

	Daya tarik	Keahlian	Kepercayaan	Kesesuaian	Kredibilitas	Niat pembelian
Daya tarik	0.825					
Keahlian	0.458	0.808				
Kepercayaan	0.451	0.597	0.795			
Kesesuaian	0.398	0.698	0.536	0.803		
Kredibilitas	0.496	0.584	0.770	0.554	0.779	
Niat pembelian	0.556	0.627	0.490	0.639	0.420	0.874

6. Q-Square

	RMSE	MAE	Q ² _predict
Kredibilitas	0.651	0.470	0.605
Niat pembelian	0.776	0.582	0.418

7. Path Coefficient

Path Coefficients						
Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values						
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)		P Values
Daya tarik → Kredibilitas	0.144	0.157	0.072	1.998		0.046
Keahlian → Kredibilitas	0.077	0.090	0.115	0.675		0.500
Kepercayaan → Kredibilitas	0.591	0.567	0.104	5.676		0.000
Kesesuaian → Kredibilitas	0.126	0.123	0.090	1.396		0.163
Kesesuaian → Niat pembelian	0.586	0.590	0.064	9.196		0.000
Kredibilitas → Niat pembelian	0.095	0.093	0.086	1.106		0.269

8. Uji Mediasi

Specific Indirect Effects						
Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values						
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)		P Values
Daya tarik → Kredibilitas → Niat pembelian	0.014	0.016	0.018	0.763		0.446
Keahlian → Kredibilitas → Niat pembelian	0.007	0.014	0.021	0.350		0.727
Kepercayaan → Kredibilitas → Niat pembelian	0.056	0.049	0.046	1.235		0.218
Kesesuaian → Kredibilitas → Niat pembelian	0.012	0.009	0.014	0.845		0.399

9. Cross Loading

Cross Loadings

	Daya tarik	Keshlian	Kepercayaan	Kesesuaian	Kredibilitas	Niat pembelian
Atr 1	0.845	0.365	0.398	0.299	0.429	0.376
Atr 2	0.805	0.392	0.344	0.362	0.387	0.551
Cong 1	0.351	0.592	0.485	0.840	0.490	0.480
Cong 2	0.317	0.576	0.389	0.797	0.430	0.480
Cong 3	0.303	0.527	0.465	0.800	0.470	0.532
Cong 4	0.307	0.546	0.375	0.773	0.383	0.539
Cred 2	0.376	0.426	0.562	0.304	0.743	0.309
Cred 3	0.430	0.507	0.594	0.496	0.822	0.419
Cred 4	0.429	0.426	0.620	0.465	0.751	0.297
Exp 1	0.390	0.762	0.414	0.558	0.391	0.549
Exp 2	0.421	0.868	0.586	0.578	0.539	0.508
Exp 3	0.301	0.790	0.428	0.561	0.469	0.478
PI 1	0.529	0.580	0.438	0.547	0.369	0.873
PI 2	0.513	0.564	0.418	0.547	0.407	0.884
PI 3	0.488	0.496	0.425	0.534	0.362	0.841
PI 4	0.421	0.554	0.432	0.604	0.333	0.888
Trust 1	0.397	0.484	0.774	0.375	0.553	0.388
Trust 2	0.303	0.383	0.818	0.336	0.630	0.309
Trust 3	0.381	0.557	0.792	0.558	0.646	0.470
Cred 1	0.303	0.455	0.621	0.447	0.798	0.274



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The influence of celebrity endorsement on the purchase behavior of brands and product categories

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Abstract

Purpose – Celebrity endorsement has been profusely used to promote the consumption and purchase intention of diverse product categories; however, there is scarce research about whether celebrity endorsement effectiveness differs between brands and product categories. In this context, this study aims to answer this question: “Does consumer purchase behavior influenced by celebrity endorsement differ between brands and products?”.

Design/methodology/approach – To this end, a conceptual model of the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumer purchase behavior is examined through a multiple group structural equation modeling on two consumer samples (315 = brands; 308 = product categories). Samples were categorized as a celebrity promoting either a product category or a brand, and food products were selected as the product category for the investigation.

Findings – Findings indicate differences in the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement between brands and product categories: credibility is the most relevant variable influencing consumer purchase intention for product categories, while credibility and congruence both influence consumer purchase intention for brands. Similarly, the celebrity recommendation of brands generates greater purchase intention due to celebrity congruence with the endorsed product.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors’ knowledge, the present research is one of the first endeavors to compare the effectiveness of celebrity brand endorsement versus celebrity product endorsement on purchase intention.

Keywords Consumer behavior, Celebrity endorsement, Brands, Product categories, Food products

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The company Kellogg’s advertised its brand Frosted Flakes cereals with the image of the Olympic swimmer, Michael Phelps, on the package; the singer Selena Gomez published an Instagram post on Coca-Cola brand with great success among her fans, and former first lady Michelle Obama collaborated in a communication campaign to promote the consumption of vegetables and fruit among children (Englund *et al.*, 2020), as a way to enhance healthy food consumption.

Consumers continuously face images of both brands and product categories in social media, and the presence of celebrities recommending these items influence consumer purchase behavior (Hwang and Zhang, 2018; Chang *et al.*, 2020). This is linked to the fact that celebrities make both products and brands more attractive to potential consumers (Schimmelpfennig and Hunt, 2020), and many consumers are willing to purchase what their favorite celebrities endorse

(Tian *et al.*, 2021; Huo *et al.*, 2022). Even the nature of the product or the specific product category influences the effectiveness and success of the endorsement (Jain *et al.*, 2011), being celebrity endorsement profusely used to influence the purchase intention of food brands and products (Bragg *et al.*, 2018; Zhou *et al.*, 2019).

Extant literature on marketing has emphasized the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumer behavior (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016; Gilal *et al.*, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2021; Rifon *et al.*, 2022), and numerous companies have collaborations with celebrities to target consumers through social media (Coates *et al.*, 2019; Folkvord and Laguna-Camacho, 2019). Prior studies on celebrity endorsement have postulated that the endorsement effectiveness depends on the attributes or characteristics of the celebrity (Saldanha *et al.*, 2018; Gilal *et al.*, 2021; Yang *et al.*, 2023). But the question of whether celebrity endorsement is an effective communication tool both for brands and product categories or commodities remains unsolved (Yang *et al.*, 2023). The significance of comparing the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in brand and product endorsement is

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underlined by the fact that findings could suggest companies that a communication campaign with the use of celebrities would be more effective when recommending a product category, rather than when recommending a specific brand.

The objective of the present research is to challenge the use of celebrity brand endorsement to achieve endorsement success, and propose an alternative approach based on the endorsement of product categories or commodities. This novel approach considers the value of using the product categories to achieve high effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. To this end, this research will examine whether celebrity endorsement effectiveness results from the endorsement of the product category, rather than brand endorsement. Further research is needed to understand whether the effectiveness of celebrity's recommendations varies depending on the presence of a brand, and to better understand what characteristics of celebrities influence consumer purchase behavior for brands and product categories.

This study aims to address the gap in the celebrity endorsement literature examining whether the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement differs when recommending a brand or a product category. For this purpose, this research is grounded on the *source-credibility model* (Hovland *et al.*, 1953), the *source-attractiveness model* (McGuire, 1985) and the *match-up theory* (Koernig and Boyd, 2009) to propose a conceptual model to examine the potential differences in celebrity endorsement between brands and product categories. The present study investigates the impact of celebrity-related variables – credibility, congruence with the product, trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness – on the dependent consumer-related variable – purchase intention –, while considering the influence of product-related variables like the presence or the absence of a brand.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is one of the first to directly compare the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement on consumer purchase intention of brands and products (Schimmelpfennig and Hunt, 2020), being the contribution to this field of knowledge threefold. In the first place, this study aims to determine whether there are differences in the factors influencing the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement for brands and for product categories or commodities. In the second place, the present research strives to identify the characteristics of celebrity endorsers that influence consumer purchase behavior of product categories and brands, providing an empirical examination for food products and food brands. In the third place, this study sets out a future research agenda for celebrity endorsement on specific product categories; for instance, breakfast cereals, soft drinks or dairy products.

The article adopts the following structure. First, a conceptual framework of celebrity endorsement is presented and a review of the research hypotheses. Second, the methodology of the investigation is described, followed by the discussion of the results. Finally, the theoretical and managerial implications are discussed, as well as the research limitations and guidance for future research.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Celebrity endorsement

Numerous academics in the marketing field have defined the concept of celebrity. In his seminal work, McCracken (1989)

defines a celebrity as “any individual who has high public recognition, and who uses this recognition for the benefit of a consumer good, appearing in an advertisement” (p. 310). The conceptualization of the term celebrity has evolved over time to include any profession that gives public exposure, such as the film and television industry, social media, arts or sports (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Shukla and Bubey, 2022).

Celebrity endorsement is referred to “the agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and a brand or product to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the brand or product” (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016; p. 644); and as the celebrity's ability to persuade consumers to purchase the endorsed product or brand (Rifon *et al.*, 2022). Consistent with Winterich *et al.* (2018), a celebrity endorser could be described as a prominent or popular individual who is successful in his/her profession and who enjoys public recognition, who uses his/her social image to endorse a product or brand or to merely associate his/her image with a brand, service or product (Yang *et al.*, 2023).

Endorsements and recommendations made by celebrities represent an effective and popular marketing communication strategy extensively adopted, leading to an improved communication with consumers and to an increase in consumer purchase intention (Singh and Banerjee, 2018). For this reason, the celebrity endorsement phenomenon has been profusely studied (Zhou *et al.*, 2019; Schimmelpfennig and Hunt, 2020; Schouten *et al.*, 2020; Brooks *et al.*, 2021; Yang *et al.*, 2023).

The popularity of celebrity endorsement has increased in the past years, and today companies often use product endorsement as part of their communication strategy (Wang and Kim, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2023). One reason for the widespread popularity of celebrity endorsement is that it has a positive influence on consumer behavior toward the endorsed product or brand (Tran *et al.*, 2019; Yang *et al.*, 2023), the product purchase intention (Tran *et al.*, 2019; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020), product and brand awareness and recognition (Wang and Kim, 2020; Tian *et al.*, 2021; Zhou and Kraak, 2021); word of mouth, brand evaluations and willingness to pay a premium price (Winterich *et al.*, 2018); brand engagement and company reputation (Shukla and Bubey, 2022).

Prior research has also emphasized the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement to increase product sales and the company's revenue and market value (Gilal *et al.*, 2020). The effectiveness of the marketing message communicated through a celebrity is grounded on his/her attributes and appeal (Saldanha *et al.*, 2018; Gilal *et al.*, 2021), having a superior influence on consumer attitude and purchase intention in comparison with other communication tools (Saldanha *et al.*, 2018; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

Nowadays, the increasing penetration of social media – that gives individuals great opportunities for communication and expression – has led to the phenomenon of “internet celebrities,” acknowledged as individuals who recommend products and brands through online social media (Liu *et al.*, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2021; Brooks *et al.*, 2021). The growing power enjoyed by “internet celebrities” in marketing communication is because of the emergence of social media and high penetration of the internet (Eng and Jarvis, 2020), and

influences consumer purchase decisions (Janssen *et al.*, 2021; Tseng and Wang, 2022), being perceived as similar to celebrity endorsers due to their online status (Ozuem *et al.*, 2024). The consumers' identification with social media "internet celebrities" is strongly determined by their perceived similarity, leading to a positive attitude and increased purchase intention toward the recommended product or brand (Liu *et al.*, 2020; Schouten *et al.*, 2020; Wang and Kim, 2020; Ozuem *et al.*, 2024).

In the past years, academics and practitioners have examined the phenomenon of influencer marketing, which is closely related to celebrity endorsement. Consistent with Khamis *et al.* (2017) the so-called "influencers" could be described as "those individuals who have gained their popularity and fame by successfully branding themselves as experts on social media," in contrast to traditional celebrities who have achieved public recognition due to their professional talent (Jin, 2018). These "influencers" are individuals who create diverse content through social media to influence consumer attitudes and purchase decisions (Chang *et al.*, 2020; Tseng and Wang, 2022), being recognized as influential persons because of their numerous followers (Hwang and Zhang, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2021). Consistent with the proposal of Yu and Hu (2020) this study assumes that internet celebrities could be described as individuals that influence audiences' emotions, opinion and behaviors through social media interaction and who have a great tendency to influence the audience. Academics have predominantly emphasized that "influencers" could be more effective than traditional celebrities, given that they are perceived as more authentic (Jin *et al.*, 2019; Schouten *et al.*, 2020; Yu and Hu, 2020).

2.2 Celebrity endorsement of brands and product categories

The study presented here has selected food products as the product category under research to analyze the potential different effectiveness of celebrity endorsement between brands and product categories. The reason underlying the selection of food as the product category under research is the high effectiveness of celebrity's recommendations for fast-moving consumer goods and low-involvement products purchased through a routine decision-making (Jain *et al.*, 2011), given that most food products fall under this categorization.

In a market characterized by the fact that almost everything is branded (Chapleo, 2011), products like vegetables and fruits are still often commercialized as unbranded commodities, whereby the grower does not incorporate brands to differentiate the produce that is frequently marketed as a commodity (Lewis *et al.*, 2014). For this reason, some food companies place a strong emphasis on product characteristics, being flavor and smell the main selling attributes which are not transmittable through communication tools or through celebrity endorsement (Hartmann *et al.*, 2017).

The development of communication campaigns by food companies is not an easy task, and food produce is often the last product category to adopt modern communication tools such as celebrity endorsement. As a consequence, food companies have developed communication campaigns focusing on the consumer relationship with food, with the purpose of creating a link between the emotions associated with food and a well-

known celebrity (Hartmann *et al.*, 2017). In line with this argumentation, celebrity endorsement could be considered an effective communication tool to raise product awareness, to inform about the intrinsic and extrinsic values of food products (Bodini *et al.*, 2009) and to persuade consumers about the food health benefits (Bragg *et al.*, 2018; Zhou and Kraak, 2021).

Furthermore, it is recognized that the use of social media celebrity endorsement can capture the attention of a wider consumer audience (Godey *et al.*, 2016), and influence consumer purchase intention (Tran *et al.*, 2019; Schimmelpfennig and Hunt, 2020). For instance, the well-known social media Instagram has increasingly been used to show food products, being food one of the product categories more present on social media (Evans *et al.*, 2017). This is linked to the fact that the social media Instagram is mostly based on visual aesthetics, making it suitable for the promotion of food products and to influence the way individuals purchase and consume food (Blight *et al.*, 2017).

In line with this argumentation, in the past decades, branding has become core to the success of packaged products. Strong brands enjoy high levels of awareness and elicit important benefits for companies through consumer acceptance, consumer preference and the creation of positive consumer behavioral responses (Veloutsou *et al.*, 2020; Veloutsou, 2023). The underlying reason is the modernization and development of retailing, making consumers unable to rely on the shopkeeper's guidance on the characteristics of products and as a consequence, consumer behavior became more strongly influenced by communication tools like branding (Lewis *et al.*, 2014).

Today, the great majority of consumers do not have time or the knowledge to select quality products every time they shop, being familiar brands those who can greatly reduce consumer effort and time in the purchase decisions (Stanton and Herbst, 2005). It is, therefore, expected that consumers place great trust in brands and branded products, being celebrity endorsement a highly effective communication tool to attract consumer interest toward brands and influence consumer behavior (Tran *et al.*, 2019; Schouten *et al.*, 2020; Schimmelpfennig and Hunt, 2020).

Referring to food brands, those food brands sponsored through online social media effectively influence consumer behavior, driving more positive attitudes toward the brand, greater brand awareness and higher purchase intention (Evans *et al.*, 2017; Schimmelpfennig and Hunt, 2020). For instance, most of the celebrity endorsement campaigns on food brands targeted to children and young consumers could be considered as highly effective (Bragg *et al.*, 2018).

3. Research hypotheses

The present research proposes a conceptual model to examine the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumers' purchase behavior of products and brands grounded on the *source-credibility model* (Hovland *et al.*, 1953), the *source-attractiveness model* (McGuire, 1985) and the *match-up theory* (Kamins, 1990). The study presented here is based on the *source-credibility model* (Hovland *et al.*, 1953) which proposes that the influence of a source depends on its level of perceived credibility. To better understand this theoretical model it

should be noted that it assumes that information from a credible message sender influences the attitudes of the receiver through internalization that takes place when the opinions presented by the sender are perceived as useful to solve a consumer problem (Biswas *et al.*, 2006). On the other hand, the *source-attractiveness model* (McGuire, 1985) is also considered, which posits that an attractive source influences consumers' attitudes more favorably compared to a less-attractive source (Ohanian, 1990). This theoretical model addresses the fact that physically attractive individuals more effectively influence attitude change (Chaiken, 1979), being able to increase arousal that, in turn, affects information processing (Roozen and Claeys, 2010). Aligned with this theory, attractive sources of information are evaluated more favorably and have a more positive impact on consumer perceptions of the brands and products with which they are associated (Kamins, 1990). The *match-up theory* is the third theoretical framework under consideration. Consistent with this theoretical model, the celebrity endorser should be congruent with the recommended product or brand – also known as the celebrity and product or brand “match-up” – to effectively influence consumer behavior (Kamins, 1990; Koernig and Boyd, 2009). The *match-up theory* posits that the perceived congruence between the meaning transferred by the celebrity's image and the product message results in more positive evaluations of the endorser, the product or the brand (Koernig and Boyd, 2009). The conceptual proposed model is shown in Figure 1.

3.1 The credibility of celebrities

The term credibility could be defined as “the extent to which a source is recognized as possessing significant knowledge or enough experience to offer an unbiased judgment” (Carroll, 2008), highlighting whether an individual is recognized as being honest, true and unbiased. A prominent scholar, Ohanian (1990) defined in his seminal work the concept of endorser credibility as “the extent to which an endorser is perceived as possessing expertise relevant to a given topic and can be trusted to provide an objective opinion on a subject.”

The *source-credibility* theoretical model proposes that various characteristics of a communication source generate effects on message receptivity (Erdogan, 1999). Based on this theoretical model, the credibility of the endorser could be considered the key factor to achieve an effective communication and an impact

on consumers' behavior and attitudes toward the endorsed products and brands (Tran *et al.*, 2019). According to the *source-credibility* model, if the endorser of a message is perceived as “credible,” the message will have a significant impact (Hovland *et al.*, 1953), being the highly credible source more persuasive than the less credible one (Ohanian, 1990; Erdogan, 1999). On the other hand, the *source-credibility* model identifies trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise as the key dimensions of the source credibility (Hovland *et al.*, 1953; Till and Busler, 2000; Tzoumaka *et al.*, 2014); while emphasizing the impact of trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness of the celebrity on consumer purchase intentions (Ohanian, 1990).

Ample evidence supports the notion that consumers are more likely to positively evaluate products and brands endorsed by individuals that are perceived to be credible (Erdogan, 1999; Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016). When celebrities recommend a product or brand in a more genuine authentic way, for instance, showing or presenting the product in a real-life setting, they are perceived as more credible (Russell and Russell, 2017).

Despite authors like Deshbhag and Mohan (2020) report that in Western countries celebrity endorsements have a limited impact on consumers' purchase behavior; most of the previous research highlights that the endorser credibility has a positive effect on different consumer behavioral outcomes, such as brand evaluations, purchase intentions or willingness to pay a premium price (Winterich *et al.*, 2018). In line with this argumentation, the purchase intention could be defined as the “individual's willingness to purchase goods or services” (Das, 2014). On the contrary, recent research reports that prominent brands do not appear to require the effect of the celebrity endorsement to boost consumers' attitude and their purchase intentions (Fons *et al.*, 2024). In the present study, the following research hypothesis is presented:

H1. The credibility of the celebrity positively influences consumers' purchase intention of brands and product categories.

3.2 The congruence between the celebrity and the product recommended

The *source-credibility* theoretical models failed to explain the reasons why an endorser was effective for one product but ineffective for some other product, being the match-up between the endorser and the endorsed product one potential explanation (McCracken, 1989). The *match-up theory* (Kamins, 1990; Koernig and Boyd, 2009) postulates that a good match or congruence between the endorser and the product or brand is a key determinant for the effectiveness of the endorsement, referring to the degree the image of the celebrity matches the image of the endorsed product (Tseng and Wang, 2022).

This is linked to the fact that the celebrity endorsement can fail if there is not a good “fit” between the brand or product and the celebrity who recommends it, being endorsement more effective with a high congruence between the celebrity and the recommended product or brand (Kamins, 1990; Till and Busler, 2000; Lee *et al.*, 2021). Conversely, Liang and Lin (2018) argue that both congruent and incongruent endorser-

Figure 1 Conceptual proposed model



Source: Authors' own elaboration

product combinations have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions; while recent research emphasizes that the match-up hypothesis predicting endorsement success does not consider any connection between the consumer and the endorser (Carlson *et al.*, 2020).

Ample evidence supports the notion that celebrities have been profusely used to endorse a wide range of products given that they enhance consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, especially when there is consistency between celebrity and product characteristics (Liu *et al.*, 2020; Tseng and Wang, 2022). Prior literature indicates the positive influence of the product-endorser match-up on consumers' attitudes (Kim and Kim, 2021) and purchase intention (Gong and Li, 2017; Farivar and Wang, 2022); whereas a low product-endorser congruence negatively affects the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement (Park and Lin, 2020), and the endorser credibility (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, this hypothesis is presented:

- H2. The congruence between the celebrity and the endorsed product positively influences consumers' purchase intention of brands and product categories.

3.3 Trustworthiness of celebrities

The concept of trustworthiness refers to perceptions of honesty, integrity, sincerity and reliability of an endorser (Erdogan, 1999; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018; Singh and Banerjee, 2018), addressing the question of whether an individual could be considered believable or not. Consistent with Ohanian (1990), the term of celebrity trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence placed by an individual in a source, emphasizing the faithfulness and reliability of the celebrity.

The present study considers the celebrity endorser's trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness as independent second-order constructs in the *source-credibility model* that influence endorser credibility, corresponding with the proposal of Yuan *et al.* (2016). Prior literature indicates that consumers get more easily influenced by someone whom they trust (Atkin and Block, 1983); and in turn, a product endorsed by a trustworthy endorser is more effective in influencing consumer behavior than an endorsement by a less trustworthy endorser is (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018). However, contradictory results about the impact of trustworthiness were reported by Ohanian (1991) who found a nonsignificant influence of endorser trustworthiness on consumer's intention to purchase a celebrity-endorsed brand.

Similarly, celebrity trustworthiness has a positive influence on consumers' attitudes and behavioral outcomes (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018), such as product and brand purchase intention (Osei-Frimpong *et al.*, 2019). Hence, the following hypothesis is posed:

- H3. The trustworthiness of the celebrity positively influences the celebrity's credibility.

3.4 The expertise of celebrities

The term expertise refers to the source's level of knowledge; skills or experience as perceived by individuals (Erdogan, 1999; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018). In line with this definition,

expertise could be described in terms of high levels of experience, knowledge and problem-solving skills within a specific domain; while it is recognized that to become an expert requires long-term training, experience and practice (Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim, 2021).

The theoretical framework of the *source-credibility model* argues that an endorser with expertise is more persuasive (Erdogan, 1999) and more likely to influence consumer behavior (Biswas *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, the term of celebrity expertise is described as the degree of perceived skills, experience, knowledge or understanding connected to the brand or product being recommended (Choi and Rifon, 2012) and positively affect product and brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Ohanian, 1990; Wiedmann and Von Mettenheim, 2021).

Celebrity expertise is more relevant in the endorsement effectiveness than physical attractiveness in the recommendation of technical products (Roozen and Claeys, 2010), and Eisend and Längner (2010), on the other hand, report the delayed impact of expertise but no direct influence on celebrity endorsement effectiveness. Aligned with previous literature, this study proposes that consumers are more willing to purchase a product or brand when the endorser is perceived to be an expert in his/her field (Till and Busler, 2000; Saldanha *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

- H4. The expertise of the celebrity with a brand or product category positively influences the celebrity credibility.

3.5 The attractiveness of celebrities

In regard to the concept of attractiveness, authors like Erdogan (1999), Gong and Li (2017) and Wang and Scheinbaum (2018) highlight that the endorser attractiveness depends not only on physical attractiveness but also on nonphysical characteristics such as personality, intellectual skills, friendliness and lifestyle. On the contrary, some researchers report that only the physical attractiveness of celebrities exerts a positive impact on product evaluation, especially for beauty-related products (Biswas *et al.*, 2006; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018), while other studies indicate the limited influence of physical attractiveness on consumer behavior when the endorser is perceived to be an expert (Premeaux, 2009).

The attractiveness is a dimension of the source credibility that affects the receiver of communication (McGuire, 1985). Accordingly, the *source-attractiveness model* posits that an attractive source influences consumers' attitudes favorably compared to a less-attractive source (Ohanian, 1990; Till and Busler, 2000), being the attractiveness of the endorser a positive influence on his/her credibility (Ohanian, 1990).

Extant research reports that the endorser's attractiveness is more important than her/his expertise when influencing consumers' behavior (Knoll and Matthes, 2017; Kusumondjaja and Tjiptono, 2019), having a great positive influence on consumer purchase intentions (Osei-Frimpong *et al.*, 2019). This outcome might be because consumers associate the positive stereotypes of attractive people with the products and brands advertised (Frank and Mitsumoto, 2021). However, it is unclear if particularly attractive endorsers are able to influence beyond consumer attitudes and create direct

purchase intention (Caballero *et al.*, 1989), and other researchers found that perceived physical attractiveness of the celebrity endorser influences purchase intention under certain conditions (Till and Busler, 2000). Considering that the attractiveness of celebrities recommending food products on social media has a great influence on consumer behavior (Kusumasondjaja and Tjiptono, 2019), the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H5. The attractiveness of the celebrity positively influences the celebrity's credibility.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data collection

The current research argues that the concept of celebrity endorsement could be understood as the recommendation of products or brands, and celebrity endorsement on social media was categorized as promoting either a food product or a food brand. Then, visual stimuli with real celebrities were presented to the participants simultaneously with the questionnaire, showing two celebrities recommending either a food product category – a food commodity – or a food brand. These visual stimuli presented food content generated by two celebrities and shared in social media – Instagram –, regardless it was encouraged or financially supported by companies or not, due to the fact that the use of real online content elicits more valid responses from participants.

This study used endorsement on social media because prior studies report that when consumers see product and brand information on online social media, they do not know whether the celebrity was paid to make the endorsement or whether they simply spontaneously shared their favorite products and brands (Gong and Li, 2017). The selected celebrities for the visual stimuli were well-known celebrities in Spain, who have good image and enjoy high popularity. Besides, the two selected celebrities have a close relationship with food products: the famous chefs Jordi Cruz – recommending food brands – and Dabiz Muñoz – recommending a food product category.

The survey was conducted among consumers residing in Spain in June 2021. Research data were collected through random sampling using an online structured self-administered questionnaire. The research questionnaire was created using Qualtrics® software, and invitations to fill out the online questionnaire were located in the authors' social media and disseminated with the collaboration of other professors.

One “yes/no” pre-screening mandatory question was included to ensure that participants read celebrity recommendations or comments on online social media; and in turn, those participants who do not read these recommendations were screened out of the survey. Next, a pretest study was conducted to survey a small subset of the population to determine whether the questionnaire was valid and reliable; and accordingly, the instrument was pretested among 35 respondents to check adequate wording, question order and the ability of the participants to understand the meaning of the questions.

Two questionnaires were prepared, one for branded food products, and a second one for food product categories. The questionnaires consisted of two parts. The first part was

prepared to gather demographic and socio-economic information; while the second part included the questions to measure participants' assessment of the variables. Research participants assessed each item on a seven-point Likert-type scale to measure the level of agreement or disagreement with the proposed statements, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7). Finally, 315 valid questionnaires were obtained for branded products, and 308 valid questionnaires were obtained for product categories, at a confidence level of 95%. Respondents of the branded products' questionnaire were different from the food product category questionnaire; and in turn, a total amount of 623 consumers participated in the study. The sample profile is summarized in Table 1.

4.2 Variables and measurement scale

The variables for this research were selected based on prior research (Table 2). The credibility of celebrities was assessed using four items adapted from Ohanian (1990) and Martins *et al.* (2017). To measure trustworthiness, expertise and the attractiveness of celebrities we adapted the scale proposed by Ohanian (1990). The congruence or match-up between the celebrity and the product or brand being endorsed was measured through a four-item scale adapted from Dwivedi *et al.* (2016). Finally, the consumers' purchase intention was measured through a four-item scale adapted from Wiedmann *et al.* (2014).

5. Results

5.1 Analysis of the measurement model

To estimate the measurement model a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. The first examination revealed the need to remove two items from the initial scale – CONG1 and PINT2. Having removed these indicators, the results showed an adequate specification of the factorial structure of the model.

Then, the unidimensionality, validity and reliability of the measurement model were analyzed. In the first place, the level of internal consistency was examined through the Cronbach alpha estimates, that range from 0.696 to 0.916, thus indicating good construct reliability (Table 3). Convergent validity was established with factor loadings for all items being close to 0.70 and significant ($p \leq 0.05$) (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The obtained results reported an average variance extracted (AVE) above 0.50, indicating that the measures are significantly related to the underlying dimensions. The composite reliability (CR) of the constructs reached the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating a good internal consistency of the model (Hair *et al.*, 1998). So, the results show an adequate factor structure of the model.

Finally, to evaluate the discriminant validity among the constructs, the AVEs were compared to the squared interconstruct correlation estimates of each paired constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results indicate that the AVE values were greater than the squared correlations, suggesting discriminant validity (Table 4).

5.2 Analysis of the structural model

Structural equation modeling through multigroup analysis using maximum likelihood estimation was developed to test the proposed hypotheses through Amos 18.0 software. The fit

Table 1 Sample profile

Variable	Category	Brands		Products	
		Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Age	16–20 years	28	9.0	25	8.3
	21–30 years	77	24.4	78	25.2
	31–40 years	90	28.5	90	29.1
	41–50 years	74	23.5	69	22.4
	51–60 years	35	11.2	35	11.3
	> 61 years	11	3.4	11	3.7
	Total	315	100.00	308	100.00
Gender	Male	154	48.8	152	49.2
	Female	161	51.2	156	50.8
	Total	315	100.00	308	100.00
Household monthly income level (EUR/Month)	900–1,800	28	9.0	26	8.6
	1,800–2,700	89	28.2	85	27.5
	2,700–3,600	103	32.6	96	31.2
	3,600–4,500	58	18.4	63	20.3
	>4,500	37	11.8	38	12.4
	Total	315	100.00	308	100.00
Education level	None	25	7.9	21	7.0
	Primary education	57	18.2	55	17.9
	Secondary education	87	27.5	94	30.4
	University education	122	38.7	118	38.2
	Doctorate (PhD)	24	7.7	20	6.5
	Total	315	100.00	308	100.00
Frequency of reading celebrity recommendations on social media	Daily	39	12.3	50	16.3
	Once a week	60	19.1	48	15.6
	Several times per week	90	28.6	93	30.1
	Once a month	29	9.2	25	8.0
	Several times per month	64	20.4	66	21.5
	Sometimes a year	26	8.1	20	6.5
	Rarely	7	2.3	6	2.0
	Total	315	100.00	308	100.00

Source: Authors' own elaboration

indices (CFI = 0.952, NFI = 0.926, RMR = 0.077, RMSEA = 0.052, $\chi^2 = 829.441$, $df = 312$, $p = 0.000$, $C = \text{MIN}/\text{DF} = 2.658$) achieved acceptable values according to Hair *et al.* (1998) indicating a good model fit.

5.3 Model estimates and research hypotheses testing

Research findings provide empirical support for the acceptance of $H1$, $H2$ and $H3$ for the endorsement of brands; while research $H1$, $H3$, $H4$ and $H5$ could be accepted for the recommendation of product categories (Table 5).

Regarding the purchase behavior of brands, the credibility of the celebrity was found to have the highest positive impact on consumers' purchase intention ($\beta_{1B} = 0.445$; $p \leq 0.001$); followed by the congruence of the celebrity or match-up with the endorsed product ($\beta_{1B} = 0.235$; $p \leq 0.001$). On the other hand, when examining the variables that influence the credibility of the celebrity, findings indicate a strong positive influence of the celebrity's trustworthiness ($\beta_{2B} = 0.719$; $p \leq 0.001$). These results indicate that as long as consumers perceive the celebrity to be trustworthy, the celebrity would be perceived as credible when recommending a brand, being coherent with previous research (Gupta *et al.*, 2015; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018).

Contrary to the research initial expectations, the obtained results do not support the significant influence of celebrities' expertise ($\beta_{3B} = 0.087^{ns}$) and celebrities' attractiveness ($\beta_{4B} = 0.034^{ns}$) on the credibility of celebrities when recommending a brand. That is, expertise and attractiveness show a lack of influence on celebrities' credibility, since the relationships failed to reach statistical significance. In line with this argument, the obtained results support that the celebrity knowledge, skills or expertise with products, along with their attractiveness does not influence consumers' perception about their credibility. In regard to the lack of influence of the celebrity attractiveness on their credibility when endorsing a brand, the obtained results are aligned with previous research reporting that the endorser attractiveness mostly affects consumer behavior in beauty-related products (Osei-Frimpong *et al.*, 2019).

Regarding the consumers' purchase intention of products, findings indicate a strong positive influence of the celebrity credibility on consumers' intention to purchase ($\beta_{1U} = 0.889$; $p \leq 0.001$); while not supporting a significant influence of celebrities' congruence on purchase intention ($\beta_{5U} = 0.075^{ns}$), being in line with Liang and Lin (2018) who demonstrated the lack of relevance of congruence of the endorser. Findings also demonstrate that when celebrities endorse a product category,

Table 2 Measurement variables and indicators

Latent variables	Indicators	Brands		Products	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Credibility (Ohanian, 1990; Martins et al., 2017)	CRED1: Celebrities recommending products/brands seem to be sincere	5.82	1.271	5.25	1.362
	CRED2: Celebrities recommending products/brands seem to be honest	5.81	1.277	4.77	1.433
	CRED3: Celebrities recommending products/brands seem to be reliable	5.96	1.249	5.17	1.424
	CRED4: Celebrities are credible and convincing	5.95	1.272	5.14	1.425
Trust (Ohanian, 1990)	TRUST1: Celebrities show high level of commitment to the consumers	5.88	1.325	5.13	1.471
	TRUST2: Celebrities have high integrity when recommending brands/products	5.93	1.339	5.24	1.450
	TRUST3: Celebrities care and are concerned about consumers	5.91	1.335	5.09	1.491
Expertise (Ohanian, 1990)	EXP1: Celebrities recommending brands/products are experienced in this area	5.95	1.221	5.18	1.416
	EXP2: Celebrities recommending brands/products are qualified in this area	6.01	1.263	5.23	1.450
	EXP3: Celebrities recommending brands/products are skilled in cooking	5.96	1.226	5.15	1.436
Attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990)	ATR1: The celebrity recommending brands/products is attractive to me	6.05	1.071	5.36	1.480
	ATR2: I pay more attention toward advertisements/recommendations presented by attractive/beautiful celebrities	5.96	1.240	5.28	1.441
Congruence (Dwivedi et al., 2016)	CONG1: There is a logical connection between the brand/product and the celebrity	6.01	1.139	5.18	1.439
	CONG2: There is a match-up between the brand/product and the celebrity	6.02	1.160	5.25	1.460
	CONG3: The combination of the product/brand and the celebrity is adequate	6.01	1.130	5.21	1.450
	CONG4: The images between celebrities recommending brands/products and the products recommended are connected	5.95	1.186	5.28	1.460
Purchase intention (Wiedmann et al., 2014)	PINT1: I am likely to purchase brands/products recommended by celebrities	5.96	1.331	5.16	1.390
	PINT2: My willingness to purchase brands/products recommended by celebrities is high	5.78	1.250	5.29	1.441
	PINT3: I would purchase brands/products recommended by celebrities	5.88	1.260	5.26	1.491
	PINT4: Celebrity recommendations inspire me to purchase the recommended brand/product	5.91	1.328	5.19	1.463

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 3 Factor loadings and indicators of internal consistency and reliability

Construct	Items	Cronbach alpha	Brands				Products			
			Lambda (λ)	CR	AVE	Cronbach alpha	Lambda (λ)	CR	AVE	
Credibility	CRED1	0.916	0.849	0.913	0.725	0.803	0.702	0.807	0.636	
	CRED2		0.847				0.722			
	CRED3		0.843				0.707			
	CRED4		0.866				0.715			
Trustworthiness	TRUST1	0.881	0.827	0.907	0.720	0.716	0.715	0.774	0.544	
	TRUST2		0.872				0.704			
	TRUST3		0.846				0.736			
Expertise	EXP1	0.844	0.800	0.846	0.647	0.696	0.692	0.743	0.590	
	EXP2		0.811				0.704			
	EXP3		0.802				0.712			
Attractiveness	ATTR1	0.738	0.677	0.722	0.598	0.725	0.698	0.673	0.596	
	ATTR2		0.802				0.730			
Congruence	CONG2	0.818	0.750	0.821	0.615	0.712	0.714	0.748	0.597	
	CONG3		0.831				0.701			
	CONG4		0.749				0.698			
Purchase intention	PINT1	0.913	0.877	0.913	0.778	0.812	0.761	0.820	0.603	
	PINT3		0.887				0.762			
	PINT4		0.882				0.805			

Notes: CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted
Source: Authors' own elaboration

there is a positive relationship between celebrity *trustworthiness* ($\beta_{3U} = 0.551$; $p \leq 0.001$), *expertise* ($\beta_{3U} = 0.279$; $p \leq 0.001$) and *attractiveness* ($\beta_{3U} = 0.135$; $p \leq 0.001$) on the credibility of the celebrity. Therefore, trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness would be the stepwise order

in the creation of celebrity credibility when recommending product categories. Finally, derived from the results it can be argued that the celebrity trustworthiness is the main variable influencing the celebrity credibility, for both brands and products.

Variables	Brands						Product categories					
	Cred.	Trust.	Exp.	Attr.	Cong.	Pint.	Cred.	Trust.	Exp.	Attr.	Cong.	Pint.
Credibility	0.851						0.732					
Trustworthiness	0.615	0.848					0.503	0.737				
Expertise	0.454	0.462	0.804				0.531	0.562	0.768			
Attractiveness	0.648	0.412	0.370	0.773			0.578	0.512	0.571	0.772		
Congruence	0.546	0.332	0.355	0.666	0.784		0.583	0.432	0.469	0.467	0.773	
Purchase intention	0.334	0.315	0.415	0.145	0.312	0.882	0.461	0.512	0.515	0.412	0.502	0.776

Table 5 Structural model estimates and hypotheses testing

Relationships	Brands (n = 315)				Product categories (n = 308)			
Credibility → Purchase intention	$\beta_{18} = 0.445$	$p = 0.001$	4.771	H1: Supported	$\beta_{19} = 0.889$	$p = 0.000$	9.523	H1: Supported
Congruence → Purchase intention	$\beta_{28} = 0.235$	$p = 0.004$	2.895	H2: Supported	$\beta_{20} = 0.075^{ns}$	$p = 0.209$	1.284	H2: No supported
Trustworthiness → Credibility	$\beta_{38} = 0.719$	$p = 0.000$	8.568	H3: Supported	$\beta_{21} = 0.551$	$p = 0.000$	7.457	H3: Supported
Expertise → Credibility	$\beta_{48} = 0.087^{ns}$	$p = 0.329$	1.016	H4: No supported	$\beta_{30} = 0.279$	$p = 0.001$	5.076	H4: Supported
Attractiveness → Credibility	$\beta_{58} = 0.034^{ns}$	$p = 0.556$	0.680	H5: No supported	$\beta_{40} = 0.135$	$p = 0.002$	2.916	H5: Supported
R^2 (Credibility) = 0.702					R^2 (Credibility) = 0.551			
R^2 (Purchase intention) = 0.762					R^2 (Purchase intention) = 0.450			

6. Discussion and implications

The obtained results support that consumers' purchase intention is strongly influenced through celebrity credibility, which is greatly influenced by the trustworthiness of the celebrity either recommending a product or a brand. This outcome underscores that a celebrity endorser should be one individual who is perceived as credible based on his/her trustworthiness.

One potential reason for the lack of influence of celebrities' expertise might be that this characteristic is not perceived as relevant, since brands of fast-moving consumer goods are frequently consumed by individuals; who may feel as having expertise in these brands' purchase and evaluation. Another potential explanation for this outcome would be that the brand could be acting as a guarantee of a certain level of product quality and credibility (Aaker, 1996). These results are aligned with previous studies postulating that the use of expert celebrities is not deemed necessary when endorsing low-risk products (Atkin and Block, 1983; Deshhbag and Mohan, 2020) which is the case of food brands.

Referring to the lack of influence of the celebrity attractiveness on their credibility when endorsing a brand, the obtained results are coherent with previous research and demonstrate that the attractiveness of an endorser mostly affects consumer behavior in beauty-related products (Osei-Frimpong *et al.*, 2019), which is not the case of food products, being the product category under research.

Furthermore, and regarding celebrities' recommendation of product categories, findings report a strong positive influence of the celebrity *credibility* on consumers' intention to purchase, while not supporting the influence of the celebrities' *congruence* or match-up with the endorsed product. One possible reason might be the great difficulty to present high congruence between celebrities and product categories or commodities. Another potential explanation for this outcome may be that consumers when taking the decision to purchase a food product – being the product category under research – do not consider relevant the congruence between the endorser and the product type, being in line with [Liang and Lin \(2018\)](#).

In light of the obtained results, the answer to the question being investigated here “Does consumer purchase behavior

influenced by celebrity endorsement differ between brands and products?", would be that the celebrity credibility is the major attribute influencing consumer purchase intention for product categories; while credibility and congruence both influence consumer purchase intention for brands. In line with this argumentation, the credibility of the celebrity endorser, followed by the celebrity congruence or match-up with the endorsed product are the main factors influencing consumers' purchase intention for brands. It is, therefore, expected that celebrity endorsers who are perceived to be honest, reliable and congruent are more likely to influence consumers' purchase intention of brands.

When promoting brands, the celebrity recommendation generates greater consumer purchase intention due to celebrity congruence with the endorsed product category; however, the attributes of the celebrity as attractiveness or expertise were not relevant. One potential explanation is that perceived expertise about a celebrity endorser is processed as a central cue, implying its applicability in high-involvement products, which is not the case of food products. In a similar vein, extensive research has reported the positive impact of celebrity attractiveness mainly for attractiveness-related products (Osei-Frimpong *et al.*, 2019), not being the case of food items. Conversely, research findings demonstrate the influence of trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness on the credibility of the endorser when recommending a product category.

The present study reports that the underlying processes explaining the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement depend on the product category or brand name endorser combination. Research findings imply that for a brand endorsement to be effective, the celebrity should be trustworthy and congruent; while, for a product category, the celebrity should be trustworthy, expert and attractive to a lesser extent. This result is aligned with prior research indicating that both brands and celebrities – understood as “brand persons” – reinforce each other; and in turn, companies use the credibility of celebrities to position the product and establish itself as a brand (Deshbhag and Mohan, 2020).

The purpose of the present research was to challenge the use of brand endorsement to achieve a celebrity endorsement success and proposed an alternative approach to brand endorsement based on the endorsement of commodities or product categories. The obtained results offer a sound understanding of the value of the use of commodities in celebrity endorsement and demonstrate that the underlying processes to achieve high endorsement effectiveness differ from the traditional brand-endorsement combination.

6.1 Theoretical and managerial implications

The current research provides guidance and theoretical implications for marketers. In the first place, the present study contributes to the literature on celebrity endorsement providing an empirical comparison of the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement on consumers' purchase intention between brands and products. In line with this argumentation, this study recognizes that consumers are influenced in their purchase behavior through different celebrity attributes, depending on whether a brand or a product category is being endorsed. In the second place, the present research has identified the characteristics of celebrity endorsers that most influence

consumer purchase behavior of brands and products, being credibility, as well as the celebrity trustworthiness the greater influences when the celebrity is either recommending a product or a brand. In the third place, this study demonstrates that despite it is acknowledged that consumers are influenced in their purchase behavior by celebrity endorsement, this influence is different depending on the presence of a brand.

Research findings provide valuable managerial insights for marketers to implement better celebrity marketing practices. There is an increasing recognition that celebrity endorsement is a beneficial communication tool that provides companies with opportunities to create a positive product or brand image. In this context, this study argues that the starting point of celebrity endorsement for a company or marketer should be to explore whether a brand or a product category or commodity should be endorsed. In a similar vein, for a marketer or company, it would be better to have *an a priori* understanding of whether to endorse a given brand or a commodity before proceeding with the communication strategy.

This research comprehensively indicates that celebrity endorsement is an effective communication tool for both influencing brand and product categories' purchase intention; and provides guidelines for selecting an effective endorser, being credibility and trustworthiness the main influencing factors. This finding implies that companies should select the appropriate type of celebrity who is more suitable for the product or brand image.

The study presented here may assist companies in the selection of a celebrity endorser, since studies confirm the great investment done by companies in promoting their brands and products through celebrity endorsement (Deshbhag and Mohan, 2020; Brooks *et al.*, 2021). Finally, the present study highlights that credible and trustworthy celebrities have a positive impact on consumer purchase intention; and therefore, selecting a celebrity endorser based on his/her credibility and trustworthiness seems to be an adequate strategy for product categories that are not particularly related to attractiveness or performance.

6.2 Research limitations and future research guidance

This research has limitations representing avenues for future research on the topic. In the first place, further research on celebrity endorsement could examine the influence of consumer-related variables that were not included in this study, such as the level of consumer involvement with the product category, since different levels of involvement may yield different results. In the second place, future studies may focus on the influence of the congruence of the celebrity endorser with the recommended product, and its influence depending on the type of endorsed product. In the third place, future studies on celebrity endorsement could examine the differences in endorsement effectiveness comparing social media recommendations that are presented to consumers clearly stating that the content is financially supported versus celebrity's recommendations that have not received financial support. Future studies may compare explicitly declared endorsements of products and brands versus celebrity endorsements without a clear statement of the endorsement deal, since different results may arise. In the fourth place, more comprehensive research could be developed on how the

hedonic or utilitarian nature of the recommended products could influence the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. In the fifth place, further research could examine the direct influence of celebrity trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness on the purchase intention of product categories and brands, as well as the indirect effects of these variables through the celebrity credibility. In the sixth place, future research is required to investigate whether the purpose of companies' communication could determine the use of celebrity endorsement of a product or a brand, and the focus on the different subdimensions of the celebrity attractiveness – such as personality, intellectual skills or lifestyle – could provide interesting venues for further research. Finally, this research was conducted in a specific country, and other promising avenues for future research include the extension of research to a more diverse geographical location to examine potential differences across countries and potential cultural associations in celebrity endorsement of products and brands.

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340

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Sports celebrity personality and purchase intention: the role of endorser-brand congruence, brand credibility and brand image transfer

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine the influence of five sports celebrity personality (SCP) attributes – attractiveness, expertise level, credibility, trustworthiness and character – on consumers' purchase intentions (CPI). It identifies celebrity brand congruence (CBC), endorsed brand celebrity (EBC) and transfer of brand image (TBI) as antecedents of CPI.

Design/methodology/approach – The purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data from 838 respondents. This study developed a multidimensional construct for SCP. The covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was used to examine the relationship between SCP and the endorsed brand. The study used CBC as a mediator and EBC and TBI as partial mediators. The direct and indirect effect of SCP on CPI was investigated using CBC, EBC and TBI as mediators.

Findings – This study supports the importance of three antecedents (i.e. CBC, EBC and TBI) on CPI. It finds congruence across SCP and CBC variables, and a positive impact of SCP on EBC and TBI variables. Also, it exhibits a significant direct effect of CBC on EBC and TBI, whereas the direct effect of CBC on CPI is not substantial. The indirect effect of CBC through mediating variables EBC and TBI found to be significant.

Research limitations/implications – This study concludes that sports celebrity endorsement is essential to transfer the positive celebrity image to the endorsed brand image. However, it is not merely sufficient to influence the buyers' purchase conduct; the brand credibility additionally assumes to take a role in changing their behavioral intentions.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the sports marketing literature by its novelty in analyzing the sports celebrity personality at a multidimensional level. It uses SCP's different attributes as one construct and studies its impact on CPI by taking CBC, EBC and TBI as mediators. The results of this study equip sports management professionals with the knowledge to build better long-term relationships with consumers.

Keywords Brand congruence, Brand credibility, Brand image, Consumers' purchase intentions, Sports celebrity personality

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Introduction

Sports celebrities possess a strong level of recognition that influences customers' perception toward the endorsed brand and alters their purchase intentions (Braunstein and Zhang, 2005; Stevens *et al.*, 2003). Celebrity athlete personality attracts the attention of the consumers and accordingly shifts their actual appearance to the advertised brand (Kim *et al.*, 2017). Sport celebrity endorsements influence consumers' explicit attitudes (the result generated from logical reasoning) or implicit beliefs (the action based on unconscious deliberations) that concern the brand and its purchase intention (Arai *et al.*, 2013; Chang, 2018; Chang *et al.*, 2018). In the context of sports marketing, sports celebrity endorsement is a preferred area of research by many scholars (Braunstein-Minkove *et al.*, 2011; Carrillat *et al.*, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2017). They conducted their investigation to measure the consumers' perception towards sports celebrity advertising in multi-textual (different attributes of informative material) or multi-platform level (different types of media) (Summer and Morgan, 2008). The study of sports celebrity literature provides extensive information on endorsement activities of sports celebrities and how endorsement research continues to evolve as new variables emerged. Notably, how sports organizations use sports celebrities in social media to develop direct relationships with their fan base. In addition, their presence on social networking websites bonds the endorsed brand with consumers (Pegoraro and Jimnah, 2012). Nevertheless, social media can become a destructive platform for any commercial brand if not properly utilized as a marketing communication tool (Sveinson and Hoeberb, 2019).

Nowadays, organizations do rigorous checks on celebrities' followers and their activities on social media before negotiating an endorsement deal with them. One rational reason to explain such action is that the public figure of a sports celebrity endorser is constantly reshaping due to the controversies surrounding his/her personal life. Any scandal will tarnish the reputation of the endorsed brand; fewer sales (Abeza *et al.*, 2020; Ge and Humphreys, 2020; Knittel and Stango, 2014). Hence, it becomes important for an organization to study the overall personality of the celebrity player before signing a contract. Else, using any sports celebrity in a marketing campaign is a risky endeavor to promote a commercial brand. Nowadays, the connection between a celebrity player and fans is closer than ever as fans are able to follow easily the normal day-to-day activities of their favorite player via social media (Frederick *et al.*, 2012; O'Hallarn *et al.*, 2018). Fans are keen to judge the attitudes and behaviors of their favorite celebrity player on the basis of their different personality attributes such as celebrity credibility, likability, trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise level. Each attribute has a distinct influence on fans and varies in intensity considering the popularity of the game or team, and the underlying role of celebrity player in a team. So, from a managerial perspective, it is important to capture the entire personality characteristics of a celebrity player and study their combined impact on consumers' purchase intentions.

Previous studies examined the credibility of a sports celebrity endorser and its impact on consumer attitude towards a brand and purchase behavior (Kim and Na, 2007; Lee and Koo, 2015). However, few studies in sports literature included the credibility of the endorsed brand in their models, and still the association between sports celebrity personality and endorsed brand credibility is unexplored (Spry *et al.*, 2011; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018; Wang and Yang, 2010). Moreover, these studies have identified only a few attributes of celebrity star power and examined their relations with brand credibility. Thus, a holistic view showing the link between brand credibility and multidimensionality of personality characteristics of the celebrity athlete used in endorsements is missing in previous studies. Therefore, it is essential to comprehensively study the characteristics of celebrity athletes to comprehend the credibility of the brand endorsed and investigate its impact on consumer purchase behavior.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. The first is to examine five dimensions of celebrity player personality: attractiveness, expertise level, credibility, trustworthiness and character.

These dimensions are collectively combined under the heading of sports celebrity personality (SCP); used to determine the degree of effect on endorsed brand credibility (EBC), celebrity brand congruence (CBC) and transfer brand image (TBI). Furthermore, the present study investigates the direct relationship of CBC and consumers' purchase intention (CPI), as well as the mediating role of EBC and TBI. The second is to explore consumers' perception towards the credibility of the endorsed brand. The association between brand credibility and multidimensional characteristics of the celebrity athlete is directly considered on endorsement unlike other previous studies.

The paper is organized into six sections. Following the introduction, an overview of the related literature on attributes of the sports celebrity personality and purchase intentions has been presented. The third section provided the conceptual model based on celebrity attributes and developed the hypotheses to examine the impact of sports celebrity personality on the endorsed brand. Section four includes a detailed description of the research methodology and results of the study. The fifth part discusses the results obtained on endorser-brand congruency, and credibility, as well as on purchase intentions. Finally, the paper provides concluding considerations, reviewing the managerial implications and elaborating the limitations of the research incorporating a couple of aspects for future research in this field.

Previous literature and hypotheses formulation

Sports celebrity personality (SCP)

A sports celebrity is defined as a player or coach who gained popularity in a specific sport (Pifer *et al.*, 2015; Shank, 2009). Sport celebrity has the power to direct fans' attention towards the endorsed brand, create a positive brand image, increase the trustworthiness of the endorsed brand and impact positively the purchase intentions of fans and consumers in general (Joseph *et al.*, 2019; Martin, 1996; Voracek and Caslavova, 2019). The difference between a sport and non-sport celebrity is that the former is considered a hero in the community after having obtained a valuable reward for the country in recognition of winning a match, competition or medal (Moskowitz and Wertheim, 2011; Parry, 2020; Shuart, 2007; Yang and Shi, 2011). Sports celebrities receive more recognition than non-sport celebrities inside the society due to the praise they received after their victory in the playground (Joseph *et al.*, 2019; Shuart, 2007; Stevens *et al.*, 2003). They can acquire better opportunities to advertise sport or non-sport related products because of the credibility, trustworthiness, and believability generated by their performance inside the playing field, along with the attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle off the field (Arai *et al.*, 2013; Pifer *et al.*, 2015). Corporate organizations used them to endorse a non-sport brand as they attract media attention and fan following which gives visibility to the endorsed brand too (McCormick, 2018; Schlossberg, 1996). For this reason, the products endorsed by them is unlike any other competitor brand available in the marketplace.

The personality of a sports celebrity is a blend of unique characteristics that make him/her a distinguished person (Braunstein and Zhang, 2005; Joseph *et al.*, 2019; McCronick, 2018). The theory of source credibility suggests that consumers' persuasiveness toward the communication message is primarily affected by the credibility of the information released by the endorser (Spry *et al.*, 2011). Endorser's expertise level and true character bring believability to the advertisement communiqué, and thus the advertising message perceived as more attractive. Endorser's likability positively affected consumers' belief and attachment towards the endorsed brand (Arai *et al.*, 2013; Braunstein-Minkove *et al.*, 2011). McCronick (2018), and Braunstein and Zhang (2005) investigated five factors of a celebrity athletes, which are considered as attributes of star power. These factors are (1) believability of the athlete's words, (2) attraction towards a particular athlete, (3) image of an athlete occupied in consumers' mind, (4) knowledge and competency of an athlete in his/her profession and (5) popularity of a particular athlete in the society from the consumers' perspective. Both studies concluded that all factors are reliable predictors of respondents' behavior on direct purchase (to buy a product endorsed by the star athlete), or media consumption (to watch a particular sports broadcasting star athlete).

Celebrity brand congruence (CBC)

Sports celebrity-brand congruence analysis suggests that during an advertising campaign, the message conveyed through the image of sports celebrity and product, will converge whenever both images as being of approximately equivalent attractiveness (Kamins, 1990; Kim and Na, 2007). If sports celebrity attractiveness matches with product attractiveness, then that generates more sales revenue from consumers and improves the credibility of the sports celebrity endorser (Kim and Na, 2007). In other words, once consumers realize a fit between the endorser and brand, the endorser's credibility and attractiveness will start influencing consumers to make them recognize the endorsed brand (Kim and Na, 2007). Lee and Park (2014) also found that the strength of celebrity advertising increased, whenever a match existed between sports celebrity and endorsed product. Liang and Lin (2018) found that sports celebrities would be a better choice to advertise a sports brand, as consumers found a better fit for sport products with sports celebrities.

Also, previous researchers found that a moderate level of incongruence between the sports celebrity and brand will make the brand more attractive to the consumers (Lee and Thorson, 2008; Steve and Huma, 2010). Banyte *et al.* (2011) stated that a moderate mismatch of the brand with the sports celebrity endorser provides better results not only for the market leader brand but also for second-tier brands. They specified that sports celebrity brand incongruity generates a longer time of advertising views, and improves consumers' attitude and interest towards the brand. A moderate mismatch between sports celebrity and brand affects positively consumer purchase intention and also improves word-of-mouth marketing (Törn, 2012). According to Martin (1996), the congruence between the celebrity and the endorsed brand is an important factor while selecting the sports celebrity athlete for the non-sport brand. Moreover, the sport from which the athlete comes may enhance the endorsement effectiveness and create a better impact on the consumers.

This study considers sports celebrity Virat Kohli endorsing a non-sport brand American Tourister with an aim to examine the effects of congruence or incongruence between the celebrity and brand on consumer attitudes towards the brand.

Endorsed brand credibility (EBC)

Erdem *et al.* (2006, p. 34) defined brand credibility as "the believability of the product position information contained in a brand, which depends on the willingness and ability of firms to deliver what they promise." Higher brand credibility can improve customers' perception of product quality and reduce their price sensitivity towards the product (Erdem *et al.*, 2002). In the previous studies on source credibility, researchers focused on examining the credibility of the celebrity endorser. However, the awareness level of consumers has increased enormously nowadays due to the popularity of social networks. So, it is essential to measure the consumers' perception of the credibility of the endorsed brand as well. Thus, this study has taken the credibility of the brand together with its endorser.

Transfer brand image (TBI)

Arai *et al.* (2013) developed a model to measure the athlete brand image using on-field (performance) as well as off-field (attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle) dimensions of celebrity athlete personality. The study found that the marketable lifestyle of celebrity athlete is the most important dimension of the celebrity athlete brand image. This dimension includes the sub-scale of his/her life story (how the athlete personality can be perceived by the fans or public outside the field), role model (how the celebrity athlete participate and contribute to the society) and relationship effort (how the celebrity athlete interact with his/her fans online and offline).

The transfer of brand image viewed as a transfer process from a sports celebrity brand image to the endorsed brand image when endorser and brand share similar association sets

(Kim and Na, 2007; Kim *et al.*, 2017). Kim *et al.* (2017) conducted a study to measure the impact of the congruent advertising context with the celebrity athlete personality in transferring celebrity athlete's brand image on the endorsed brand image. The study found that the transfer of the brand image from celebrity athlete to the endorsed brand was more pronounced when the advertising context matched with the athlete's personality.

This study used the multidimensional attribute of a celebrity player as a single personality construct in order to check its congruence with the endorsed brand and measure its impact on EBC and TBI. Three hypotheses are formulated in this respect:

H1.1. SCP will positively impact CBC.

H1.2. SCP will positively impact EBC.

H1.3. SCP will positively impact TBI.

Celebrity brand congruence (CBC) and consumers' purchase intentions (CPI)

Sports celebrity endorsement has been assessed by the ability level of an endorser to influence customers. The liking and recognition of celebrity sportsperson in society generate his/her congruence with any endorsed product. Endorser-product congruence reinforces consumers' positive brand beliefs, which eventually affects their brand attitude and CPI (Fleck *et al.*, 2012).

Lee *et al.* (2017) found a positive attitude of participants towards the website advertisement and advertised brand when they viewed the advertisement with a sports celebrity. They found congruence between banner advertising and sports websites, and a significant effect of congruence on participant's future intentions. Recent studies on congruence showed that athlete-brand congruence generates more favorable responses towards the brand through influencing the implicit and explicit attitude of the respondents (Chang *et al.*, 2018). A study conducted by Chang (2018) showed that congruence between athlete and endorsed product alter consumers' explicit attitudes, while the evaluative conditioning changes their implicit attitudes. The impact of perceived fit increases on consumers' precise approach when they introspected in logically the endorsement of the product. Liang and Lin (2018) found no significant relation between celebrity endorser product congruence and consumer behavioral intention. However, they identified a positive relationship between sports athlete's endorsed products and CPI for low involvement products. Braunstein-Minkove *et al.* (2011) recognized a moderate effect of endorser product congruence on consumer's exceptional brand value; however, a strong influence of unique brand value on CPI.

To examine the impact of CBC on EBC, TBI, and CPI, the study has proposed the following hypotheses:

H2.1. CBC will positively impact EBC.

H2.2. CBC will positively impact TBI.

H2.3. CBC will positively impact CPI.

Endorsed brand credibility (EBC) and consumer purchase intention (CPI)

Spry *et al.* (2011) examined the effect of celebrity credibility on endorsed brand value by taking brand credibility as a mediator. A credible celebrity increases the brand value of the product if consumers locate the likelihood of the brand. Erdem and Swait (2004) examined the dual effect of brand credibility on consumers' purchase considerations and choice of brands, by considering two of the credibility attributes: brand trustworthiness and expertise. The results of their study showed a positive influence of brand credibility on consumers' brand choice and consumption behaviors. Baek and King (2011) explored the favorable and robust impacts of brand credibility on consumer purchase intention of different brands in the services sector. Four impacts were identified: (1) improving the quality of the brand, (2) increasing the value for money, (3) saving the

cost of information and (4) reducing the perceived risk. Wang and Yang (2010) examined the positive impact of brand credibility on consumers' purchase intention. By using brand awareness and brand image as moderators, they found a positive relationship between brand credibility and consumers' behavioral intentions (Rai and Singh, 2020).

Wang et al. (2017) used endorser credibility as a second-order construct. They classified endorser credibility as the main factor which generates a positive outcome on consumers in terms of favorable attitude towards the brand, believability and credibility towards the brand, and overall intention to purchase that brand. They also found that two components of celebrity endorsers, namely trustworthiness and attractiveness, positively influence consumers' attitudes towards the brand, improve their brand credibility and increase their purchase intention (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018).

This study has taken endorsed brand credibility as a mediator to measure the direct and indirect impact of EBC on CPI. Accordingly, the next two hypotheses are formulated:

H3. EBC will directly affect CPI.

H3.1. EBC will indirectly mediate between CBC and CPI.

Transfer brand image (TBI) and consumers' purchase intentions (CPI)

Sports celebrity image and brand image are two vibrant components in celebrity research. Sports celebrities are admirable people who enhance the image of the product by shifting their positive personality characteristics to the advertised brand. McCracken (1986) developed the meaning transfer model (MTM). The model explains how celebrity endorsement transfers the cultural and societal values of the product to consumers' purchase behavior. It highlights the importance of celebrity endorsers in three different stages. Initially, the celebrity image built, then transferred to the product, and finally shifted to the buyers with the product purchase (McCracken, 1989). Jain and Roy (2016), and Roy and Jain (2017) in their studies extended the components of MTM. They identified the importance of celebrity image for the endorsed brand and explained the transfer of celebrity image to the endorsed brand image through consumers' purchase behavior.

Sports celebrities have a positive image in any community due to their high level of expertise, credibility, attractiveness and performance in the field (Lohneiss and Hill, 2014). The image of the celebrity sports person and its transference to the endorsed brand can be better understood with the help of transgression studies. These studies state that a small change in the athlete's image in public can create a more significant difference in the image of the endorsed brand (Ge and Humphreys, 2020; Knittel and Stango, 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Lee and Koo, 2015; Um, 2013). Lee et al. (2015), and Lee and Koo (2015) mentioned that if consumers consider the unethical behavior of the athlete and attach such immoral behavior with the athlete's endorsed brand, then it will impact their attitude, image, sports consumption, and purchase intention toward the endorsed brand (Abeza et al., 2020). Customers refrain from buying products endorsed by athletes with bad reputations. For example, the multinational company Gatorade and Accenture broke their agreement with Tiger Woods after his extramarital affair controversy. The sponsors lost more than 2% of their market share within the first 15 days of the scandal revealed in the media. Investors believe that such an incident can impact the sales of the company as well, so they started selling their shares (Ge and Humphreys, 2020; Knittel and Stango, 2014).

The above review highlights the importance of sports celebrity brand image and how it impacts the endorsed brands either positively or negatively. Accordingly, the study derived the following two hypotheses:

H4. TBI will directly affect CPI.

H4.1. TBI will indirectly mediate between CBC and CPI.

Conceptual framework

This study adapts the product match-up model by Kamins (1990) and image transfer model by McCracken (1989). However, most of the constructs used in the study were developed from previous literature (Barbara *et al.*, 2002; Fleck *et al.*, 2012; Gwinner and Eaton, 1999; Gwinner *et al.*, 2009; McCormick, 2018; Ngan *et al.*, 2011; Wang, 2017). Figure 1 summarizes the proposed model.

Research methodology

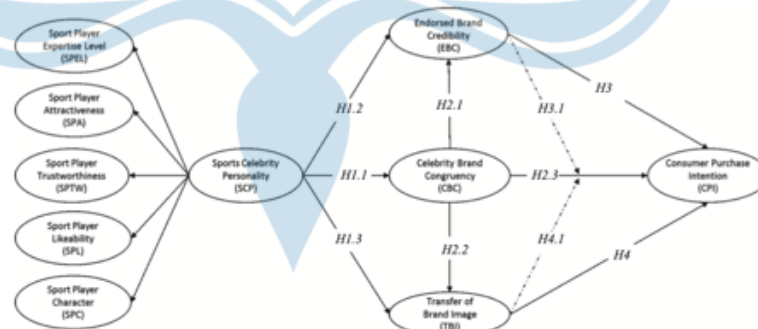
Measures

The measurement items for the survey instrument (sports celebrity personality, endorsed brand credibility, celebrity brand congruence, transfer brand image, and consumer purchase intention) came from previously validated instruments and were adapted to fit the context of this study. The study adopts all the constructs used by McCormick (2018) to measure the SCP. For measuring the CBC, three items have been taken from the study of Fleck *et al.* (2012). For EBC, this study adopted two items from Wang's (2017) research and one item (Classy/Not Classy) from Barbara *et al.* (2002) study. For measuring TBI, two items were considered from Gwinner and Eaton's (1999) study and one item (My image of American Tourister is consistent with my image of Virat Kohli) from Gwinner *et al.* (2009) study. For measuring CPI, three items have been taken from Ngan *et al.* (2011) study. The responses of the survey participants to each of the items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). The draft questionnaire was shown to three professors of marketing of a top B-School in India to ensure content validity. Their feedback was used to prepare a structured questionnaire which was pre-tested with a small sample of 10 respondents to explore any language and/or typing errors. It was made sure that the respondents who participated in the pre-test are not participating in the final survey.

Research design and data collection

The selection of a celebrity and the endorsed brand that fits all the requirements was the first step towards designing the study. This was also important so as to remove any possible bias in the selection process. First, a search was made over the Internet to identify the top sports celebrity names connected with widespread endorsement deals in India in a way similar to Liang and Lin (2018) and McCormick (2018). Ten names from the Indian sports fraternity were identified which were Prithvi Shaw, Saina Nehwal, Rohit Sharma, Hima Das, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Hardik Pandya, PV Sindhu, MS Dhoni, and Virat Kohli (Inside Sport, 2018).

Figure 1.
The theoretical
framework of the
research model



Virat Kohli was selected as the sports celebrity for the following two main reasons. First, according to a brand valuation report published in 2018 by Duff and Phelps (2018), Virat Kohli ranked number one celebrity of India for the last two consecutive years (Business Today, 2019; Live Mint, 2019). Second, according to Forbes (2019) list of highest-paid athletes, Virat Kohli ranked 85th, and he is the only Indian player in the top 100 players list for 2019 (Business Standard, 2018). In 2018, Virat Kohli earned \$24 million, in which \$20 million originated from endorsement deals (Aksharit, 2018). Also, he is regarded as the most attractive figure in the Indian advertisement industry (Business Today, 2019; Duff and Phelps, 2019; Live Mint, 2019). After deciding upon Virat Kohli as a sports celebrity endorser, the second step was to select one brand endorsed by him. To avoid biases in the brand selection process, a pilot study conducted and data were collected from 100 undergraduate and postgraduate students. They were provided with a list of 25 brands that were endorsed by Virat Kohli. They were instructed to rank the brands from 1 (most recalled) to 25 (least recalled) (Biscaia *et al.*, 2014; Gupta *et al.*, 2013). Results revealed that American Tourister got the highest recall (47%) followed by Manyavar (31%), Boost (27%), Philips (24%), and Too Yumm (21%) brand.

Once the celebrity and endorsed brand were finalized, the next step was to collect the data from a representative sample. Most of the similar studies in the past have used student samples for convenience, creating external validity concerns. It is argued that the unique nature of our work necessitates such a sample. According to TAM Media, youth represent the largest fan-base of sports consumption in India, with 64 percent males and 44 percent people of age group 15–35 years (Statista, 2019; Yousaf *et al.*, 2018). For data collection, respondents were selected from a pool of 1500 students at two large universities in India, who were approached through an internal e-mail. Of those, 1000 were selected through purposive sampling technique, and questionnaires were distributed to them. A total of 858 questionnaires were returned back. The questionnaires were further screened, and 16 questionnaires were discarded due to the lack of complete information. In the end, 844 questionnaires were retained for further analysis. Cook's method was used to explore outliers and six observations were removed since they were showing abnormal Cook's distance. This resulted in the final sample size of 838 valid responses, making the overall response rate of 57.80% (from base 1500). The average age of the respondents was 22.2 years (range 18–25), with 55% of them being males. The sample was thus found close in the gender distribution of the population and covered a major age group of the overall audience.

Bostrom *et al.* (1993) was used to check the non-response bias in the chosen sample. The mean values of the first 40 and 40 late respondents were examined using a *t*-test. Results revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups for the variables. This resulted in our belief in the absence of non-response bias in the sample. More rigorous checks for non-response bias were avoided as the proportion of non-response was small in our case. The common method bias was also checked after randomizing the items in the questionnaire. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted and all the items were constrained to load onto a single factor. The results of the unrotated factor solution revealed that no single factor explained more than 50% variance of the variables. This indicated the lack of common method bias. The collected data were randomly split into two-halves, with each set containing 419 respondents. The objective was to use one-half of the data for establishing psychometric properties of the measures, while the second half was to be used for model validation and hypothesis testing to ensure higher validity of the measures and overall model (Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994).

Results

Measurement model

Data analysis was done using structural equation modeling (SEM) through covariance-based SEM (with software AMOS version 21.0). A cut-off value of $p < 0.001$ was selected to check for

the statistical significance of all parameters in the analyses (Trafimow and Earp, 2017). The univariate normality was tested, the skewness and kurtosis of all variables were measured and it was found that all values of skewness were within the prescribed limits of -2 to $+2$ and all kurtosis values were within the cut-off range of -7 to $+7$, indicating univariate normality of the data (Curran *et al.*, 1996). In order to ensure psychometrically sound measures, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the first half of the sample of 419 respondents. The sample size of 419 respondents was sufficient for the statistical validity of this CFA as we needed only ten times the number of variables in our study (Reinartz *et al.*, 2009). The factor loadings for each item for their respective construct, Cronbach's alpha (α), average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and maximum shared variance (MSV) for each construct were found sufficient and are shown in Table 1.

Test of first-order factor analysis

In order to test the model efficacy of first-order factor analysis, the indices used were comparative fit index (CFI), goodness-of-fit index (GFI), normed fit index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), chi-square (χ^2) and χ^2/df . The model was run and the measurement model indicated that the model fits the data: $\chi^2 = 314.132$ ($p < 0.05$), $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.272$; GFI = 0.915, NFI = 0.913, TLI = 0.953; CFI = 0.947 and RMSEA = 0.026 (Bentler, 1990; Kline, 2011).

To confirm construct validity, convergent and discriminant validity need to be established. The average variance extracted (AVE) was found to be greater than 0.50, as well as most loadings were above 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2010), providing sufficient evidence of convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). To establish discriminant validity, the findings, as shown in Table 2, indicate the square root of the AVE (diagonal values) of each construct is larger than its corresponding correlation coefficients (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

Structural model

Once the psychometric properties of the measures were established, the structural model was assessed. Figure 2 shows the complete structural model tested with the second split data of 419 respondents.

The model fit obtained for the path model was found satisfactory with $\chi^2 = 416.216$, $\text{df} = 317$, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.312$, GFI = 0.942; IFI = 0.931, CFI = 0.944 and RMSEA = 0.052. It therefore became quite evident that while psychometric properties of constructs remained intact with the structural model, the hypothesis tests show interesting results. Results of hypothesis testing revealed that the effect of SCP on CBC was highly significant as $b = 0.823$, $t = 7.21$, $p < 0.01$, supported H1.1. Also, the effect of SCP on EBC ($b = 0.680$, $t = 5.81$, $p < 0.01$) and TBI ($b = 0.652$, $t = 5.77$, $p < 0.01$) is highly significant supporting H1.2 and H1.3. The effect of CBC on EBC ($b = 0.178$, $t = 3.87$, $p < 0.01$) and on TBI ($b = 0.157$, $t = 2.85$, $p < 0.05$), is significant supporting H2.1 and H2.2. The effect of EBC on CPI ($b = 0.422$, $t = 5.40$, $p < 0.01$) and the effect of TBI on CPI ($b = 0.681$, $t = 7.20$, $p < 0.01$) is highly significant supporting H3 and H4 respectively. However, the effect of CBC on CPI is not significant ($b = 0.005$, $t = 0.26$, $p > 0.05$). Table 3 displays the results of the structural model and hypothesis, including path, regression weight, and associated t -value of each path. As it can be seen, the majority of the hypotheses are supported except for H2.3.

Mediation effect

The findings of this study show that the direct impact of CBC on CPI is not significant, whereas the total effect (direct and indirect effect) is highly significant (refer to Figure 3). Also, $R^2 = 0.62$ suggested that 63% of the variance in the CPI explained by the three independent variables CBC, EBC, and TBI.

Constructs	Item	FOL	SOL	Celebrity personality and purchase intention	
1. Sport player personality (SPP)					
• <i>Sport Player Expertise Level (SPEL)</i> AVE = 0.790 CR = 0.895 CA = 0.88	(name of the sports celebrity) has excellent athletic ability (name of the sports celebrity) is aggressive when he plays (name of the sports celebrity) is a team player (name of the sports celebrity) is an extremely talented athlete (name of the sports celebrity) shows leadership abilities (name of the sports celebrity) is goal oriented (name of the sports celebrity) is at the peak of his/her career (name of the sports celebrity) is a hard worker (name of the sports celebrity) is courageous (name of the sports celebrity) has a high level of technical ability	0.73 0.54 0.79 0.88 0.77 0.89 0.67 0.84 0.80 0.63	0.91		
• <i>Sport Player Trustworthiness (SPTW)</i> AVE = 0.758 CR = 0.904 CA = 0.841	(name of the sports celebrity) is responsible (name of the sports celebrity) is well spoken (name of the sports celebrity) is intelligent (name of the sports celebrity) shows good sportsmanship	0.84 0.79 0.86 0.88	0.91		
• <i>Sport Player Likability (SPL)</i> AVE = 0.709 CR = 0.880 CA = 0.796	(name of the sports celebrity) is modest (name of the sports celebrity) is very charming (name of the sports celebrity) is honest (name of the sports celebrity) has an ability to connect with his/her fan base (name of the sports celebrity) is kind (name of the sports celebrity) is a daredevil (name of the sports celebrity) is likable (name of the sports celebrity) is controversial (name of the sports celebrity) is flamboyant (name of the sports celebrity) is worldly	0.81 0.82 0.74 0.70 0.73 0.59 0.76 0.56 0.73 0.86	0.93		
• <i>Sport Player Character (SPC)</i> AVE = 0.777 CR = 0.913 CA = 0.857	(name of the sports celebrity) is responsible (name of the sports celebrity) is well spoken (name of the sports celebrity) is intelligent (name of the sports celebrity) shows good sportsmanship	0.84 0.79 0.86 0.88	0.91		
2. Celebrity Player Congruence (CPC)					
AVE = 0.76 CR = 0.91 CA = 0.87	(name of the brand) and (name of the sports celebrity) go well together (name of the brand) is well-matched with (name of the sports celebrity) (name of the sports celebrity) is very appropriate as a celebrity endorser of the (name of the brand)	0.89 0.88 0.85	0.87		
3. Endorsed Brand Credibility (EBC)					
AVE = 0.66 CR = 0.85 CA = 0.82	Unconvincing/Convincing Unbelievable/Believable Not classy/Classy	0.71 0.86 0.86	0.82		
4. Transfer of Brand Image (TBI)					
AVE = 0.71 CR = 0.85 CA = 0.84	Virat Kohli (VK) and American Tourister (AT) have a similar image The image I associate with AT is related to the image I associate with VK My image of AT is consistent with my image of VK	0.70 0.90 0.91	0.84		
5. Consumer Purchase Intention (CPI)					
AVE = 0.73 CR = 0.88 CA = 0.85	Unlikely – Likely Impossible – Possible Improbable – Probable	0.82 0.87 0.86	0.85		

Table 1.
Factor loadings,
Cronbach's alpha (CA),
composite reliability
(CR) and AVE

Table 1.
Factor loadings,
Cronbach's alpha (CA),
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(CR) and AVE

Sobel test, Aroian test and Goodman test were performed to examine the indirect effect of CBC on CPI through the two mediators EBC and TBI. This analysis is displayed in [Tables 4](#) and [5](#) (Sobel, 1982).

The effect of CBC on CPI through EBC found to be highly significant, suggesting that EBC is a full mediator between CBC and CPI. Similarly, the indirect effect of CBC on CPI found to be highly significant, suggesting that TBI is also a mediator between CBC and CPI. Nevertheless, EBC is a more influential mediator if compared to TBI.

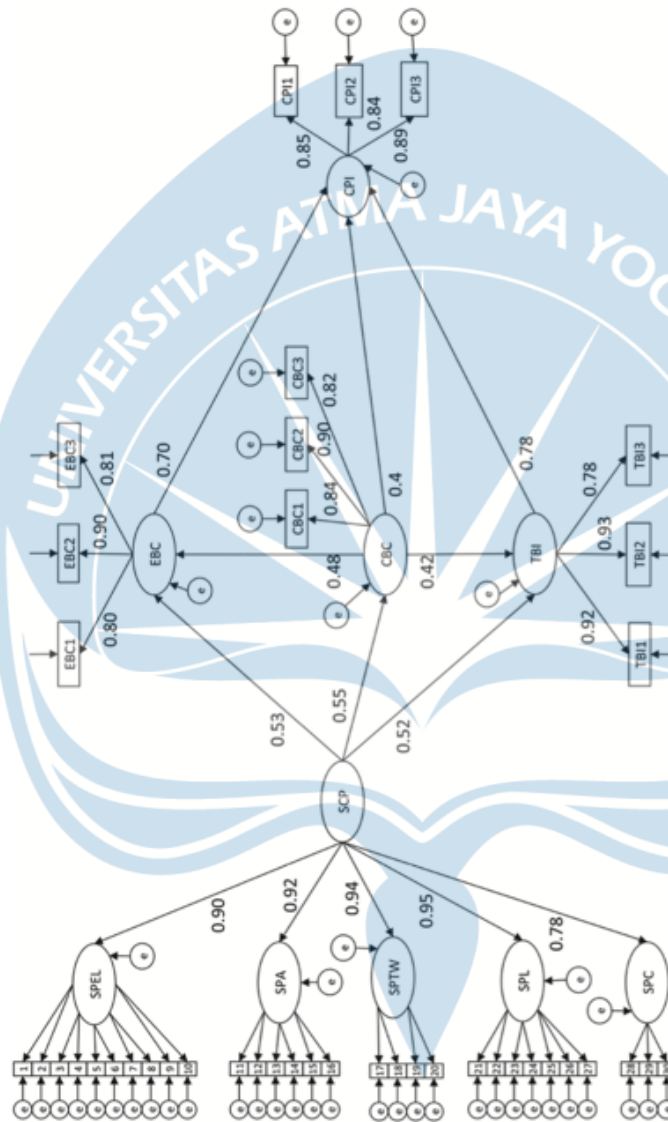
General discussion and contribution

This study develops a multidimensional model based on sport celebrity attributes and examines endorser congruence with the endorsed brand. It uses a non-sport brand "American Tourister" as an endorsed brand and matches it with a sports celebrity "Virat Kohli" with a purpose to infer the importance of sport celebrity traits as perceived by consumers since matching them with the endorsed brand can easily direct the perception of consumers towards the endorsed brand (McCormick, 2018). This claim was supported by accepting hypothesis [H1.1](#). Hypothesis [H1.2](#) infers that the attributes of a celebrity athlete can generate a positive outcome on the endorsed brand. The celebrity athlete star power can increase consumers' believability towards the endorsed brand. This claim was supported by accepting hypothesis [H1.2](#). This result is consistent in the sport context with [Kim and Na \(2007\)](#) study, who found that endorser credibility and attractiveness can build a positive attitude in consumers' minds, and subsequently develop the endorsed brand credibility when sports celebrities and endorsed brands are matched to each other. The study also found that even in the incongruent situation (sports celebrity and endorsed brand), the celebrity athlete attractiveness makes a positive impact on consumers'. Although two variables of celebrity personality were only used, they still unconstrained their importance in creating the credibility of the endorsed brand.

Hypothesis [H1.3](#) claims that celebrity advertisement is valuable in transferring the sports celebrity image to the endorsed brand image ([Jain and Roy, 2016](#); [Kim et al., 2017](#)). This research depicts a positive image of Virat Kohli in consumers' minds which further influence their perceptions toward the American Tourister. [Fleck et al. \(2012\)](#) stated that, if a celebrity is broadly acceptable and esteemed by consumers, then they find the celebrity to be congruent with any brand, even though the brand is moderately mismatched with the celebrity; the same result this study reached. On the other hand, this result contradicts other studies that assert positive outcome to be generated only if there exists a match between athletes and endorsed brands ([Kim and Na, 2007](#); [Roy et al., 2012](#)). To investigate the transferability of the celebrity traits to the brand, it is essential to understand the strength of association between

Table 2.
Interconstruct
correlation and
descriptive statistics

Constructs	SCP	CBC	EBC	TBI	CPI
SCP	0.88				
CBC	0.54	0.87			
EBC	0.61	0.49	0.82		
TBI	0.65	0.52	0.78	0.84	
CPI	0.56	0.41	0.69	0.76	0.85
<i>M</i>	5.83	5.27	5.52	5.53	5.52
<i>SD</i>	0.94	1.43	1.15	1.22	1.28
Note(s): SCP, Sport Celebrity Personality; CBC, Celebrity Brand Congruence; EBE, Endorsed Brand Credibility; TBI, Transfer of Brand Image; CPI, Consumer Purchase Intention; <i>M</i> , Mean; <i>SD</i> , Standard Deviation					



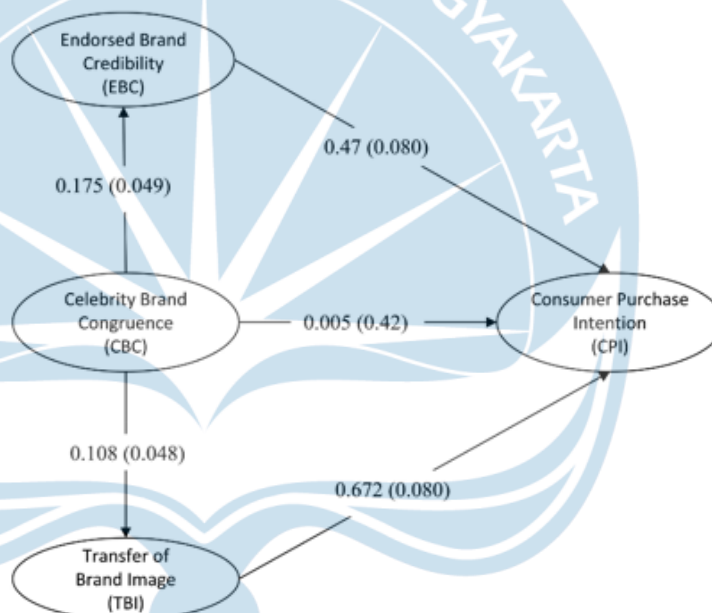
Note(s): SPEL, Sports Player Expertise Level; SPA, Sports Player Attractiveness; SPTW, Sports Player Trustworthiness; SPL, Sports Player Likability; SCP, Sports Celebrity Personality; CBC, Celebrity Brand Congruence; EBC, Endorsed Brand Credibility; TBI, Transfer of Brand Image; CPI, Consumer Purchase Intention

Figure.2.
Structural
equation model

Table 3.
SEM indices and
hypotheses

Goodness of fit	Hypothesis	Relationship	Regression weight	t-value	Decision
$\chi^2/df = 1.312$	H1.1	SCP → CBC	0.823*	7.21	Supported
CFI = 0.944	H1.2	SCP → EBC	0.680*	5.81	Supported
GFI = 0.942	H1.3	SCP → TBI	0.652*	5.77	Supported
IFI = 0.931	H2.1	CBC → EBC	0.178*	3.87	Supported
RMSEA = 0.052	H2.2	CBC → TBI	0.157**	2.85	Supported
	H2.3	CBC → CPI	0.005	0.26	Rejected
	H3	EBC → CPI	0.422*	5.40	Supported
	H4	TBI → CPI	0.681*	7.20	Supported

Note(s): * indicates $p \leq 0.01$, ** indicates $p < 0.05$, no star means non-significant; SCP, Sport Celebrity Personality; CBC, Celebrity Brand Congruence; EBC, Endorsed Brand Credibility; TBI, Transfer of Brand Image; CPI, Consumer Purchase Intention

Figure 3.
Mediating effect of
EBC and TBI**Table 4.**
Indirect effects of CBC
on CPI through EBC

Test	Test stat	SE	p-value
Sobel test	3.1239	0.0232	0.001
Aroian test	3.0856	0.0242	0.003
Goodman test	3.15	0.0225	0.0010

celebrity and brand traits (Bergkvist, 2017; Lee and Ko, 2015). Hypotheses H2.1 and H2.2 claim that the fit between celebrity personality variables and endorsed brand will positively

influence consumers' perception towards the endorsed brand, and eventually will create brand credibility and build a positive image of the brand. The result of this study confirms a positive pairwise relationship between CBC, EBC, and TBI. This can be interpreted that the fit between influential celebrity athlete and endorsed brand produces beneficial results for the brand in terms of creating its credibility and building its positive image. This is consistent with the finding of Roy and Jain (2017) which confirms a positive shift of traits and qualities of the celebrity endorser to the endorsed brand and consequently to the purchase intention of the final consumer.

The current study also infers a positive influence of EBC on CPI as formulated in hypothesis H3. Consumers, who are fascinated by the personality of the sports celebrity endorser, will generate positive thoughts about the brand endorsed by them. The sports celebrity advertisement helps to build the credibility of the brand in consumers' mind, and influence their CPI (Lee and Koo, 2015). In previous research, no direct relationship has been found across EBC and CPI using the multidimensionality of the celebrity player. Hence, proving the relationship EBC on CPI can be regarded as a contribution in the field of sports celebrity advertising and brand research streams. This study also infers the positive influence of TBI on CPI as formulated in hypothesis H4. Initially, the shift of positive image from sports celebrity to the endorsed brand was supported by testing hypothesis H1.3. Consumers, who are exposed to the sports celebrity and the endorsed brand, find a match between both variables. They start the process by shifting the positive image from the endorser to the endorsed brand and finish it by changing their purchase behavior. In other words, the fit across the sports celebrity (Virat Kohli) and the brand (American Tourister) has been seen positively by consumers, and regarded as helpful to change their brand image and buying behavior. Ambroise *et al.* (2014) reached a similar result on celebrity personality and brand identity. Although a specific variation has been found between variables, the study derived similar results by examining the positive impact of the celebrity personality on the brand's character, which advanced by brand personality influencing buyers' purchase decisions.

Lastly, the study achieves its main objective by highlighting the importance of brand credibility and explaining how the brand image transfers to consumers. Diverse from the positive relationships between proposed variables, the study finds a negative association between CBC and CPI through testing hypothesis H2.3; meaning that celebrity and brand similarities, as perceived by consumers, did not influence their purchase decision. In other words, consumers' perceived the sports celebrity and its endorsed brand positively, but that is not enough to change their mind favorably towards the endorsed brand. The reason behind this finding may be the 1.3 billion population of India, which comes under the middle-class category and spends \$2 to \$10 per day (Asian studies, 2018). Because of their low income before making the purchase decision, consumers look for the credibility of the brand; especially, when the price of the product is high (Voráček and Čáslavová, 2019). Furthermore, hypotheses H3.1 and H4.1 supported the mediating function of EBC and TBI by confirming their role in influencing the purchase decision of consumers. In other words, the consumers give due weightage to the credibility of the brand before they make their purchase decision. For them, brand credibility is rather more important than the celebrity athlete who endorses

Test	Test stat	SE	p-value
Sobel test	2.363	0.0314	0.016
Aroian test	2.327	0.032	0.015
Goodman test	2.41	0.031	0.011

Table 5.
Indirect effects of CBC
on CPI through TBI

that brand (Spry *et al.*, 2011). Findings also show that the characteristics of a celebrity are beneficial when combined with a suitable brand that maintained its credibility in the market. Isolating the celebrity from the brand did not achieve the desired result for the brand otherwise (Roy and Jain, 2017).

This study concluded that whenever consumers exposed to the sports celebrity with the endorsed brand, only then they can perceive the congruence between sports celebrity and brand. Such perception builds the credibility of the brand and transfers the positive image of the celebrity athlete to the endorsed brand. With this finding, the study highlights the importance of the multidimensional construct of sports personality for establishing the attractiveness of the brand and generating positive outcomes from the consumers. Thus, developing and testing the multidimensional construct is the main contribution of this study in the field of celebrity and brand advertising. Previous studies used single attributes of a celebrity player for brand congruence (Fleck *et al.*, 2012; McCormick, 2018), but this study used the multidimensional attribute of a celebrity player as a single personality component and checked its congruence with the endorsed brand. Of equal importance, this study recognizes brand credibility as a key variable to convert consumers' positive perceptions about the brand into their purchase intentions. That means consumers are not influenced solely by the matching of celebrity-brand advertising, but also give other due considerations such as the credibility of the brand.

Managerial implications

In the world of competition, consumers are exposed to advertising everywhere, and it can impact their cognitive outcomes in the form of implicit and explicit attitudes toward the endorser and the endorsed brand. In other words, when consumers encountered celebrity advertising, some thoughts or perceptions about the brand automatically emerged in their minds. When they used these thoughts to assess positively or negatively the celebrity or brand, they form their implicit attitude. When they started to evaluate critically the information conveyed in the advertisement, they form their explicit attitude. From a managerial perspective, it is crucial to understand consumer psychology before making any strategy that can impact consumers directly or indirectly. The findings of this study confirmed the positive relationship between all attributes of the sports celebrity personality (SCP) and endorsed brand. That means instead of considering a single personality attribute of a sports celebrity, it is vital for marketing officials to give due weightage to all personality traits of the sports celebrity. Sometimes, sports celebrity is expertise in his/her field, but shows low levels of trustworthiness among consumers as in the example of Tiger Woods and Ray Rice (Knittel and Stango, 2014; Neff, 2014). So, it is important to measure all the qualities of the celebrity sportsperson before projecting their image towards customers. Similar to what has been stated in previous studies, this study also supported the significant impact of congruence on consumers' implicit attitudes, as it finds an automatic connection between the sports celebrity and the brand.

It is a challenge for the marketing managers to find the right celebrity athlete with all the personality traits with whom they can create the matching of their brand and influence their target customers in a better way. For getting the associative and automatic views of the target customers, it is important to conduct a pilot study and accumulate the views of the target consumers before finalizing the selection of celebrity athletes for their brand (Martin, 1996). It is advisable to marketing practitioners to use illustrative techniques such as words or images which are easy to use and simple to understand by the consumers. One key finding of this study is that when the consumers perceive the congruence between the celebrity and the brand, its positive image shifted to the endorsed brand image. This result provides more interesting implications if analyzed in the Indian context. Most of the Indians are functionally illiterate, and they make their purchase decisions by seeing their favorite celebrity advertising. Such social factors should be considered by marketing managers. They should

attempt and select a celebrity in their advertisement who is popular in that particular segment and also can easily influence their target customers. Jain and Roy (2016), and Voráček and Čáslavová (2019) studied consumers' thought about the cost of the brands when they could make their purchase decisions. If their preferred celebrity is supporting a low-cost product, then they will purchase it immediately. Still, if the same personality is endorsing a high-cost product, then they will take a second thought for the endorsed brand. This study also arrived at a similar result. Consumers considered the credibility of the brand before making their purchase decisions, especially at the point when the cost of the product is high. Hence, it will be necessary for the marketing managers to work on the quality of their brand and choose a sports celebrity who is considered fit with the brand.

Conclusion

A celebrity player gains consumers' recognition because of his/her expertise and performance on the field. Besides, his/her attractiveness, likability and trustworthiness pave the way to obtain endorsement deals. A social character bestows him/her popularity and credibility in society. In studying the multidimensional attributes of a celebrity player, this study highlights how influential a celebrity player can be towards fans or consumers through endorsement. Previous studies reported that a slight fault committed by the celebrity on the field or outside it will cause damage to brand image and its credibility in the eyes of the consumers (Abeza *et al.*, 2020; Ge and Humphreys, 2020; Knittel and Stango, 2014). Hence, it becomes important to understand a consumer mindset prior to their reaction to the information spread out about a celebrity. This study attempts to measure the consumers' perception towards the multidimensional personality attributes of a sports celebrity athlete and the brand endorsed. With the advancement of new technology and the rise of social media platforms, the role of celebrity has transformed and become more influential in sports marketing. The consumers are following closely celebrities' news that posted on social media (such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) or traditional media (television or billboards). Social media facilitates such interaction of celebrities with their fans; making them more influential (Abeza *et al.*, 2014; Pegoraro and Jinnah, 2012). Do *et al.* (2015) investigate brands that endorsed exclusively via social media. They performed better in regard to consumer brand congruence and relationships with consumers. This study supports this finding and concludes that fans who follow their favorite celebrities are more emotionally attached to them. For that reason, consumers find congruence between the celebrity and endorsed brand; unlike a modest mismatch between the two (Fleck *et al.*, 2012). Gwinner and Eaton (1999) stated that the image of a celebrity can be transferred to a brand when a functional- or image-based similarity occurred. This study finds an image-based similarity between the celebrity player (Virat Kohli) and endorsed brand (American Tourister). Celebrity endorser generates a positive image of the endorsed brand in consumers' minds which influences their perceptions toward the endorsed brand and impacts their purchase intention.

The purpose of the first set of hypotheses (H1.1, H1.2, and H1.3) is to measure the consumers' perception of the various characteristics of celebrity athletes and their impact on their endorsed brand. The study shows that the endorser (Virat Kohli), who is less congruent with the endorsed brand (American Tourister), has his positive traits transferred to the endorsed brand. Additionally, the enhanced brand image of the endorsed brand influences the purchase intention of the target customers. Such result challenges a study conducted by Lee and Koo (2015) concluding that without the endorser-brand congruence, it is not possible to transfer the positive image of the celebrity to the endorsed brand. In the second set of hypotheses (H2.1, H2.2, H2.3, H3, and H4), the study examines the consumers' perception towards endorser-brand congruence and its impact on endorsed brand image and credibility and ultimately on consumers' purchase intention. The results show a positive impact of CBC on EBC and TBI. Consumers find a decisive match between the celebrity and brand. The effect of such congruence is transferred to the endorsed brand and builds the image and

credibility of the brand. However, this study finds a negative association between CBC and CPI. This is a realistic outcome since the match of celebrity personality with endorsed brand will not create a positive outcome for the endorsed brand. Again, this study reached to contradictory results with other studies that found a positive impact of celebrity brand congruence on consumer purchase decision (Fleck *et al.*, 2012; McCormick, 2018). The reason behind the contradictory result is the low purchasing ability of the middle-class consumers of India, and their habit to look at the credibility of the brand before making a purchase decision. In the last set of hypotheses (H3.1 and H4.1), the study uses EBC and TBI as mediators. The purpose is to measure the importance of brand credibility and image attributes of the brand as viewed by Indian consumers. Do consumers purchase the brand because their favorite celebrity endorses it, or they value the credibility of the brand? The negative impact of CBC on CPI shows that the endorser-product congruence factor was the only insignificant aspect for consumers. In fact, consumers give enough value to the brand credibility which mostly impacts their purchase intentions.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has provided a useful contribution in the field of sports celebrity advertising. Still, there are certain limitations exist which can be addressed in future studies. As per the findings of Ambroise *et al.* (2014), the influence of celebrity personality on consumers' behavior varies with the image of the brand and the type of celebrity profile. This study only considers the relationship between one celebrity athlete, Virat Kohli, with a non-sport endorsed brand, "American Tourister", and ignores other types of celebrities like movie actors or fashion models. In such a case, the results may become different if the sports celebrity matched with the entirely congruent brand, or the profile of the celebrity athlete paired with the cost of the brand. Another limitation is that this study collected its data by targeting only young graduate and undergraduate university students. This might create biases in the study. Hence, it is recommended in future studies to collect data from a dispersed range of consumers belonging to different age categories in order to obtain comprehensive responses and to reach credible results that can be generalized.

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