The Effects of Expert and Consumer Endorsements on Audience Response

This study examines the process by which audiences integrate expert and consumer endorsements into their product evaluations and how endorsement consensus affects this process. The results suggest that positive expert and consumer endorsements both enhance audiences’ attitudes toward the endorsed product. However, positive consumer endorsements and higher perceived credibility of consumer endorsements, rather than expert endorsements, enhance audiences’ behavioral intents when audiences are already interested in the endorsed product.

While websites can perform a variety of marketing functions and selling (Kanso and Nelson, 2004), managing online third-party endorsements becomes an important factor in brand reputation—especially in light of the fact that advertisers are increasingly using their websites to obtain feedback on their products, services, and overall reputation among their customers, and also as a tool to improve their public relations and image (Wang, 2003, 2005a). The importance of strategically taking advantage of cross-channel integration of the internet and maximizing the effectiveness of third-party endorsements is obvious (Kanso and Nelson, 2004; Wang, 2005b).

Audiences are likely to gather third-party opinions to make their decisions, and third-party opinions are likely to be “especially important for experiential products because they offer indirect experience on sensory aspects not conveyed by tangible attributes” (West and Broniarczyk, 1998, p. 38). One major type of third-party opinion is the third-party endorsement, which is defined as the third-party’s opinions or evaluations about products that incorporate the name of the third party, and a positive or negative evaluation of the product that is attributed to the third party (Dean and Biswas, 2001). Dean (1999) suggests that third-party endorsements may take one of three general forms:

1. The product is ranked against competing products in its class.
2. The product is awarded a seal of approval by the third party.
3. A subjective or noncomparative statement is made about the product.

The focus of this study is on average ratings provided by two different types of endorser with different source characteristics, specifically institutions with expert power versus regular consumers. Specifically, this study wants to first compare endorsers’ credibility perceived by audiences and then examine audiences’ uses of online third-party endorsements in the context of average ratings of an experiential product. Moreover, this study wants to examine the effects of endorsement consensus on audiences’ attitudes toward the endorsed product and their behavioral intents.

Endorsement consensus refers to the level of agreement between endorsements created by different reference groups, third parties, or sources. The effectiveness of endorsement consensus was suggested by research focusing on the effects of message repetition on attitude strength (Harkins and Petty, 1987). Little research, however, has examined the effects of endorsement consensus or...
... third-party endorsements [are certainly a] factor in brand reputation—especially in light of the fact that advertisers are increasingly using their websites to obtain feedback on their products, services, and overall reputation among their customers, and also as a tool to improve their public relations and image.

Consistent with previous studies, this study focuses on overall ratings rather than on the information content contained in reviews, because overall ratings have been shown to be more influential than information content in affecting audiences’ interests (Wyatt and Badger, 1990). In addition, the visual impact study of third-party endorsement suggests that information conveyed in movie reviews can be sometimes ambiguous while average ratings could be more visually effective (Dean, 1999). That is to say that audiences are familiar with ratings for movies, so the form appears to be a succinct visual conveyer of information while quoted statement form is the least visually interesting, consisting only of text (Dean and Biswas, 2001).

The importance of understanding how to use expert and consumer endorsements strategically motivates the investigations proposed in this study regarding the effects of third-party endorsement. By understanding the effects of expert and consumer endorsements, this study can provide practical implications for advertisers to strategically use third-party endorsements to their benefits when advertising their products.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Effects of third-party endorsement
Two types of third-party endorsers, relevant to this study, have been identified in the endorsement literature: experts and regular consumers. They generally parallel, respectively, the two different source characteristics: credibility and perceived similarity to the audience (Frieden, 1984; Wilson and Sherrell, 1993). Friedman and Friedman (1979) proposed that expert endorsers influence through the process of internalization, suggesting that expert endorsers persuade through the credibility dimension. That is, the endorser is perceived to have credible information that may be used to solve the consumer’s problem. The process of internalization occurs when the audience adopts an attitude because it is useful for the solution of a problem.

Third-party endorsements that employ regular consumers to recommend products and provide testimonials appear to be associated most closely to persuasion through the similarity to the audience dimension (Dean and Biswas, 2001). In addition, audiences are particularly attracted to chunks of information about products that efficiently convey meaning (Jacoby, Szybillo, and Busato-Schach, 1977). By rating products on experience and credence characteristics, a third-party endorsement by either institutions or regular consumers may function as a chunk of information about a product and be perceived as a cost-efficient guide to product quality. In this case, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Regular consumers’ positive endorsements will generate better attitude toward the endorsed product than regular consumers’ negative endorsements.

H2: Institutions’ positive endorsements will generate better attitude toward the endorsed product than institutions’ negative endorsements.

Despite the similarity between expert and consumer endorsements, the two appear to differ in several respects. First, expert endorsements may be viewed as more credible than consumer endorsements. Experts who possess higher expertise than individual consumers analyze and review products as part of their ongoing business and publish their results in media. For example, movie critics are published regularly in newspapers.

Institutions such as the Boston Globe and the New York Times are probably perceived to have access to testing facilities, equipment, and information to a greater degree than do regular consumers. Because institutions are probably perceived to have more than one expert on staff, this characteristic may imply that a consensus was reached prior to endorsement. Such a check-and-balance system may not be attributed to regular consumers (Dean and Biswas, 2001). Therefore:

H3: Audiences will perceive institutions as having more expertise than regular consumers.
H4: Audiences will perceive institutions’ average rating as more credible than regular consumers’ average rating.

This study argues that even though audiences might perceive institutions’ average rating as more credible than regular consumers’ average rating, this does not mean audiences will rely on institutions more to make their decisions. Dean and Biswas (2001) proposed that third-party endorsements should be tested for their ability to enhance perceptions of products that have idiosyncratic, pleasure-seeking, consumption characteristics. They also argued that third-party endorsements might perform very differently for such products. For example, selecting a movie has strong hedonic consumption characteristics. In such cases, audiences may have idiosyncratic tastes and follow third-party endorsements differently. Thus, this study proposes a research question.

RQ1: How do audiences use institutions’ and regular consumers’ average ratings to form their attitudes and behavioral intents when evaluating a movie?

Endorsement consensus
Disagreement in third-party endorsements is evident because of unreliability in sensory experiences. Research in decision making suggests that a lack of consensus in opinions can create uncertainty for audiences (Hogarth, 1989). Research also has shown that audiences respond negatively to such uncertainty (Jaccard and Wood, 1988). Audiences may completely reject an alternative with conflicting opinions or ignore the endorsement disagreement and use a discounted average value for the category as a default valuation for the alternative (Ross and Creyer, 1992).

Meyer (1981) conducted a study in which participants were asked to evaluate restaurants given critic ratings. He found that for restaurants whose average critic rating exceeded the mean value across all restaurants, participants did not exhibit utility when the critics disagreed about the restaurant quality. This study argues that endorsement consensus should influence audiences’ movie evaluations in a positive way, yielding a strengthening effect on audiences’ attitudes toward the movie as well as their behavioral intents. Therefore:

H5a: Positive consensus between endorsements will generate better attitude than low consensus between endorsements.

H5b: Positive consensus between endorsements will generate better attitude than negative consensus between endorsements.

H6a: Consequently, positive consensus between endorsements will generate higher behavioral intent than low consensus between endorsements.

H6b: Consequently, positive consensus between endorsements will generate higher behavioral intent than negative consensus between endorsements.

METHODOLOGY
Experimental design
A 2 x 2 factorial design, measuring two levels of average rating by regular consumers (positive versus negative) and two levels of average rating by expert institutions (positive versus negative), was used in this study. A positive average rating given by either regular consumers or expert institutions was defined as an average rating that was perceived as positive by participants, whereas a negative average rating given by either regular consumers or expert institutions was defined as an average rating that was perceived as negative by participants. In this case, positive endorsement consensus between regular consumers’ average rating and expert institutions’ average rating materialized when both average ratings were perceived as positive by participants. Negative endorsement consensus between regular consumers’ average rating and expert institutions’ average rating materialized when both average ratings were perceived as negative by participants. Consequently, low endorsement consensus materialized in two conditions: (1) consumers’ average rating was perceived as positive and expert institutions’ average rating was perceived as negative by participants; (2) consumers’ average rating was perceived as negative and expert institutions’ average rating was perceived as positive by participants. Table 1 demonstrates the four conditions measured in this study. In each

| TABLE 1                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Experimental Design (Measured Conditions)**                           |
| **Third-Party B: Institutions**                                        |
| **Negative Average Rating**                                            |
| Positive average rating                                                 |
| **Positive Average Rating**                                            |
| Negative average rating                                                 |
| **Third-Party A: Consumers**                                           |
| Negative consensus (N = 36)                                            |
| Low consensus (N = 75)                                                 |
| Positive consensus (N = 81)                                            |
condition, participants reviewed consumers’ average rating and institutions’ average rating to evaluate a movie. To make this experiment close to reality, participants chose the movie they would like to review. However, participants were asked to pick a movie they know little about, which limited participants’ possible preconceived attitudes toward the movie they chose.

For example, participants might review movie 1 that received an average rating of C from both consumers and institutions. If participants evaluated the ratings from both consumers and institutions as negative ratings, movie 1 represented the negative consensus condition. Movie 2 received an average rating of C from consumers and an average rating of B from institutions while movie 3 received an average rating of B from consumers and an average rating of C from institutions. These two movies represented the two conditions of low consensus. Finally, participants could review a movie that received an average rating of B from both consumers and institutions, which represented the positive consensus condition. Consequently, these four conditions formed the $2 \times 2$ factorial design used in this study.

Participants logged onto the Yahoo Movie’s website that featured Yahoo consumers’ average rating and institutions’ average rating of the movie (please see Figure 1 for a low consensus example). The desktops used in this study were typical computers found in computer stores and participants’ homes. Because 16 computers at the lab were all the same type with exactly the same monitors, this nullified the possibility that participants would have performed the experimental task differently due to differences in the computers used.

Participants were free to decide the order that they reviewed the average ratings and were allowed to review them at their own pace. After reviewing, participants completed a questionnaire that asked specific evaluations of both consumers’ and institutions’ average ratings regarding the movies.

This study’s experimental design has several advantages. First, the design of using real movies eliminated possible confounding effects that fictitious stimuli might affect audiences’ responses. Second, the average ratings were measured and then counterbalanced between two different types of third-party endorser so that possible confounding effects of unbalanced conditions were nullified. Third, this design can compare not only the within-subjects effects of endorser type but also the between-subjects effects of endorsement consensus on audiences’ attitudes and behavioral intents. Finally, this study implemented the experimental procedure as it was close to participants’ real-life environment and natural viewing experience.

Participants
Two hundred and ten participants took part in this study, and their responses were recorded and analyzed. Participants were students at a large northeastern university. The sampling of this study’s participants was appropriate because college students are typical movie viewers and represent the population this study purports to represent. There were 36 participants in the negative consensus condition, 81 participants in the positive consensus condition, 75 participants in the low consensus condition with positive consumers’ average rating, and 18 participants in the low consensus condition with positive institutions’ average rating.
Independent and dependent variables
The questionnaire administered to the participants used published items and scales to measure the effectiveness of consensus manipulations and several dependent variables. As manipulation checks, two closed-ended questions asked participants to rate consumers’ and institutions’ average ratings as positive or negative. Then one bipolar, 7-point semantic differential scale was used to ask participants “is there a consensus between institutions’ average rating and regular consumers’ average rating” where 7 indicated high consensus and 1 indicated low consensus. A post hoc Bonferroni test reported in Table 2, after a significant ANOVA result ($F[3, 206] = 40.894, p = .000$), revealed that the negative consensus condition ($M = 5.14, SD = 1.57$) and the positive consensus condition ($M = 5.23, SD = 1.48$) generated higher perceived consensus than the two low consensus conditions with either positive consumers’ average rating ($M = 2.75, SD = 1.58$) or positive institutions’ average rating ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.34$).

Six dependent variables were measured in this study. Perceived credibility of institutions’ average rating and regular consumers’ average rating was measured by asking participants “how credible is institutions’ (regular consumers’) average rating” and using a 1-item scale where 7 indicated credible and 1 indicated not credible. Perceived expertise toward either institutions or regular consumers was measured by asking participants to rate institutions’ (regular consumers’) expertise in rating a movie and using a 1-item scale where 7 indicated high expertise and 1 indicated low expertise.

Bipolar, 7-point semantic differential scales were used to measure participants’ attitudes and behavioral intents. Attitude toward the movie was measured by asking participants to complete the sentence, “I would describe this movie as . . .,” using a 6-item scale composed of good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, high quality/low quality, like it/don’t like it, desirable/not desirable, and favorable/unsavory (Hallahan, 1999). Cronbach’s $\alpha$ value for participants’ attitudes toward the movie is .92, which indicated that the measures were reliable. For this construct, a mean index was computed and used as the basis for analysis. Behavioral intent was measured by asking participants how likely they would go to see the movie and using a 1-item scale (Hallahan, 1999).

Three covariates were measured. Participants were asked how many movies they usually go to see in a year. Participants’ perceived credibility of either institutions’ movie ratings or regular consumers’ movie ratings in general was measured by asking participants “how credible are institutions’ (regular consumers’) movie ratings in general” and using a 1-item scale where 7 indicated credible and 1 indicated not credible. Table 3 reports the complete items for each construct measured in this study, including descriptive statistics and the measure of reliability if available.

**ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**
Hypotheses H1 and H2 tested the effectiveness of expert and consumer endorsements while Hypotheses H3 and H4 tested the characteristics of third-party endorsers. To test the main effects and the interaction effects of the four conditions, this study used MANCOVA with participants’ attitudes toward the movie and behavioral intents as the dependent variables. Expert endorsement and regular consumer endorsement were used as the two fixed (independent) variables. Experts’ credibility and regular consumers’ credibility in rating movies in general as perceived by the participants and the number of movies they usually see in a year were used as the covariates.

A single MANCOVA test was performed and reported in Table 4. An advantage of the MANCOVA is that the set of dependent variables is considered simultaneously. That is, the test considers the correlations among the set of dependent variables. There was a main effect for regular consumers’ average rating ($F[2, 203] = 8.831, p = .000$). It was concluded that the mean vectors were not equal. Overall, the set of means between conditions (positive versus negative regular consumers’ average rating) was different.

There was also a main effect for expert institutions’ average rating ($F[2, 203] = 9.587, p = .000$). The set of means between conditions (positive versus negative institutions’ average rating) was also different. Consequently, condition differences

**TABLE 2**
Post Hoc Bonferroni Test for Four Conditions

| Consensus Manipulation  | N   | Mean   | SD    |
|------------------------|-----|--------|-------|
| Condition 1: Negative consensus | 36  | 5.14*  | 1.57  |
| Condition 2: Low consensus        | 18  | 3.61*  | 1.34  |
| Condition 3: Low consensus        | 75  | 2.75*  | 1.58  |
| Condition 4: Positive consensus   | 81  | 5.23*  | 1.48  |

*Means that do not share the same subscript significantly differ at .000.
TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics for the Main Constructs and Measures

| Constructs                                                                 | M     | SD    | Reliability |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------------|
| **Manipulation check**                                                     |       |       |             |
| Consensus between institutions’ and consumers’ average ratings             | 4.19  | 1.91  | NA          |
| One item: “Is there a consensus between critics’ average grade and Yahoo users’ average grade?” |       |       |             |
| **Covariate variable**                                                     |       |       |             |
| The number of movies seen in a year                                        | 17.8  | 30.85 | NA          |
| One item: “On average, how many movies do you go to see a year?”          |       |       |             |
| Credibility of movie ratings by institutions in general                   | 4.14  | 1.35  | NA          |
| One item: “In your opinion, how credible are movie critics in general?”   |       |       |             |
| Credibility of movie ratings by consumers in general                       | 3.90  | 1.52  | NA          |
| One item: “In your opinion, how credible are movie reviews or ratings by consumers in general?” |       |       |             |
| **Dependent variable**                                                     |       |       |             |
| Credibility of consumers’ average rating of the chosen movie               | 4.43  | 1.49  | NA          |
| One item: “How credible is Yahoo users’ average grade?”                   |       |       |             |
| Consumers’ expertise                                                       | 4.04  | 1.45  | NA          |
| One item: “Please rate Yahoo users’ expertise in reviewing this movie.”   |       |       |             |
| Credibility of institutions’ average rating of the chosen movie            | 5.07  | 1.56  | NA          |
| One item: “How credible is the critics’ average grade?”                   |       |       |             |
| Institutions’ expertise                                                    | 5.31  | 1.44  | NA          |
| One item: “Please rate critics’ expertise in reviewing this movie.”       |       |       |             |
| Attitude toward the movie                                                 | 4.7   | 1.64  | .92         |
| Item 1: “I would describe this movie as good/bad.”                         |       |       |             |
| Item 2: “I would describe this movie as pleasant/unpleasant.”              |       |       |             |
| Item 3: “I would describe this movie as high quality/low quality.”         |       |       |             |
| Item 4: “I would describe this movie as like it/don’t like it.”            |       |       |             |
| Item 5: “I would describe this movie as desirable/not desirable.”          |       |       |             |
| Item 6: “I would describe this movie as favorable/unfavorable.”            |       |       |             |
| Behavioral intent                                                         | 4.29  | 2.18  | NA          |
| One item: “How likely is it that you would go to see this movie?”         |       |       |             |

with respect to the dependent variables were established. In other words, this study can determine on which variables the conditions differed after the multivariate tests were statistically significant.

The tests of between-subject effects were reported in Table 5. Based on the individual univariate tests, Hypothesis H1 ($F[1, 204] = 12.389, p = .001$) was supported as positive endorsements by regular consumers ($M = 4.97, SD = 1.5$) elicited better participants’ attitudes toward the movie than negative endorsements by regular consumers ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.8$).

Hypothesis H2 ($F[1, 204] = 14.991, p = .000$) was also supported when positive endorsements by expert institutions ($M = 5.33, SD = 1.22$) elicited better attitude toward the movie than negative endorsements by expert institutions ($M = 4.13, SD = 1.77$). There was a main effect for consumers’ average rating ($F[1, 204] = 17.283, p = .000$) but not for institutions’ average rating ($F[1, 204] = 2.093, p = .149$) on participants’ behavioral intents.

To test for expert institutions’ and regular consumers’ source effects, several paired-
sample T-tests were conducted. Hypothesis H3 was supported. Participants did perceive institutions (M = 5.31, SD = 1.44) as having more expertise than consumers (M = 4.04, SD = 1.45) in rating the movies (t[209] = 8.73, p = .000). Hypothesis H4 was also supported as participants perceived institutions’ average rating (M = 5.08, SD = 1.56) as more credible than consumers’ average rating (M = 4.43, SD = 1.49), t[209] = 4.431, p = .000.

A post hoc Bonferroni test, after a significant ANOVA result (F[3, 206] = 15.593, p = .000), revealed that Hypotheses H5a and H5b were supported. Positive consensus condition (M = 5.53, SD = 1.07) generated higher attitude toward the movie than two low consensus conditions with either positive consumer endorsement (M = 4.36, SD = 1.67, p = .000) or positive institution endorsement (M = 4.46, SD = 1.51, p = .041) and negative consensus condition (M = 3.65, SD = 1.89, p = .000).

A post hoc Bonferroni test, after a significant ANOVA result (F[3, 206] = 10.471, p = .000), revealed that Hypotheses H6a and H6b were supported. Positive consensus condition (M = 5.19, SD = 1.87) generated higher behavior intent than two low consensus conditions with either positive consumer endorsement (M = 4.11, SD = 2.2, p = .007) or positive institution endorsement (M = 3.22, SD = 2.24, p = .002) and negative consensus condition (M = 3.19, SD = 1.98, p = .000).

Finally, there were effects for one covariate on participants’ attitudes and behavioral intents. The higher regular consumers’ credibility in rating movies was perceived by the participants, the better attitudes (F[1, 204] = 8.894, p = .003) and higher behavior intents (F[1, 204] = 8.711, p = .004) the participants generated toward the movie based on the individual univariate tests after a significant multivariate test (F[2, 203] = 5.048, p = .007).

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The results of this study revealed a number of important findings related to audience information evaluation, attitude, and behavioral intent. First, positive average rating from either consumers or institutions and higher credibility of regular consumers generated better attitude. However,
regular consumers’ positive average rating and higher credibility of regular consumers as perceived by the audiences enhanced behavioral intent. Second, even though the average rating provided by institutions, perceived as having higher expertise than regular consumers, was considered as more credible than regular consumers’ average rating, this study observed audiences shifting their reliance on regular consumers’ positive endorsements and credibility to decide the likelihood of going to see the movie.

These findings substantiated scholars’ arguments that third-party endorsements may perform very differently for products that have hedonic consumption characteristics when audiences may have idiosyncratic tastes and follow third-party endorsements differently (Dean and Biswas, 2001; Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell, 2000). When the average ratings of the institutions and consumers reached a positive consensus, audiences preferred consensus because the alternative was a sure winner. In this situation, audiences responded negatively to negative consensus and low consensus because there was a chance their experience might fall short of their expectations. It was also clear that audiences’ behavioral intents were sensitive to regular consumers’ ratings rather than expert institutions’ ratings when audiences weighted consumer endorsement more heavily than expert endorsement based on the movie in which they were interested.

**Implications for advertising and marketing managers**

Since the age of the internet, customer feedback is constantly posted on websites on which consumers share their experiences. The influence of this type of endorsement on consumer judgments is substantial because websites are classic examples of hybrid messages combining and linking elements of product information from third-party endorsements and can perform a variety of marketing functions including advertising, public relations, and market research.

Since the age of the internet, customer feedback is constantly posted on websites on which consumers share their experiences. The influence of this type of endorsement on consumer judgments is substantial because websites are classic examples of hybrid messages combining and linking elements of product information from third-party endorsements and can perform a variety of marketing functions including advertising, public relations, and market research. White and Ramana (1999) argued that competition and the desire to establish an internet presence were the driving forces for advertisers to develop a website because many advertisers view the internet as a desirable medium for advertising their products.

The first practical implication is that advertisers can use the web for not only advertising and marketing activities, but also to obtain feedback and improve public relations. Thus, strategic thinking of integrating endorsements via websites will be an important task and channel for educating, informing, and persuading diverse audiences (Wang, 2005a). According to the results, regular consumers’ positive endorsements outweighed experts’ endorsements in influencing audiences’ behavioral intents. This is to say when advertising products that have hedonic consumption characteristics, managing regular consumers’ endorsements might be a more important task than obtaining experts’ positive endorsements.

However, advertisers should keep in mind that it is also important to increase the credibility dimension of regular consumers’ endorsements. The unregulated nature of internet publishing suggests that most audiences can receive product information from various online sources—including newsgroup postings, portals, news and media organizations, in addition to a growing number of sites affiliated with blogs and podcasts, among others. Given the ease of accessing the multiplicity of product information online, it is likely that audiences may not perceive product information from many of these sources with high credibility.

One way to enhance the credibility dimension of regular consumers’ endorsements is to create a dialogue and interaction between audiences and third-party endorsers. For example, blogs have become a popular channel where audiences can share their experiences and chat with each other. The interactivity function of
the internet allows audiences to exchange information with many third parties. Advertisers can include a link to a regular consumer’s endorsement that lets audiences contact the source with permission. In this way, advertisers could encourage audiences to seek feedback from sources after endorsements have appeared and leave this channel entirely in audiences’ hands without intruding upon their privacy. By encouraging the audiences to verify the endorsements, the credibility dimension of regular consumers’ endorsements could be greatly enhanced because trust, one important dimension of building endorsement credibility, can be built (Grazioli and Jarvenpaa, 2000; Wang, 2003).

Finally, advertisers’ usages of different types of endorsement could result in different persuasive effects among audiences depending on product types. For example, endorsement consensus is extremely relevant in the marketing communication domain because product information from different sources often can contain a certain degree of conflicting product features and evaluative implications. An expert can rate X exercising machine as extremely useful and give it a 5-star rating for advanced body builders while a customer who is an advanced body builder reviews X exercising machine as expensive and very difficult to operate. Audiences may learn, in this case, from two different sources that even though the advertised product is extremely useful for them, the difficult operation of the machine and the cost prevent them from purchasing the product. In this case, ratings for different product features and audiences’ goals may influence the dependency of their attitudes and behavior intents on various types of third-party endorsement.

**Next steps**

Audiences are more likely to face uncertainty for the experiential products studied here because of their sensory nature and the need for direct experience. Future research should examine the impact of endorsement consensus between different third-party endorsements for functional products that have different levels of performance and financial risks and whether salience directed to experience attributes reduces the importance of tangible attributes.

Of further interest is the integration of specific product attribute information and summary evaluative ratings. This study extends the study about the effects of third-party endorsements on experiential products to account for how audiences respond in the face of endorsement conflicting or consensus. For example, in the diet and weight control equipment industry where performance measures are readily available either through experts and real consumers in product publicity, response to these products may well depend on both experts’ and consumers’ evaluative statements and ratings.

Although this study has focused on audiences’ responses to consensus, the importance of the decision is also likely to influence their responses. As the importance of the decision increases, the potential risk associated with making a bad selection may cause audiences to exhibit caution in their decisions. Future study should examine different levels of importance of product evaluation based on different types and characteristics of third-party endorsement. For example, buying a new car or making a substantial investment may require more assurance from credible and knowledgeable sources.

Finally, it is the study’s intention to acknowledge one important comment made by the reviewers concerning the sample. Neither the study nor the results provided sufficient evidence to support the premise that consumers are more likely to accept recommendations from people who are similar to themselves. When it concerns movie recommendations, it is not reasonable to assume that the participants in this study are similar to the consumers who offered ratings concerning movies on Yahoo’s website. However, it is reasonable to assume that the participants in this study can offer ratings regarding movies on the website if they wish. Thus, future research should examine possible and different dimensions of similarity such as demographics and values that regular consumers’ endorsements may affect audiences’ attitudes and behavioral intents.

**CONCLUSION**

Third-party endorsements play an important role in audience evaluation of products, particularly so for experiential products. . . .
[U]nderstanding how audiences react to consensus among third-party endorsements is of vital importance to advertising practitioners who rely on expert opinions or word-of-mouth to disseminate information.

ments both enhance audiences’ attitudes toward the endorsed product while positive consumers’ average rating and higher perceived credibility of regular consumers’ movie ratings enhance participants’ behavioral intents to the extent that audiences already have interests in the endorsed product. Audiences’ needs for positive consensus play a crucial role in determining how an audience will form their attitudes and behavioral intents: they are more likely to respond favorably to positive consensus than endorsement disagreement and negative consensus.

ALEX WANG (Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin) is an assistant professor of communication sciences at the University of Connecticut-Stamford. His research focuses on information processing psychology, integrated marketing communications, and website promotion management. Dr. Wang’s industry experience in marketing, advertising, public relations, and electronic publishing took place in Taipei, Taiwan and in Boston. His works have been published in the Journal of Promotion Management, the Journal of Website Promotion, the Journal of Advertising Research, and elsewhere. He also serves as a member on the editorial board of the Journal of Website Promotion.

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