Higie 1989), there has been little research on how consumer psychological traits influence testimonial effectiveness. This is surprising given previous advertising research, which has found useful insights from considering such traits (e.g., Day and Stafford 1997; Martin, Lang, and Wong 2004; Polyorat and Alden 2005).

In this research, we explore how susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) affects a consumer's attitudes when exposed to a testimonial. SNI reflects the readiness to conform to others' expectations regarding purchases, and the need to identify with others, or enhance one's image by acquiring products or brands (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). Recent research suggests that SNI can have a significant effect on consumer efforts at impression management. For instance, high-SNI consumers have been found to seek products with socially visible benefits (Batra, Homer, and Kahle 2001), to actively avoid social disapproval (Wooten and Reed 2004), and to be

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less skeptical of advertising (Mangleburg and Bristol 1998). A common theme of this research is that high-SNI consumers are more heavily influenced by social approval. Given that TP testimonials present how other consumers in a target market positively view a product, it would appear useful to explore how SNI affects testimonial advertising effectiveness.

To this end, we extend previous research on testimonials by investigating how a consumer's level of SNI influences his or her attitudes in response to print ads featuring a testimonial and product attribute information. We show that high-SNI consumers exhibit more favorable attitudes when exposed to an ad that features a testimonial strongly endorsing the style of the product. In contrast, low-SNI consumers react more favorably to ads based on functional product attribute information. We then investigate the process that underlies these attitudinal effects by examining consumer cognitive responses. These findings suggest that high-SNI and low-SNI consumers focus on different parts of an advertisement, and it is the valence of this focus that mediates their attitudes. Thus, this research highlights the importance of SNI when considering the use of testimonials. The following sections outline relevant literature. Next, the hypotheses, method, and results will be presented. Finally, the findings will be discussed and future research directions presented.

BACKGROUND

Testimonials in Advertising

Research suggests that TP testimonials are used as a peripheral cue (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983), where endorser source credibility influences message persuasion. Source credibility research typically addresses one or more of the two dimensions of source credibility, namely, expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley 1953). Overall, this research suggests that a highly credible endorser is more persuasive than a less credible endorser when considered in terms of main effects (see Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia 1978 for a review). From this perspective, a testimonial from a consumer with product experience would be more persuasive than a consumer with no product experience (e.g., Wu and Shaffer 1987). In addition, a third source credibility dimension that has proved useful to studying TP testimonials is source–receiver similarity (Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia 1978). Research indicates that consumers are more influenced by a testimonial from an endorser who is viewed as similar to themselves (e.g., Feick and Higie 1992).

In general, these studies suggest that TP testimonials offer informational influence where the endorser is an expert and similar to the target consumer. Informational influence is a form of interpersonal influence where a person accepts information from another person as a form of evidence (Burnkrant

and Cousineau 1975). For example, Price, Feick, and Higie (1989) show that similar endorsers have more informational influence than dissimilar endorsers. Likewise, Feick and Higie (1992) show that for a service where people vary widely in their preferences and tastes, a similar endorser results in more favorable attitude toward the ad and purchase intentions than does a dissimilar endorser.

Yet it seems plausible that if consumers can be influenced by similar others from an informational standpoint, endorsers may also exert normative influence, particularly for consumers who are concerned with social approval. Indeed, source credibility research has found endorser effects for individual differences such as authoritarianism, where people high on this trait are more persuaded by a highly credible source (see Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia 1978 for a review). This suggests that individual differences offer insights into endorser effects. Thus, in summary, prior research suggests that testimonial effectiveness is derived from informational influence as determined by dimensions such as perceived similarity. We build on these insights by exploring differences in how susceptible people are to social influence, and how this susceptibility (or lack of it) affects the manner in which they evaluate and process ads containing testimonial and product attribute information. We control for expertise and similarity, and focus on the manner in which the susceptibility to normative influence can affect consumers. We now turn to normative influence.

Susceptibility to Normative Influence

Normative influence is defined as the social influence to conform to the expectations of another person or group (Burnkrant and Cousineau 1975). According to reference group theory, normative influence can be subdivided into value-expressive influence and utilitarian influence (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Bearden, Netemyer, and Teel 1989; Park and Lessig 1977). Value-expressive influence relates to an individual's motivation to enhance or maintain his or her self-concept. Here, an individual may aspire to a referent group as a means of ego enhancement or as a means of personal expression (Park and Lessig 1977). This desire to associate with a reference group results in the group norms influencing the individual. Utilitarian influence involves conformity based on perceived rewards and punishments, which relate to group membership (Park and Lessig 1977).

Bearden, Netemyer, and Teel (1989) developed a scale that measured susceptibility to interpersonal influence that comprised two dimensions: normative and informational (i.e., the tendency to learn about the product by, for example, observing others). Our research focuses on the normative dimension that comprises both value-expressive and utilitarian reference group influence, based on results that suggest that these two types of influence are not empirically distinct in tests

of discriminant validity (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). As such, this eight-item SNI scale involves the influence of others' expectations and a motivation for social approval. This desire for social approval is reflected in the wording of the SNI scale items (e.g., "When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of").

Research has revealed that high-SNI consumers seek products with socially visible benefits, such as style (Batra, Homer, and Kahle 2001), presumably to gain or maintain in-group acceptance. Batra, Homer, and Kahle (2001) demonstrated that SNI was associated with values of wanting to be well-respected and feeling a sense of belonging. Thus, it seems reasonable that high-SNI individuals buy products that they believe their desired in-group approves of. Such product ownership would serve a social signaling (Batra et al. 2000) function, allowing for possible status and self-esteem enhancement. In addition, Wooten and Reed (2004) show that high-SNI individuals tend to avoid presenting themselves in a way that may result in social disapproval. On the other hand, low-SNI individuals are presumably less concerned about what other people think. Accordingly, high-SNI individuals may pay attention to social cues in advertising, not only to attain a product with positive social benefits, but also to avoid negative social outcomes from choosing the wrong brand. Furthermore, research by Mangleburg and Bristol (1998) shows that high-SNI people tend to be less skeptical of advertising as a medium for gathering information. By focusing on SNI, we address what has been highlighted as a surprising lack of attention to SNI in marketing, despite its potential usefulness (Wooten and Reed 2004).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Effects of SNI, Testimonial Quality, and Attribute Quality on Attitudes

The objective of this research is to investigate how participants of differing SNI levels respond to advertising that uses testimonial and attribute information of differing quality. Since high-SNI participants are motivated to buy the same products as other in-group members (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989)—especially products that offer conspicuous benefits, such as style (Batra et al. 2000)—and are motivated to avoid in-group disapproval (Wooten and Reed 2004), they should prefer the strong testimonial ad where an in-group member strongly endorses the product's style. This testimonial suggests a social signaling benefit (Batra et al. 2000) and social approval, and should be preferred to the weaker testimonial where this benefit is presented in a more muted fashion. In contrast, since low-SNI participants are less motivated by a need to conform to in-group expectations, the functional product attribute information rather than the testimonial should influence their evaluations. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1a: There will be a significant interaction between SNI and testimonial quality across dependent measures. Specifically, for high-SNI participants, when compared to an ad with a weaker testimonial, strong testimonial quality will lead to more favorable attitudes toward the ad (A_{ad}), attitudes toward the brand (A_b), and purchase intentions (PI). For low-SNI participants, there will be no difference between strong testimonials and weak testimonials for A_{ad}, A_b, and PI.

H1b: There will be a significant interaction between SNI and attribute quality across dependent measures. Specifically, for low-SNI participants, when compared to an ad with a weaker attribute quality, strong attribute quality will lead to more favorable attitudes toward the ad (A_{ad}), attitudes toward the brand (A_b), and purchase intentions (PI). For high-SNI participants, there will be no difference between strong attribute ads and weak attribute ads for A_{ad}, A_b, and PI.

Exploring the Process

We studied process issues using valenced cognitive responses. Valenced cognitions provide a measure of the affective tone of a person's thinking, which is relevant since research has shown the importance of affective cognitions on A_{ad} (Batra and Ray 1986; Homer 2006). We expect high-SNI participants to place a greater emphasis on the testimonial than on the functional product attribute information. This should be reflected in a greater number of thoughts being generated about the testimonial, and judgments of testimonial quality being directly associated with these testimonial thoughts. Specifically, high-SNI participants are expected to elaborate on the testimonial, and thus produce more thoughts about the testimonial. Furthermore, these thoughts should be more positive in valence for the stronger testimonial than for the weaker testimonial. In contrast, low-SNI participants should focus on the attribute information, which should result in attribute thoughts being directly related to attitudes. These thoughts should be more positive for the strong attribute information. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H2a: For high-SNI participants, the valence of testimonial thoughts acts as a mediator between the effect of testimonial quality on attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), brand attitudes (A_b), and purchase intentions (PI). Specifically, testimonial quality should be positively associated with testimonial thoughts, which should be positively associated with A_{ad}. A_{ad}, in turn, should be positively associated with A_b, and A_b should be positively associated with PI.

H2b: For low-SNI participants, the valence of attribute thoughts acts as a mediator between the effect of attribute quality on attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), brand attitudes (A_b), and purchase intentions (PI). Specifically, attribute quality should be positively associated with attribute thoughts, which

should be positively associated with A_{ad}. A_{ad}, *in turn, should be positively associated with* A_b, *and* A_b *should be positively associated with* PI.

<center>STUDY 1</center>

Research Design

The design used is a 2 (SNI: high, low) × 2 (testimonial quality: strong, weak) × 2 (attribute quality: strong, weak) between-subjects design.

Participants and Procedure

A total of 144 undergraduate students from a leading German university took part in the study.[1] Following Wooten and Reed (2004), we conducted the study as part of a series of seemingly unrelated tasks. We also used two researchers who introduced the studies as separate projects. The first study measured SNI and questions for unrelated topics (e.g., food consumption habits). For the study introduced by the second researcher, participants read the advertisement and completed a questionnaire. Participants were thanked and debriefed in a follow-up session. An open-ended question showed no evidence of experimental demand effect bias.

Product Criteria

We chose a digital camera as the product for the advertisement based on five criteria:

1. *Knowledge:* Participants had to be familiar enough with the product to make sense of the ad and avoid nonsense responses.
2. *Attributes:* The product had to have a series of attributes in order to test for attribute quality.
3. *Commercial success:* Digital cameras represent a relevant product given their global success. For example, global digital camera sales are expected to grow to $31 billion in 2009 (Raymond 2004). Indeed, in 2003, digital-camera unit sales passed film cameras for the first time (Bulik 2004).
4. *Equal gender relevance:* Pretesting showed that digital cameras did not differ in product-involvement levels between males and females.
5. *Public luxury:* Since high-SNI consumers are expected to be influenced in relation to socially visible products (Batra, Homer, and Kahle 2001), we sought a product that was a public luxury where reference group influence can be strong (Bearden and Etzel 1982).

To minimize brand familiarity effects, we used the fictitious brand name "Rymtec."

Independent Variables

Testimonial quality was manipulated using a statement by the fictitious male student, Urs Häusler (pretesting showed that this name was considered realistic by students at the university). The strong testimonial featured a strong endorsement of the style of the camera, whereas the weak endorsement was positive, but less emphatic. The following statements illustrate how this was achieved for the strong testimonial (weaker testimonial in parentheses): "I was offered the chance to test a Rymtec digital camera. It's hot (good). I compared it to four digital cameras that are on the market right now, and it is my most preferred choice (an okay choice) for style." Testing the camera was mentioned since testimonials require endorsers to have firsthand product experience (Shimp, Wood, and Smarandescu 2005). The Appendix shows an example of the ad stimuli.

In the interests of realism, we used guidelines suggested in the popular press for the crafting of testimonials: (1) presenting a consumer who is a member of the target consumer's group, in this case, a university student (e.g., Rieck 2000); (2) using a person's full name rather than simply his or her initials (Bly 2005; Buck 2005); and (3) communicating a specific benefit—in our case, perceived style—rather than using a generic superlative (Lewis 1995; Rieck 2000). Advertisements and questionnaires were translated from English into German by one of the authors who is fluent in both languages. All ads and questionnaires were then backtranslated by an independent expert who was fluent in both languages, and who was blind to the study hypotheses.

Attribute quality was manipulated across five attributes (attributes were chosen based on a pretest where participants, excluded from the main study, rated digital camera attributes on a seven-point scale ranging from "not at all important" to "very important"). This resulted in the following strong attribute quality (weak quality in parentheses): "4× (2×) optical zoom, 6.0 (2.0) megapixel; lightweight design, 5.08 oz/144 g (medium weight design, 6.70 oz/190 g); 256 MB (32 MB) memory capacity; and six (two) preset creative scene modes." SNI was measured using the eight-item scale of Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989, α = .88).

Dependent Variables and Covariates

Attitudes

Attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) was measured on three, seven-point scales (good/bad, interesting/uninteresting, like/dislike, α = .84). All scales in the study used seven-point scales. Attitude toward the brand (A_b) was measured on three scales (good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, like/dislike, α = .86). Purchase intentions were measured on three scales (likely/unlikely, probable/improbable, definitely would/definitely would not, α = .92).

Cognitive Responses

Two independent judges coded the cognitive response data for the number of testimonial thoughts (e.g., "The statement of the student confirmed my belief that it was a good camera"), attribute thoughts (e.g., "A 4× Optical Zoom and 6.0 Megapixel is a lot better than your average camera"), and other, irrelevant thoughts. Judges also rated the valence of thoughts as positive, negative, or neutral in their tone (details on training of the judges is available from the second author on request). Participants' neutral thoughts are not discussed further as they revealed no theoretically important effects. Because of the weaknesses associated with percentage agreement statistics (Kolbe and Burnett 1991), we calculated interjudge reliability using the formula set forth by Perreault and Leigh (1989). The index of reliability (I_r) was .89 for the content dimension and .91 for the valence dimension. All discrepancies were resolved by discussion between the judges so that all thoughts could be analyzed.

Covariates

Covariates were measured to control for extraneous variation in the data using analysis of covariance. Covariates were ad involvement and endorser expertise.[2] Ad involvement was chosen owing to the large literature suggesting its usefulness in assessing the extent to which people process ad information in an in-depth or alternatively more heuristic manner. This was measured on three scales (e.g., concentrating very hard/concentrating very little, very involved/very uninvolved, paying a lot of attention/paying very little attention, α = .85). Expertise was measured to control for source credibility effects. This scale used two items (expert/not an expert, experienced/inexperienced, r = .82) anchored by strongly agree/strongly disagree, adapted from Ohanian (1990).

Results

Manipulation and Confound Checks

As a check on testimonial quality, participants rated the testimonial on three scales (compelling/not compelling, convincing/not convincing, strong/weak, α = .91) from Pham and Avnet (2004). A significant main effect for testimonial type indicated that the strong testimonial was rated as more compelling than the weak testimonial, M_{strong} = 2.96, M_{weak} = 2.40, $F(1, 140)$ = 6.47, p < .02. We used identical scale anchors for measuring attribute quality (α = .86). A significant main effect for attribute quality confirmed that stronger attribute information was viewed as more compelling than weaker attribute information, M_{strong} = 3.46, M_{weak} = 2.95, $F(1, 140)$ = 5.54, p = .02. Thus, these manipulation checks suggest that the intended factors were manipulated successfully. In addition, we

checked our assumption that product style was valued more by high-SNI participants than by low-SNI participants. To this end, participants rated a list of six camera attributes on a scale (not at all important/very important). This revealed that high-SNI participants regarded style as more important, M = 5.63, than did low-SNI participants, M = 4.91, $F(1, 136)$ = 8.07, p < .01, with no differences in the perceived importance of the other attributes (ps > .06). This result converged with the pretest results and the research of Batra, Homer, and Kahle (2001), who found SNI to be positively associated with perceived importance of style as a product attribute.

In addition, we measured ad believability on two scales (highly believable/not at all believable, totally acceptable/not at all acceptable, r = .84), adapted from Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran (2000). We averaged these scales to create an ad believability index. We also measured ad valence on two scales (many positive attributes/few positive attributes, many negative attributes/few negative attributes, r = .46) from Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran (2000). We averaged these scales to create an ad valence index. ANOVA (analysis of variance) on the confound check measures showed no significant differences (ps > .11), suggesting that the advertising stimuli did not result in a different impact across these variables. We also tested whether the effects of the experimental treatments acted independently (Perdue and Summers 1986). This MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) yielded no significant main effects or interactions for testimonial quality on the attribute quality manipulation check (ps > .75) or for attribute quality on the testimonial quality manipulation check (ps > .59). Hence, the manipulations were independent.

Hypothesis Testing

Since our research involved three experimental factors (i.e., SNI, testimonial quality, and attribute quality), we tested H1a and H1b using a three-way MANCOVA (multivariate analysis of covariance) displayed in Table 1.

Hypothesis 1a predicts that SNI will interact with testimonial quality. For high-SNI participants, strong testimonials will be more effective than weaker testimonials. For low-SNI participants, no such differences will be evident. The MANCOVA produced a significant SNI × testimonial quality interaction (Wilks's λ = .87, p < .001) for A_{ad}, $F(1, 133)$ = 8.96, p < .01; A_b, $F(1, 133)$ = 11.08, p = .001, and *PI*, $F(1, 133)$ = 17.16, p < .001. A testimonial × attribute ANCOVA (analysis of covariance) with the same covariates for high-SNI data confirmed that high SNIs prefer strong testimonials over weaker testimonials (A_{ad}: $M_{strong\_testimonial}$ = 3.57, $M_{weak\_testimonial}$ = 2.64, p < .01; A_b: $M_{strong\_testimonial}$ = 3.75, $M_{weak\_testimonial}$ = 2.97, p = .001; *PI*: $M_{strong\_testimonial}$ = 3.16, $M_{weak\_testimonial}$ = 2.22, p = .01; see Table 2). As expected, a testimonial × attribute ANCOVA performed for low SNIs with the same covariates revealed no significant

TABLE 1
Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) Results

	Dependent variable	*F* value	*df*	Partial η^2
Study 1				
SNI[a]	A_{ad}	2.23	1/133	.02
	A_b	1.33	1/133	.01
	PI	.13	1/133	<.01
Testimonial quality (testimonial)	A_{ad}	5.45*	1/133	.04
	A_b	3.25	1/133	.02
	PI	.49	1/133	<.01
Attribute quality (attribute)	A_{ad}	.86	1/133	.01
	A_b	.33	1/133	<.01
	PI	2.11	1/133	.02
SNI × testimonial	A_{ad}	8.96**	1/133	.06
	A_b	11.08**	1/133	.08
	PI	17.16***	1/133	.11
SNI × attribute	A_{ad}	2.14	1/133	.02
	A_b	9.52**	1/133	.07
	PI	3.59	1/133	.03
Testimonial × attribute	A_{ad}	.01	1/133	<.01
	A_b	.04	1/133	<.01
	PI	.00	1/133	<.01
SNI × testimonial × attribute	A_{ad}	.21	1/133	<.01
	A_b	.59	1/133	<.01
	PI	2.62	1/133	.02
Study 2				
SNI[b]	A_{ad}	1.24	1/140	.01
	A_b	.10	1/140	<.01
	PI	.19	1/140	<.01
Testimonial	A_{ad}	3.35	1/140	.02
	A_b	4.25*	1/140	.03
	PI	4.34*	1/140	.03
Attribute	A_{ad}	11.53**	1/140	.08
	A_b	2.55	1/140	.02
	PI	3.64	1/140	.03
SNI × testimonial	A_{ad}	.53	1/140	.01
	A_b	2.06	1/140	.01
	PI	.05	1/140	<.01
SNI × attribute	A_{ad}	1.07	1/140	<.01
	A_b	1.85	1/140	.01
	PI	3.13	1/140	.03
Testimonial × attribute	A_{ad}	.03	1/140	<.01
	A_b	1.98	1/140	.01
	PI	.01	1/140	<.01
SNI × testimonial × attribute	A_{ad}	.14	1/140	<.01
	A_b	1.99	1/140	.01
	PI	.20	1/140	<.01

Notes: SNI = susceptibility to normative influence; A_{ad} = attitude toward the ad; A_b = attitude toward the brand; *PI* = purchase intention.

[a] Covariate *F* values for Study 1: Involvement: A_{ad} *F* value = 14.16***, A_b = 5.29*, *PI* = .07; Expertise A_{ad} = 8.19**, A_b = 21.06***, *PI* = 8.46.**

[b] Covariate *F* values for Study 2: Involvement: A_{ad} *F* value = 14.07***, A_b = .21, *PI* = .13; Endorser similarity A_{ad} = 3.91*, A_b = 1.42, *PI* = 1.62.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Attitudes and Purchase Intentions (*PI*) Categorized by Susceptibility to Normative Influence (SNI) and Testimonial Quality

	Dependent measures		
	A_{ad}	A_b	PI
Study 1			
High SNI			
Strong testimonial	3.57	3.75	3.16
Weak testimonial	2.64	2.97	2.22
Significance	*p* < .01	*p* = .001	*p* = .01
Low SNI			
Strong testimonial	2.88	3.69	2.53
Weak testimonial	2.87	3.47	2.23
Significance	*p* > .99	*p* > .35	*p* > .28
Study 2			
High SNI			
Strong testimonial	2.70	3.45	2.61
Weak testimonial	2.29	2.91	2.16
Significance	*p* > .07	*p* = .03	*p* > .10
Low SNI			
Strong testimonial	2.72	3.25	2.62
Weak testimonial	2.54	3.14	2.25
Significance	*p* > .44	*p* > .64	*p* > .16

Notes: A_{ad} = attitude toward the ad; A_b = brand attitude; *PI* = purchase intentions.

TABLE 3
Means and Standard Deviations for Attitudes and Purchase Intentions (*PI*) Categorized by Susceptibility to Normative Influence (SNI) and Attribute Quality

	Dependent measures		
	A_{ad}	A_b	PI
Study 1			
High SNI			
Strong attributes	3.23	3.34	2.55
Weak attributes	2.83	3.08	2.55
Significance	*p* > .12	*p* > .25	*p* > .99
Low SNI			
Strong attributes	2.91	3.81	3.02
Weak attributes	2.84	3.26	2.29
Significance	*p* > .76	*p* < .01	*p* < .01
Study 2			
High SNI			
Strong attributes	2.68	3.20	2.39
Weak attributes	2.31	3.17	2.39
Significance	*p* > .10	*p* > .91	*p* > .99
Low SNI			
Strong attributes	3.02	3.48	2.84
Weak attributes	2.24	2.92	2.02
Significance	*p* < .01	*p* < .05	*p* < .01

Notes: A_{ad} = attitude toward the ad; A_b = brand attitudes; *PI* = purchase intentions.

main effects or interactions in relation to testimonial quality (*p*s > .29), suggesting that low SNIs were not influenced by testimonial quality. Thus, these results support H1a.

Hypothesis 1b predicts that SNI will interact with attribute quality. For low-SNI participants, strong attribute quality will result in more favorable evaluations than weaker attribute quality.

The MANCOVA (see Table 1) revealed that the SNI × attribute quality interaction (Wilks's λ = .93, *p* < .03) was significant for A_b, $F(1, 133)$ = 9.52, *p* < .01, and marginally significant for *PI* (*p* = .06), but was not significant for A_{ad} (*p* > .14). Planned contrasts revealed that low SNIs reported more favorable brand attitudes and *PI* in response to strong attributes (A_b: $M_{strong\_attributes}$ = 3.81, $M_{weak\_attributes}$ = 3.26, *p* < .01; *PI*: $M_{strong\_attributes}$ = 3.02, $M_{weak\_attributes}$ = 2.29, *p* < .01), whereas high SNIs were not influenced by attribute quality (*p*s > .12). Thus, there is partial support for H1b (see Table 3).[3]

For H2a and H2b we tested for mediation using path analyses (Baron and Kenny 1986) for high- and low-SNI data, respectively. Valenced testimonial cognitions (VTCs) were calculated using positive minus negative testimonial thoughts. A similar procedure was used for valenced attribute cognitions (VACs). For high SNIs (H2a), a significant effect for testimonial quality (dummy variable: weak testimonial = 0; strong testimonial = 1) was evident for A_{ad} (β = .40, *p* < .001). As

displayed in Figure 1, testimonial quality also had a significant effect on VTCs for high SNIs (β = .26, *p* < .03). VTCs also had an effect on A_{ad} (β = .42, *p* < .001). The effect of testimonial quality was reduced by 23% when VTCs were included in the model for A_{ad} (β = .31, *p* < .01). Yet attribute quality, or valenced attribute cognitions, did not affect evaluations. Furthermore, A_{ad} was positively associated with A_b (β = .66, *p* < .001), and A_b was significantly associated with *PI* (β = .71, *p* < .001). This supports H2a.

For low SNIs (H2b), attribute quality did not have a direct effect on A_{ad} (*p* > .09). However, attribute quality had a significant positive association with VACs (β = .31, *p* < .01), which were positively associated with A_{ad} (β = .24, *p* = .05). Neither testimonial quality nor valenced testimonial cognitions influenced A_{ad} evaluations (see Figure 2). Yet A_{ad} significantly influenced A_b (β = .53, *p* < .001), and A_b significantly influenced *PI* (β = .58, *p* < .001). This provides partial support for H2b.

Discussion

The findings show how evaluations of a TP endorser are influenced by a consumer's level of SNI. High SNIs respond most favorably to strong testimonial quality, an effect that is partially mediated by valenced testimonial cognitions. High

FIGURE 1
High-SNI Participants: Effects of Typical Person Testimonial Quality and Attribute Quality on Valenced Thoughts and Attitudes
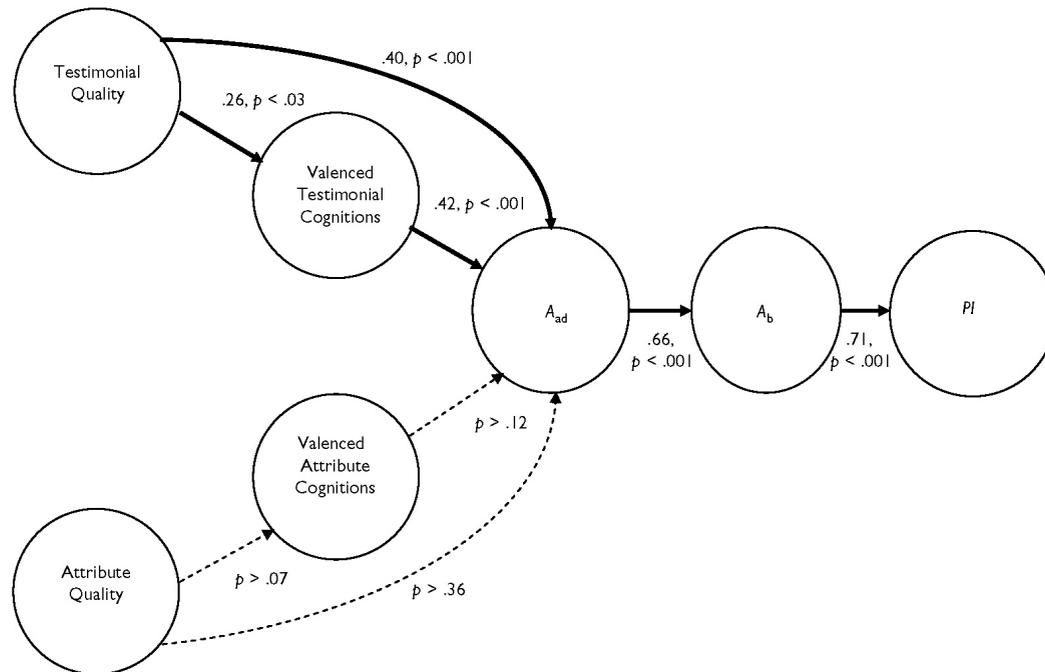
Notes: SNI = susceptibility to normative influence; A_{ad} = attitude toward the ad; A_b = attitude toward the brand; *PI* = purchase intention.
Significant paths indicated by a solid line. Nonsignificant paths indicated by a dotted line. Figures represent standardized coefficients and *p* values.

FIGURE 2
Low-SNI Participants: Effects of Typical Person Testimonial Quality and Attribute Quality on Valenced Thoughts and Attitudes
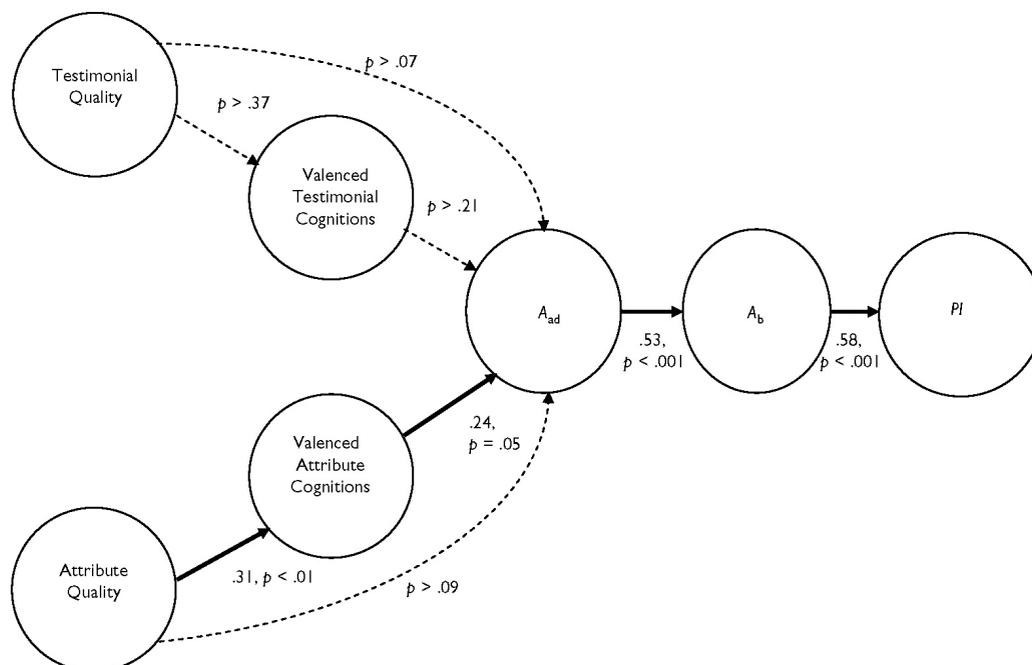
Notes: SNI = susceptibility to normative influence; A_{ad} = attitude toward the ad; A_b = attitude toward the brand; *PI* = purchase intention.
Significant paths indicated by a solid line. Nonsignificant paths indicated by a dotted line. Figures represent standardized coefficients and *p* values.

SNIs also appear to selectively process the testimonial offered by the TP endorser rather than the attribute information. In contrast, the evaluations of low SNIs were more favorable in response to strong attribute quality, an effect that is partially mediated by valenced attribute cognitions. For these people, who are less susceptible to normative influence, the focus is on attribute quality rather than testimonial quality.

While the hypotheses were generally supported, a question arises as to whether the results are restricted to TP endorsers. In Study 2, we explore this issue by examining the type of endorser as a boundary condition to the generalizability of the results of Study 1. In Study 2, the focus is again a testimonial by a satisfied customer with product experience. Rather than a TP, however, the endorser is a celebrity. We expect the results for Study 2 to converge with those from Study 1. Past research suggests that celebrity endorsement effectiveness is enhanced where the celebrity is compatible with the advertised product (e.g., Kirmani and Shiv 1998). Indeed, McCracken (1989) asserts that celebrities represent a potent source of meaning that consumers can readily adopt. We posit that high SNIs, who, as shown in Study 1, tend to focus on endorsements, will be more readily influenced by strong celebrity endorsements than low-SNI participants, who are relatively disinterested in the views of others.

STUDY 2

Overview

Study 2 tests the generalizability of the results found in Study 1 using a celebrity endorser rather than a TP endorser. The design used is a 2 (SNI: high, low) × 2 (testimonial quality: strong, weak) × 2 (attribute quality: strong, weak) between-subjects design.

Participants and Procedure

A total of 154 undergraduate students from the same participant pool as used in Study 1 took part in the study. The procedure and measures were identical to Study 1 (SNI: α = .84, A_{ad}: α = .86, A_b: α = .86, *PI:* α = .91, cognitive response content: I_r = .87, valence I_r = .93).

Independent Variable and Covariates

Given the German context and research suggesting the need to consider cultural context when studying celebrity endorsers (Choi, Lee, and Kim 2005), a range of German celebrities were pretested that would have some relevance to a digital camera ad. Analysis of the means revealed that movie director Wolfgang Petersen was familiar (*M* = 4.22, 1 = unfamiliar, 7 = familiar) and relevant to an ad for consumer electronics (*M* = 5.37,

1 = not at all relevant, 7 = highly relevant). Thus, Wolfgang Petersen was selected as the celebrity for Study 2. The wording of the endorsements was identical to Study 1, with the caption "Wolfgang Petersen, movie director of *Troy, Air Force One* and *The Perfect Storm.*" For the main study, the covariates were ad involvement (α = .81) and endorser similarity, which was measured on three items (e.g., "Wolfgang Petersen and I probably have similar values and beliefs," α = .88) from Feick and Higie (1992). Expertise (*r* = .72) was excluded, however, as it failed assumption checks for the MANCOVA.

Results

Manipulation and Confound Checks

For testimonial quality (α = .92), the strong testimonial was rated as stronger than the weak testimonial, M_{strong} = 2.83, M_{weak} = 2.25, $F(1, 149)$ = 7.54, *p* < .01. Likewise, for attribute quality (α = .84), the stronger attribute ads were viewed as more compelling than weaker attribute ads, M_{strong} = 3.17, M_{weak} = 2.71, $F(1, 149)$ = 6.02, *p* < .02. Hence, the intended factors were manipulated successfully. This MANOVA analysis also exhibited no significant main effects or interactions for testimonial quality on the attribute quality manipulation check (*p*s > .16) or for attribute quality on the testimonial quality manipulation check (*p*s > .15). Thus, the manipulations were independent. Furthermore, as with Study 1, high-SNI participants rated style as more important (*M* = 5.47) than low-SNI participants (*M* = 4.97, *p* = 05), with no differences in importance for the other product attributes (*p*s > .12).

Hypothesis Testing

The results for the three-way MANCOVA we used to test H1a and H1b are shown in Table 1. This analysis did not produce the predicted SNI × testimonial interaction (H1a) or SNI × attribute interaction (H1b).[4] However, a testimonial × attribute MANCOVA for high-SNI data with the same covariates revealed a significant main effect for testimonial type for brand attitudes, but not for A_{ad} (*p* > .07) or *PI* (*p* > .10). Consistent with H1a, strong testimonial quality resulted in more favorable brand attitudes than a weaker endorsement, A_b: $M_{strong\_testimonial}$ = 3.45, $M_{weak\_testimonial}$ = 2.91, $F(1, 57)$ = 4.89, *p* = .03. As expected, the attribute main effect (*p*s > .10) and testimonial × attribute interaction were not significant across the dependent variables (*p*s > .09). Table 2 shows the means across conditions.

Moreover, when the analysis was repeated for low-SNI data, a significant main effect for attribute quality was evident (see Table 3, Wilks's λ = .86, *p* < .01). Strong attribute quality resulted in more favorable evaluations than weaker attribute quality, A_{ad}: $M_{strong\_attributes}$ = 3.02, $M_{weak\_attributes}$ = 2.24, $F(1,$

81) $= 10.76$, $p < .01$, A_b: $M_{strong\_attributes} = 3.48$, $M_{weak\_attributes} = 2.92$, $F(1, 81) = 5.69$, $p < .05$, PI: $M_{strong\_attributes} = 2.84$, $M_{weak\_attributes} = 2.03$, $F(1, 81) = 9.00$, $p < .01$. Furthermore, as expected, the main effect for testimonial across the dependent variables ($ps > .16$) and the testimonial × attribute interaction were not significant ($ps > .64$).

For H2a and H2b, we tested for mediation in the same manner as in Study 1. For high SNIs (see Figure 3), testimonial quality was positively associated with A_{ad} ($\beta = .32$, $p < .02$). Testimonial quality was also positively related to VTCs ($\beta = .26$, $p < .05$). VTCs had an effect on A_{ad} ($\beta = .34$, $p < .01$). The effect of testimonial quality was reduced by 25% when VTCs were included in the model for A_{ad} ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$). Attribute quality or VACs did not affect evaluations. A_{ad} was positively associated with A_b ($\beta = .52$, $p < .001$), and A_b was significantly associated with PI ($\beta = .60$, $p < .001$). This supports H2a for a celebrity endorsement.

For low SNIs (Figure 4), attribute quality had a direct effect on A_{ad} ($\beta = .34$, $p = .001$). Attribute quality also had a significant positive association with VACs ($\beta = .30$, $p < .01$), which were positively associated with A_{ad} ($\beta = .31$, $p < .01$). The effect of attribute quality on A_{ad} was reduced by 21% when VACs were included in the model ($\beta = .27$, $p < .01$). Neither testimonial quality nor valenced testimonial cognitions directly influenced A_{ad} evaluations (see Figure 4). Yet A_{ad} significantly influenced A_b ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$), and A_b significantly influenced PI ($\beta = .65$, $p < .001$). This supports H2b in the context of a celebrity endorsement.

Discussion

Study 2 provides a weaker replication of Study 1 using a celebrity endorser. Unlike Study 1, the overall MANCOVA revealed a lack of hypothesized interactions. However, analysis by SNI data type (high SNI, low SNI) exhibited support for the hypotheses. High SNIs are influenced by strong endorsements, but only for brand attitudes, whereas low SNIs are influenced by attribute quality across all dependent variables.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to gain insight into how a person's susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) affects their evaluations of advertisements featuring TP testimonials and product attribute information. The results of two studies show that high-SNI and low-SNI consumers focus on different parts of an advertisement. High-SNI participants showed more favorable evaluations for advertisements featuring testimonials that strongly endorse the style of the product, although this effect was less evident in a celebrity endorser context. These consumers also focus on the testimonial when forming attitudes. Specifically, analysis of cognitive responses suggests that high-SNI consumers elaborate more on the testimonial information in an ad.

In contrast, testimonial quality had no effect on the evaluations of low-SNI consumers. For low SNIs, attribute quality was the key influence on their brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The results for the process measures indicate that the evaluations of low-SNI consumers are partially mediated by their attribute-related thoughts, rather than any focus on testimonial information. Thus, high- and low-SNI consumers reveal a key difference in terms of what they focus and elaborate on when exposed to an ad containing testimonial and attribute information. Furthermore, this processing difference is evident across both TP endorser and celebrity endorser contexts.

This research makes several contributions to the literature. First, while previous testimonial research has found interesting insights regarding testimonial effects in terms of, for example, product type (e.g., Feick and Higie 1992; Friedman, Termini, and Washington 1976), this study contributes by examining how consumer individual differences shed light on testimonial advertising effects. Specifically, we contribute to this work by suggesting that the level of a consumer's susceptibility to normative influence determines the degree to which testimonials represent an effective advertising tactic. High-SNI consumers use testimonials in their evaluations, whereas low-SNI consumers appear to disregard this information, choosing instead to focus on attribute quality. Second, we extend research in this area by investigating the mechanism underlying the use of testimonials in advertising evaluations. Our results show that high- and low-SNI participants differ in their processing of testimonial ads. Our process measures show that low SNIs do not focus on testimonials, thereby reducing their effectiveness as an advertising tactic. Instead, they concentrate on attribute information that they regard as relevant to their evaluations. Thus, this research contributes to our understanding of how high- and low-SNI consumers react to testimonial advertising.

Third, from an SNI perspective, our research adds to the work suggesting style is a key attribute for high-SNI consumers (e.g., Batra, Homer, and Kahle 2001). We build on this work by studying SNI in an advertising context and showing how the socially visible benefit of style is processed when presented in a testimonial along with attribute information. As such, we show how the normative standards of reference groups can influence evaluations of TP testimonials, depending on the consumer's level of SNI. Our focus on TP testimonial advertising builds on SNI research that has examined areas such as values (Batra, Homer, and Kahle 2001), country of origin effects (Batra et al. 2000), and consumer self-presentation effects (Wooten and Reed 2004).

Regarding managerial implications, these results suggest that while the testimonial is a popular advertising tactic, it is most effective for high-SNI consumers. Indeed, low SNIs

FIGURE 3
High-SNI Participants: Effects of Celebrity Testimonial Quality and Attribute Quality on Valenced Thoughts and Attitudes
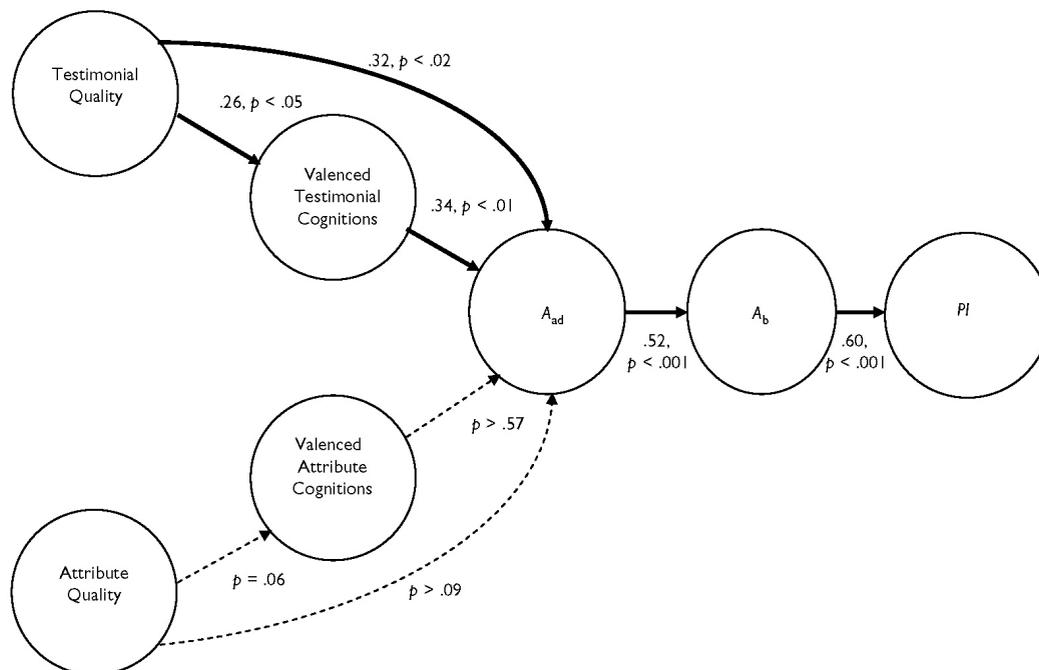
Notes: SNI = susceptibility to normative influence; A_{ad} = attitude toward the ad; A_{b} = attitude toward the brand; *PI* = purchase intention. Significant paths indicated by a solid line. Nonsignificant paths indicated by a dotted line. Figures represent standardized coefficients and *p* values.

FIGURE 4
Low-SNI Participants: Effects of Celebrity Testimonial Quality and Attribute Quality on Valenced Thoughts and Attitudes
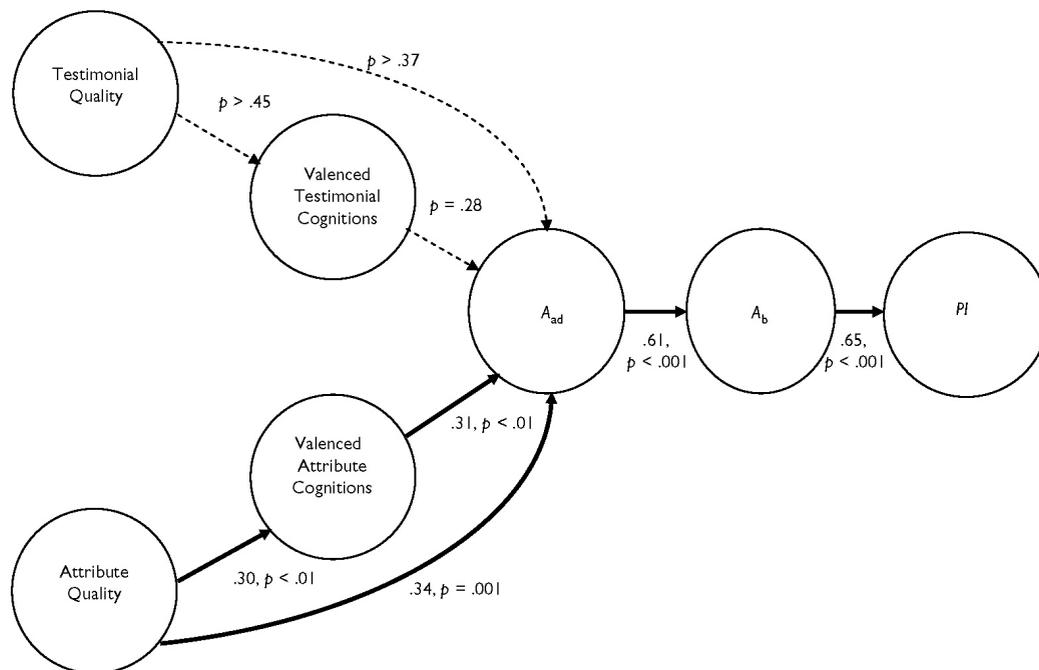
Notes: SNI = susceptibility to normative influence; A_{ad} = attitude toward the ad; A_{b} = attitude toward the brand; *PI* = purchase intention. Significant paths indicated by a solid line. Nonsignificant paths indicated by a dotted line. Figures represent standardized coefficients and *p* values.

appear disinterested in testimonials. Hence, the main implication is that testimonials are best used for a target market where higher SNI is expected. Our study shows that for these individuals, TP endorsements that strongly advocate product style work better than a celebrity endorser. This suggests a more cost-effective use of financial resources since companies could use a typical person testimonial when targeting consumers who are concerned with social approval, rather than spending large sums of money on a celebrity endorsement. For low SNIs, advertisers are better served by emphasizing product attribute information. SNI information can be derived from market research using the eight-item measure of Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989). Alternatively, assumptions can be made regarding the degree to which the target market is susceptible to normative influence—for example, by talking to salespeople and other contact staff regarding their perceptions of consumers' perceived level of SNI.

Yet while the current work suggests that high SNIs respond favorably to TP endorsers, why do they react less favorably to celebrity endorsers? We speculate that this is because testimonial effects for high SNIs may be strongest where the endorser belongs to the same in-group as the target consumer. As social distance increases (e.g., from fellow student to celebrity), this may lessen the effect of endorsers for high SNIs. Research on SNI lends support for this view. For instance, Batra, Homer, and Kahle (2001) suggest that high SNIs are motivated to comply with reference group norms. Likewise, Wooten and Reed assert that SNI reflects "a desire to fit in" (2004, p. 551) and show how high SNIs are motivated to avoid social disapproval. Thus, positive feedback on style from a fellow student may be regarded as more relevant and influential than similar feedback from a celebrity the consumer may never expect to meet.

On the other hand, this result could reflect a limitation in study design. While research indicates that a product-relevant celebrity endorser can result in more enduring attitudinal effects (Sengupta, Goodstein, and Boninger 1997), it could be that since style is important to high SNIs, a celebrity associated with style may have resulted in stronger effects. To this end, celebrities who endorse fashion products (e.g., Jennifer Lopez) rather than those who represent product relevance (e.g., Wolfgang Petersen) could be used in future research to test celebrity endorsement effects for high-SNI participants.

Further limitations include the need to determine whether other individual differences affect consumer responses to testimonials. Previous research suggests that locus of control and authoritarianism can affect an individual's responses to an endorser (Sternthal, Phillips, and Dholakia 1978). Hence, future research should examine these variables. We also used male endorsers rather than comparing male and female endorsers. While post hoc analyses showed no gender differences in the results,[5] and pretesting confirmed the product as equally

relevant across genders, future research could consider the influence of gender, given that it has been found to influence advertising evaluations in previous research (e.g., Barone, Palan, and Miniard 2004).

Another limitation relates to our testimonial manipulation. Testimonials are often highly positive; thus, to enhance the external validity of the findings, future research should address strong to very strong levels of testimonial quality. Future research could also investigate how SNI and testimonials interact with other promotional mix tactics that are featured in advertising. For instance, research on price discounts suggests that consumers' quality inferences following a price discount are also affected by the kind of brand (i.e., name brand versus store brand) that is being discounted (Gupta and Cooper 1992). It would be interesting to see whether the testimonial, which is regarded as such a common advertising tactic, could have a similar effect for high-SNI consumers. Such research would provide useful insights into testimonial effects in advertising.

NOTES

1. Germany has a population of 82.5 million people and is the most densely populated country in Europe; it is also one of the most important U.S. trading partners. Scholars have highlighted the value of experimental research in other cultures (Maheswaran and Shavitt 2000; Taylor 2005), which can enrich our knowledge of how consumers respond to advertising executions.

2. Other variables measured as potential covariates (i.e., knowledge, trust, self-esteem, identity salience, perception of targeting, dogmatism, endorser similarity, and demographics) failed assumption checks for ANCOVA (Hair et al. 1998), and were thus excluded from the analysis.

3. A significant main effect for testimonial quality on A_{ad} showed that strong testimonials resulted in more favorable A_{ad}, $M_{strong\_testimonial}$ = 3.18, $M_{weak\_testimonial}$ = 2.78, $F(1, 133)$ = 5.45, $p < .05$. No other main effects or interactions in the MANCOVA were significant (ps > .07).

4. A significant main effect for testimonial quality showed that strong testimonials resulted in more favorable A_b and *PI,* A_b: $M_{strong\_testimonial}$ = 3.37, $M_{weak\_testimonial}$ = 3.01, $F(1, 140)$ = 4.25, $p < .05$, *PI:* $M_{strong\_testimonial}$ = 2.62, $M_{weak\_testimonial}$ = 2.19, $F(1, 140)$ = 4.34, $p < .05$. A significant main effect for attribute quality showed that strong attributes resulted in more favorable A_{ad}, $M_{strong\_attributes}$ = 2.84, $M_{weak\_attributes}$ = 2.27, $F(1, 140)$ = 11.53, $p < .01$. No other main effects or interactions in the MANCOVA were significant (ps > .06).

5. No gender differences in levels of SNI were present in either study (Study 1: $p > .60$; Study 2: $p > .98$). Furthermore, post hoc analyses where gender was used in a gender × SNI × testimonial × attribute MANCOVA (identical covariates to those used in Study 1 and Study 2) yielded no significant main effects or interactions for gender for either study (Study 1: ps > .08, Study 2: ps > .09).

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APPENDIX

Strong Attribute Quality, Strong Testimonial Advertisement

RYMTEC
Digital Precision.

</div>

Make way for the new **Rymtec SDC-800** digital camera. Features include 4× Optical Zoom, 6.0 Megapixel, Light weight design (5.08 oz/144g), 256 MB Memory capacity and Six Preset Creative Scene modes. All for no added cost.

"I was offered the chance to test a Rymtec digital camera. It's hot. I compared it to four digital cameras that are on the market right now, and it is my most preferred choice for style."
- Urs Häusler, student [university deleted]

* Urs compared the Rymtec SDC-800 to current market designs offered by Canon, Panasonic, Fujifilm and Contax.

Notes: Original advertisement, which was translated into German for the experiment. Advertisement reduced from full-page size.