



## Influence of Celebrity Credibility on Consumer Product Evaluation and Attitude Formation – A Conceptual Framework

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective** – Celebrity endorsement is considered to be one of the leading advertising strategies used by marketers to promote brands. Celebrities are the most powerful information sources which have the ability to form or change consumer attitudes. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the influence of celebrity credibility on consumer product evaluation, specifically in relation to attitude formation.

**Methodology/Technique** – This paper presents the conceptual framework for understanding how the credibility of celebrities can influence the evaluation of products by consumers and consequently, the formation of consumer attitudes. The model is developed through an extensive review of the literature on celebrity credibility, consumer product evaluation (CPE) and attitude formation.

**Findings** – The traits of celebrity credibility, particularly trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness, have an important role to play in the evaluation of products by consumers. CPE occurs in a variety of ways and is influenced by, at least in part, celebrity credibility.

**Novelty** – The model presented in this study endeavours to investigate these relationships to add to the existing body of knowledge.

**Type of Paper:** Review.

**Keywords:** Celebrity Endorsement; Celebrity Credibility; Consumer Product Evaluation; Consumer Perception; Attitude Formation.

**JEL Classification:** M10, M12, M19.

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### 1. Introduction

Celebrity endorsement is the most effective promotional strategy used by marketers to raise awareness of a brand or product. Celebrities are used to connect with people through public appeal and promotion of products and brands.

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In India almost all brands adopt celebrity endorsement strategies for a variety of products such as personal care products, consumer durables, apparel, financial products, mobile services etc. Consumers are typically persuaded by messages conveyed by credible sources (celebrities), which has an effect on the development of consumer attitudes (Ohanian, 1990). As per the Economic Times Report (2016), celebrities are considered to be more persuasive in Indian advertisements in comparison to those in the United States (US). That report further highlights that in the US, around 20% of advertisements include celebrities; in India this number is approximately 50%. Further, Paul and Bhakar (2018) state that in developing countries such as India, the benefits of celebrity endorsements are minimal. Consequently, there is a need to explore the role of celebrity credibility in consumer evaluation of products and attitude formation. The paper discusses the theoretical background on the use of celebrity endorsement to influence consumer evaluation and attitudes towards products. The paper proposes a theoretical model on the influence of celebrity credibility on the different dimensions of consumer product evaluation leading to attitude formation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Celebrity Credibility**

Celebrity credibility plays a significant role in the formation of consumer attitudes. Moreover, celebrity endorsement is an area of interest for marketing strategists and advertisers. The word “celebrity” refers to an individual who is largely known to the public, including actors, sport figures and entertainers for their achievements in their respective fields external to the product that they endorse (Friedman and Friedman, 1979). There are different models developed by different authors, however, each model includes sources such as trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). Therefore, these are considered as the core sources of the model.

#### **2.1.1 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is defined by Erdogan (1999) as the consumer perception of an endorser’s honesty, integrity and trustworthiness. Ohanian (1990) defines trustworthiness as “the listener's degree of confidence in, and level of acceptance of, the speaker and the message”. The trustworthiness of a celebrity proposing to endorse a product is an important construct in attitude formation. While the communicator should employ a high degree of trustworthiness, a prejudiced message conveyed by a communicator is considered more effective in attitude formation. Further, Ohanian (1990) states that trustworthiness does not influence the purchase intentions of consumers, however, he considers that it does influence attitude formation. Further, Gupta et al. (2015) demonstrates that trustworthiness has a significant and positive impact on consumer perceptions of advertisements.

#### **2.1.2 Expertise**

Expertise is defined as the level to which a communicator represents a source of suitable assertions about the object. Expertise refers to the knowledge, skill or experience of an endorser (Erdogan, 1999). Expertise is considered as an important determinant of product evaluation because the celebrity is perceived as a user of the products and celebrity expertise has a positive influence on product evaluation (Rossiter and Smidts, 2012).

#### **2.1.3 Attractiveness**

Attractiveness of an endorser is another important factor that may have an effect on the beliefs and attitudes of consumers. According to Kamins (1990), the physical attractiveness of a celebrity has the ability to enhance a product or brand and advertisements based on an evaluation that occurs during the celebrity

endorsement process. Attractiveness refers not only to physical attractiveness, but also to other attributes such as intellectual skills, lifestyle, athletic power or personality (Erdogan, 1999).

## 2.2 Consumer Product Evaluation (CPE)

Consumer product evaluation refers to consumer judgment and choice among various alternatives based on the information provided by advertisements about the features of a product (Lee and Lee, 2009). Positively framed information from a credible source tends to influence consumer attitudes toward products in comparison to other sources of information (Buda and Zhang, 2000). Celebrity endorsement is considered to be a peripheral route in the elaboration likelihood model developed by Petty et al., (1983) that has an influence on the peripheral factors associated with brands/products. All peripheral routes are associated with influential factors (celebrity endorsement) and central routes are considered to be factors associated with products/brands (CPE) as shown in advertisements. Zeithmal (1988) develops the means end model relating to consumer perceptions as the measure of product assessment for consumer purchasing behavior. Hence, this paper employs consumer perceptions as the determinant of consumer product evaluation.

## 2.3 Attitude Formation

The association among elements in an attitude towards an advertisement in the model proposed by Schiffman and Kaunk (2010) describes the exposure of advertisements based on cognitive (judgments) and affective (feelings) measures. Judgments of the advertisement influence consumer attitudes towards advertisements as well as belief about the brand, leading to the consumer forming certain attitudes towards a brand. Feelings created from the advertisement also influence consumer beliefs of a brand and its influence, as well as their attitude towards the brand. Hence, the attitude formation construct in this study accentuates consumer attitudes towards a brand. Celebrity credibility has a greater impact on change in belief systems, opinions and attitudes of consumers (Erdogan, 1999). Pradhan et al. (2016) demonstrates the high influence of brand attitudes on purchase intentions of consumers, in comparison to other attributes.

## 3. Research Methodology

This paper is based on an extensive review of literature based on an analytical methodology to obtain new insight in the area of advertising management. Extensive research was conducted using certain keywords such as celebrity endorsement, celebrity credibility, consumer product evaluation, attitude formation and others to identify the determinants of celebrity credibility and consumer product evaluation that influence consumer attitudes. The study reviews previous research and theoretical models in the area of marketing.

Consumer attitudes are highly influenced by various promotional strategies; celebrity endorsement is one of the most effective informational sources available. Consumers evaluate products/brands on the basis of reference groups, brand image, product benefits etc., which enables them to form an attitude, belief or opinion about the product/brand. The present study utilizes the variables associated with celebrity endorsement and CPE which can lead to attitude formation. Consumers favor attitudes that have a positive influence on consumer purchasing intentions. Hence, marketers must make use of effective strategies to form positive attitudes towards their brands.

The model shown in Figure 1 attempts to explore how celebrity credibility can influence consumers in product evaluation, thereby influencing attitude formation. The model therefore aids an understanding of the influence of celebrity credibility on consumer evaluation of products and attitude formation. Celebrity credibility includes elements of trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990). These credible sources are able to influence the way in which a consumer perceives information conveyed by the celebrity on a product or brand. This then influences the formation of attitudes by consumers.

Perceived quality is defined as a consumer's judgement about the overall excellence or superiority of a product (Zeithaml, 1988). There are two types of cues in perceived quality: intrinsic cues and extrinsic cues (Zeithaml, 1988). Intrinsic cues relate to product attributes that change the physical description of product. Extrinsic cues are linked to brand name and image which are not a part of the physical product. However, extrinsic cues can be altered with no change in the fundamental nature of the product. Consumers think of a celebrity as a spokesperson of a particular brand and perceive the product/brand quality based on the credibility of a celebrity. Consumers tend to believe that the products/brands recommended by celebrities that they hold in high regard will be of good quality (Sabir et al., 2014).

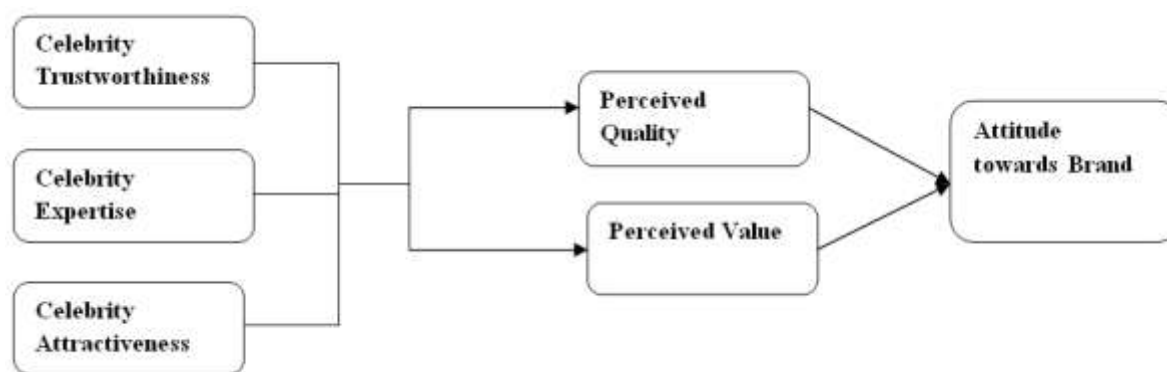


Figure1. Conceptual model illustrating the influence of celebrity credibility on CPE and attitude formation

Perceived value is conceptualized as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). The celebrities transfer certain personalities associated with them to the products through endorsement process. Consumers can perceive the value of the products through credible sources like celebrities and it can furthermore influence the consumer attitudes towards brand.

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

The review of the literature is based on previous empirical studies. Different studies in the past have probed into the impact of the credibility of a spokesperson (celebrity) on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. The present study however, aims to fill the knowledge gap by proposing a conceptual model incorporating different variables affecting the formation of consumer attitudes. The model emphasizes the link between previously understudied variables of consumer product evaluation with attitude formation. The variables were identified using well-known adapted models such as the source credibility model developed by Ohanian (1990) and the means-end model developed by Zeithaml (1988). The model proposed in this study attempts to investigate the relationships between the constructs of celebrity credibility and consumer product evaluation by studying previously unexamined variables in the emerging market of India. The model presents the theoretical framework by filling the gap in the literature by analyzing the role of celebrity credibility on consumer product evaluation and attitude formation.

Celebrity credibility plays a crucial role in forming consumer attitudes towards a particular brand/product. Consumers are attracted to celebrity endorsements that can have a positive influence on the way a consumer perceives certain brands within the market. It is evident, through a detailed review of the literature, that celebrity credibility is an important determinant of consumer product evaluation and attitude formation. As the model in this study is still in the conceptual phase, it should be tested empirically. The proposed model has contributed to the theoretical background by providing a means of analyzing the impact of celebrity credibility on CPE and consumer attitudes towards products/brands. In addition, the model addresses the research gap on the impact of celebrity credibility on CPE.

## 6. Conclusion

Celebrity endorsements of products/brands has become increasingly popular due to its beneficial outcomes. However, various advertising regulations have been imposed on celebrity endorsements, particularly those related to FFB (Fortified Food and Beverages) and OTC (Over The Counter) products. India is considered as an investment hub for various international companies due to the high levels of disposable income of consumers and the availability of expensive brands in India. Celebrity endorsements are an important source of information for consumers. The focus of the study is the influence of celebrity credibility on consumer product evaluations. The model proposed in this study adds to the knowledge of advertisers, enabling them to formulate appropriate and effective promotional strategies. This study is unique as there are very few similar studies of this nature that focus on the Indian market. Further, there are minimal resources available that aim to establish an association between celebrity credibility and consumer product evaluation.

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