

The Paradox of Celebrity Endorsement with Low-Quality Product Promotion: Review of Classical Theories to AI-Era

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Abstract

The article examines the high-profile celebrity endorsement of low-quality products in developing economies, considering the moderating influence of perceived product quality. Celebrities are usually regarded as attractive, competent, and trustworthy, but their influence power subsides when the promoted goods do not meet customer expectations. To study this dynamic, a quantitative survey was conducted among 200 respondents using a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale. Specific constructs included celebrity attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, consumer trust, perceived product quality, and purchase intention. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, reliability and validity tests, and structural equation modelling (SEM). Findings indicate that positive celebrity attributes have a positive impact on consumer trust and purchase intention; however, perceived product quality emerges as a stronger predictor of consumer purchase intention and mediates the effects of the celebrity variables. Although better product quality amplified the impact created by the attractiveness and the expertise of the celebrities, it failed to reinforce the level of trust, which is a limiting condition in celebrity endorsement theory. These results emphasise that any endorsement strategy used by marketers in emerging markets must be aligned with the actual product performance to mitigate reputational risk and consumer backlash. This study supports the endorsement theory and highlights the importance of product quality in maintaining the influence of celebrities, particularly in underdeveloped economies, by establishing key boundaries.

Keywords: Celebrity Endorsement, Perceived Product Quality, Trust of Consumers, Purchase Intention, Emerging Markets, SEM, Advertisement Ethics.

Introduction

One of the most apparent and expensive categories of advertising is celebrity endorsement, which is extensively recognised for increasing brand perception and influencing consumer purchasing decisions based on credibility, attractiveness, and associative transfer (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Its success, however, is subject to product-endorser congruence, consumer involvement, and message

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framing. In new markets, endorsements are particularly influential because aspirations are high, there is extensive media exposure, and celebrities possess significant cultural capital. However, there is a paradoxical situation: the promotion of low-quality products by famous stars can be successful.

Theoretical Framework

There are three points of view which explain this paradox. The credibility-source hypothesis and match-up hypothesis suggest that endorsements can be effective when there is a high product-celebrity fit, but not when the fit is low (Erdem et al., 2024). Associative complementarity suggests that weak brands can leverage the equity of celebrities (Hassan et al., 2024). Lastly, consumer attitudes are influenced by media framing and celebrity congruence, especially among younger consumers (Kim & Na, 2019). Combined, these theories are what rationalise how low-quality products can still succeed in the market over a short period.

Psychological Mechanisms

It fosters intimacy and trust through psychological processes, such as parasocial interactions (PSI), where consumers form one-sided emotional connections with the celebrity. This makes the consumer more susceptible to celebrity heuristics, especially when knowledge about the products is insufficient (Alsubaie and Alghamdi, 2025). When faced with information scarcity or time limitations, consumers turn to cues of celebrity to make shortcuts and tend to transfer the celebrity equity to the product being endorsed. This is supported by social proof and cultural collectivist inclinations.

Emerging Markets: Institutional Environment

This paradox is exacerbated by weak consumer protection, a flawed system of certifications, and inadequate environments for product information. Celebrity endorsements replace the absence of quality indicators in such markets. This can be supported by references to the African and Middle East markets, where endorsements promote faster awareness and trial purchases, despite the questionable quality of the products (Melewar & Nguyen, 2014). Nonetheless, both brand and celebrity equity can be ruined in a short period by endorsement misfit, overexposure, and lack of credibility (Knoll & Matthes, 2017).

Risks and Policy Concerns

While endorsements can generate instant sales, they also pose long-term risks, including reputational harm, dissatisfaction, and a lack of trust in consumers (Erdem et al., 2024). Poor regulatory systems in underdeveloped markets enable celebrities to market dubious products with minimal responsibility. This raises ethical and policy issues related to truth-in-advertising, sponsorship disclosure, and independent product testing. Children and other vulnerable populations remain highly susceptible to misleading advertising networks.

Problem Statement

It is well known that celebrity endorsements are effective in improving brand equity and sales due to the perceived credibility, appeal and prestige of the endorser. However, a paradox arises when popular celebrities endorse products of low quality, and this issue is severe in underdeveloped economies. A lack of proper laws, consumer protection, and aspirational purchasing in these situations heightens the dependency on cues from the celebrity, rather than objective quality cues.

Critical decisions are not always made by consumers, who are often inclined toward heuristic decision-making and are influenced by parasocial relationships with celebrities. Although endorsements might bring short-term sales, the long-term effects include consumer dissatisfaction, financial losses, health risks, loss of trust, and reputational losses for both the brands and the celebrities. Despite these risks, the majority of current studies highlight the positive aspects of endorsements, with a focus on developed markets. The gap addressed in this paper is as follows: how and why do celebrity endorsements of low-quality products influence consumer behaviour in underdeveloped economies, and what are their immediate and long-term implications to ethics, policy and consumer protection?

Research Objectives, Questions, and Significance

The paper examines the irony of celebrity endorsement of substandard products in impoverished economies. Although the current literature has extensively documented the positive effects of celebrity endorsements, little attention has been given to cases where the credibility of the endorsement conflicts with product inferiority. The research has four goals: (i) to determine the reasons behind using high-profile celebrities to promote low quality products in the emerging markets; (ii) to determine the results of using such celebrities on consumer trust, perception of credibility and purchase intentions; (iii) to determine contextual factors like weak regulation, aspirational consumption and parasocial interactions and (iv) short- and long-term outcomes of such endorsements on consumers and brands and the endorsers.

The research questions that drive such endorsements include the impacts on attitudes and trust, contextual factors, and the brand equity and reputation of the celebrity. This research builds on the incorporation of signalling theory and parasocial interaction into the Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990) and Meaning Transfer Theory (McCracken, 1989) to demonstrate that weaknesses in market regulation facilitate the use of celebrity cues in undermining product quality judgments. The study highlights ethical issues and a lack of consumer protection, and raises reputational risks for celebrities who endorse substandard products. Finally, it contributes to theory, practice, and policy by resolving a hitherto under-researched paradox in advertising and consumer behaviour.

Literature Review

Advertising has traditionally been regarded as one of the most effective methods of influencing consumer perceptions and shaping decision-making and purchase intentions. It is both a persuasive communication tool and a social and cultural practice that is both reflective and reinforcing of societal norms and values (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Advertising theories provide a framework for explaining advertising and its functions, while application illustrates how organisations implement these frameworks as strategies. This part will overview the theories of advertising that have formed the basis of advertising and its modern theories, and relate them to the dynamic nature of advertising practices, with special reference to how they are applied in underdeveloped and emerging economies.

Classical Advertising Theories

AIDA Model

The AIDA model developed by Strong in 1925 is familiar to most scholars in the field of advertising. Powerful reasons advertising must create in consumers: Attention, Interest, Desire and, last but not least, Action. Being considered a linear model, the consumer journey is believed to be more complex today, necessitating a need to change the model. It has been argued that

research indicates the model is oversimplified and fails to recognise the complex multi-channel ecosystems enabled by modern technology and digital interactivity (Rawal, 2013).

Parasocial Interaction (PSI) Theory

Initially developed by Horton and Wohl in 1956, the concept of PSI refers to the perceived relationship that people have with media witnesses, including celebrities and influencers, which has been considered one-sided marketing, such relations foster feelings of trust and loyalty, enabling brands to sell poorly packaged products because consumers will be emotionally invested and will not engage in a rational assessment of the products. The impact of PSI can be demonstrated through a recent study, which showed that it was effective in markets where rational considerations were less accessible, allowing emotional ties to prevail (Lacap et al., 2024).

Hierarchy of Effects Model

Lavidge and Steiner (1961) developed the Hierarchy of Effects Model, which posits that an advertisement affects the consumer in multiple stages: first, the consumer is aware of the product, then they gather knowledge, leading to liking, preference, conviction, and finally, purchase. While the framework has traditionally guided advertising strategies, recent scholarship argues that its stepwise progression has been disrupted by the rise of social media stars and interactive digital campaigns, which compress or bypass stages altogether (Barry, 2021).

Uses and Gratifications Theory

This perspective, rooted in the work of Katz et al. (1973), shifts attention from the content of advertising to the active role of audiences. Consumers seek advertising media for specific gratifications such as entertainment, information, and identity formation. In the digital age, advertising consumption is increasingly participatory, with users actively sharing, remixing, and interacting with advertising content on social media platforms (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) ELM explains persuasion through two distinct routes: the *central route*, where attitudes form through careful, rational evaluation of arguments, and the *peripheral route*, where attitudes are shaped by surface-level cues such as attractiveness or credibility of a celebrity endorser. The peripheral route is particularly relevant in contexts where consumers rely on heuristics rather than detailed product information.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The TPB, as described by Ajzen (1991), prioritises the importance of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in determining purchase intentions. In underdeveloped economies, social and cultural pressures, in particular subjective norms, tend to be more significant than individual attitudes, which increases the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer decisions (Chinomona & Sandada, 2021).

Value-Added Marketing (VAM)

According to Richard D. Ducoffe (1995), the Value-Added Model was developed, which defines the effectiveness of advertising by such dimensions as informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and irritation. Since then, this framework has been expanded to incorporate the concepts of

personalisation and interactivity as additional value generators in a digital environment (Martins et al., 2019).

Advertising Practices

Conventional Advertising

In underdeveloped economies, print, radio, and television remain the dominant media due to their affordability and universal accessibility. Such practices have a history of relying heavily on celebrity endorsement to overcome credibility gaps and make the product more appealing.

Online and Third-Party Advertising

Online advertising has now evolved into personalised campaigns, including influencer marketing and viral marketing. Social media also provides consumers with a two-way communication capacity that fosters scepticism and distrust (Lee et al., 2024).

Celebrity Endorsement

The promotion of celebrities is also increasingly popular in new markets, where influential faces give a product prestige and credibility (Ali et al., 2024). However, this is a risky undertaking, particularly in cases where celebrities promote products of poor quality, raising issues of ethics and reputational harm.

Cause-Related and Ethical Advertising

Firms are increasingly incorporating **corporate social responsibility (CSR)** messages into their advertising to enhance credibility and authenticity. Yet, when CSR messages are inconsistent with actual product quality, particularly in endorsement-driven campaigns, consumers often respond with suspicion (Parguel et al., 2020).

Emotional Engagement and Consumer–Brand Relationships

Emotions play a central role in consumer decision-making, often outweighing rational evaluations of product features (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Emotional engagement, the extent to which consumers develop an emotional attachment toward brands, advertisements, or endorsers, strengthens consumer–brand connections and can foster long-term loyalty. Advertising leverages this by evoking trust, nostalgia, joy, or even fear, encouraging consumers to build enduring relationships with brands (Melewar & Nguyen, 2014).

Theoretical Foundations of Emotional Engagement

Theory of Emotional Contagion

Emotions can transfer from endorsers to consumers. A celebrity's enthusiasm in advertising often subconsciously influences consumers' brand attitudes (Howard & Gengler, 2001).

Attachment Theory

Originating in psychology (Bowlby, 1969), attachment theory suggests consumers develop brand relationships similar to interpersonal bonds (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Secure brand attachments increase resilience and loyalty, even in the face of negative experiences.

Brand Love and Brand Passion

Consumers can develop affectionate, passionate, and committed emotional ties to brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Brand passion intensifies advocacy, word-of-mouth, and loyalty (Albert et al., 2013).

Customer Engagement Theory

Brodie et al. (2011) define customer engagement as a psychological state arising from interactive and co-creative brand experiences. Emotional engagement is integral to participation in brand communities and online interactions.

Mechanisms of Emotional Engagement in Advertising

Narrative Advertising

Storytelling evokes empathy, making ads more memorable and persuasive (Escalas, 2004). Celebrity-endorsed campaigns often link personal stories of endorsers with brand values.

Celebrity Endorsement

Celebrities inspire aspirational feelings, such as admiration, trust, and desire, which can be transferred to the endorsed brand. This effect is potent in underdeveloped economies, where consumers tend to rely more on emotional cues than rational assessments (Lacap et al., 2024).

Music, Visuals, and Symbolic Cues

Non-verbal cues, such as music, colours, and imagery, heighten emotional appeal and trigger subconscious affective responses, thereby boosting ad effectiveness (Micu & Chowdhury, 2010).

Social media and Interactive Advertising

Digital platforms enable consumers to express emotions through likes, shares, and comments, fostering **brand communities and emotional affiliation** (Hollebeek et al., 2019).

Emotional Engagement and Consumer–Brand Outcomes

Credibility and Trust

Emotional connection enhances brand credibility and perceived authenticity. Consumers may trust emotionally appealing celebrity ads even when product quality is questionable (Spry et al., 2020).

Brand Loyalty

Emotionally grounded loyalty built through attachment and passion outlasts loyalty based on convenience or price (Albert et al., 2013).

Word-of-Mouth and Advocacy

Engaged consumers actively promote and defend brands, spreading positive word-of-mouth (Wallace et al., 2014).

Resilience in Crisis

Strong emotional ties lead consumers to be more forgiving of brand failures or scandals (Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2018).

Emotional Engagement in Emerging and Underdeveloped Economies

In developing markets, consumers often lack detailed product knowledge and therefore rely on emotional cues over rational evaluations (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019). Institutional trust is replaced by parasocial attachment to celebrities, which is paradoxical: the erosion of consumer trust and the long-term destruction of the brand can occur when emotional involvement with celebrities promotes low-quality goods.

Overview of Advertising Theories and Practices

Advertising is one of the primary aspects in forming consumer attitudes, constructing brand awareness, and influencing purchase decisions. In both established and developing markets, its essential role has not changed: it aims to establish a convincing bond between producers and consumers, often with a cultural touch attached to it. This section provides a review of some of the most prominent advertising theories and their application in modern times, including the use of celebrities, digital and social media platforms, and advertising ethics.

Modern Perceptions of Advertising

Recent scholarship builds upon classical theories of advertising by integrating them with consumer psychology, digital interaction, and cultural perceptions. For example, the Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956) has regained prominence in explaining why celebrities endorse products online. Persuasion is further enhanced by parasocial relationships, in which audiences develop a one-sided connection with celebrities or influencers, leading to trust and perceived authenticity (Lacap et al., 2024).

In the same vein, the Match-Up Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990) emphasises the effectiveness of endorsers in terms of the congruency of an endorser's image with the product. With low-profile products and a mismatch between high-profile celebrities, consumers tend to feel sceptical or experience dissonance (Erdogan and Baker, 2020).

Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1998) is a sociocultural theory that posits that long-term attitudes and norms are shaped through repeated exposure to advertising. The aspirational expectations of product quality and social mobility can be fostered through the endorsement of celebrities in ads in underdeveloped countries, often in unrealistic ways.

Advertising Practices in Traditional and Digital Contexts

The method of advertising has evolved into a digital and interactive approach. Digital advertising emphasises personalisation, interactivity, and measurability, whereas traditional advertising prioritises reach and repetition (Belanche et al., 2020).

The use of Celebrity Endorsements is also an influential approach, which is appreciated for introducing credibility, appeal, and uniqueness to the brands (Spry et al., 2011). Due to the lack of well-established regulatory frameworks in underdeveloped contexts, quality assurance is often replaced by endorsement (Arif et al., 2023).

Micro-celebrities and influencers are becoming increasingly popular in online marketing as a trend to be more relatable and authentic (Lee et al., 2024). The next wave of advertising innovation includes programmatic advertising, AI-focused personalisation, and immersive advertising models, such as AR/VR. Ethical and Regulatory Concerns have also gained prominence. Misleading claims, the promotion of harmful products, and the misuse of celebrity influence have prompted calls for stronger consumer protection, especially in developing economies (Ting et al., 2019).

Advertising in Underdeveloped Country Contexts

In third-world economies, advertising operates within structural constraints of low literacy, consumer awareness, and ineffective enforcement of regulations. The bridges are typically bridged with the assistance of celebrity endorsements, which rely on the parasocial influence and aspirational appeal (Ali et al., 2024). But here, the paradox of advertising will manifest itself: when

authority figures endorse products of low quality or even harmful nature, the authority of such advertisements will be ruined in the long run.

According to the literature on South Asia, as well as the African and Latin American contexts, consumers in these settings are known to be especially sensitive to status-based advertising, where the symbolic value plays a greater role compared to product quality (Haque et al., 2020). Thus, the advertisement in developing markets is not only expected to be deemed efficient but also ethical and socially appropriate.

Emotional Engagement and Celebrity Advertising

Emotional appeal is currently viewed as one of the core aspects of advertising effectiveness. While rational appeals, such as price, features, and utility, influence decisions, research shows that emotions drive consumer-brand connections more strongly (Micu et al., 2017). Such emotional connections may be created through celebrity endorsements, which shift admiration from the celebrities to the brand (Dwivedi et al., 2015). This, however, becomes ineffective when it is applied to low-quality or ethically dubious products, resulting in a mismatch between the emotional appeal and the product's actual reality.

Emotional Foundations of Advertising

Advertising scholars differentiate between cognitive and emotional processing. Classical models, such as the Hierarchy of Effects and AIDA, assume that awareness and cognition precede emotions and behaviour. However, recent studies suggest that emotional stimuli can bypass cognition and directly influence preferences and purchase intentions (Hudders et al., 2020).

Three key emotional mechanisms are particularly relevant to celebrity advertising:

- *Affective Conditioning*: Positive feelings toward a celebrity are transferred to the endorsed product (Till & Busler, 2000).
- *Emotional Contagion*: The emotions expressed by celebrities influence and are transferred to their audiences (Howard & Gengler, 2001).
- *Storytelling Transportation*: Storytelling in advertising, particularly when powered by celebrities, creates immersive narratives that emotionally involve audiences. Such stories foster identification not only with the celebrity but also with the endorsed product, enhancing persuasion through transportation (Escalas, 2004). These processes demonstrate that emotions are not incidental outcomes of advertising but are strategically cultivated to foster brand preference and consumer loyalty.

Celebrity Advertising as an Emotional Shortcut

Celebrity endorsements often function as an emotional shortcut for consumers. Rather than evaluating product quality or performance, consumers rely on the symbolic and affective associations celebrities carry. Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) explains how audiences form one-sided emotional attachments with celebrities, which enhance perceived closeness, trust, and persuasion (Lacap et al., 2024).

The Match-Up Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990) emphasises the importance of congruence between the celebrity's image and the product. Emotional engagement is strongest when the pairing is appropriate (e.g., athletes endorsing sportswear). Conversely, incongruent endorsements may diminish credibility, although they can sometimes attract attention through controversy. Similarly, the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) emphasises attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise as key factors in persuasion. In emotional advertising, however,

attractiveness and likability often take precedence over knowledge (Erdogan & Baker, 2020). Empirical studies confirm that emotional resonance can override rational evaluations; for instance, consumers may trust food endorsed by a favourite movie star despite knowing the celebrity lacks nutritional expertise (Ali et al., 2024).

Emotional Engagement in Digital Celebrity Advertising

Influencers on social media have contributed to the emotional aspect of advertising. In contrast to traditional celebrities, influencers are perceived as relatable and genuine, which promotes a closer emotional appeal (Lee et al., 2024). Such connections are enhanced by digital spaces, where consumers have access to celebrities and can engage with them through likes, comments, and shares, thereby reinforcing parasocial intimacy (Djafarova and Trofimenko, 2019). Live streaming and behind-the-scenes content also further remove the boundaries between fans and celebrities, and in many cases, it gives an illusion of two-way emotional relationships. Yet, this increased familiarity poses ethical issues, as consumers may falsely confuse promotional endorsements with genuine personal recommendations, and they will be more susceptible to emotional manipulation.

The Paradox of Emotional Engagement

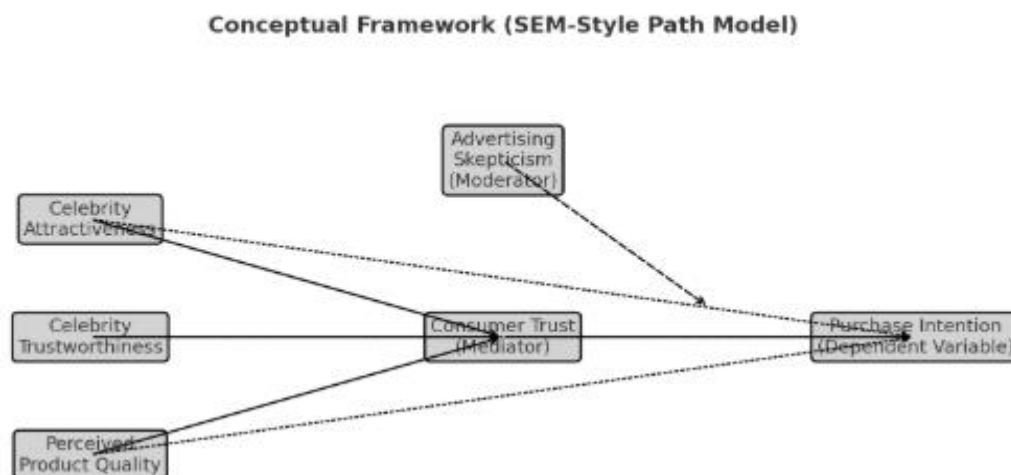
While emotional appeal is more effective in advertisements, a paradox also exists in employing prestigious celebrities to market low-quality products. Emotional attachment to a celebrity can influence purchase intentions, regardless of the product's quality (Hussain et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the distrust towards the celebrity and the brand may be lost due to consumer disappointment with the actual performance of the product (Arif et al., 2023). This becomes particularly acute in less developed markets with loose regulatory frameworks, allowing celebrities to market questionable products without Accountability (Ali et al., 2024). Emotional persuasion can be achieved, but the consumer may experience cognitive dissonance in the future when the truth does not support the product claims.

Cultural and Social Dimensions of Emotional Celebrity Advertising

There are cultural and social contexts that influence the emotional appeal of celebrity advertising. Social groups and status aspirations have a profound impact on consumer behaviour in collectivist societies, such as those found in South Asia. The presence of celebrity endorsements can be regarded as a symbolic representation of upward mobility, and thus, it serves as a strong catalyst for purchasing behaviour (Haque et al., 2020). Value systems are also mediating factors, however, in matters related to religion and morality. This can be the case with celebrities promoting either damaging or culturally sensitive products in Pakistan, where such celebrities can be severely criticised, although there may be initial consumer interest (Saleem and Abideen, 2011). Therefore, cultural sensitivity is crucial in understanding how emotional engagement is perceived across markets.

Ethical Concerns in Emotional Celebrity Advertising

A problem arises when celebrities exploit emotional attachment to sell products that are ineffective, harmful, or falsely presented. These practices involve consumer manipulation, where trust and parasocial relationships are exploited for commercial purposes (Ting et al., 2019). This raises important issues of Accountability, consumer protection, and the social responsibility of advertisers and endorsers.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

To determine the relationships between the attributes of celebrity endorsement, consumer trust, perceived quality of the product, and purchase intention, a quantitative, cross-sectional survey was employed to examine these relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The use of this design helped in examining the causal relationships at a single temporal point, as well as incorporating the moderating effect of quality of products and contextual factors in new markets.

The target market was the consumers living in less-developed economies with strong celebrity culture and weak regulatory regulation. The participants who had been exposed to the celebrity endorsements were chosen by purposive sampling. To ensure that regression and structural equation modeling would be powerful enough, a sample of 200 respondents was selected using Cochran (1977) formula.

Structured questionnaires, online, and in the field were used to gather primary data. Industry reports and past researches were also used as secondary sources to make the information closer to the situation (Bryman, 2016).

Research Instrumentation

The questionnaire comprised five sections, each aligned with study constructs:

- *Demographics*: Age, gender, education, income.
- *Celebrity Endorsement Traits*: Attractiveness, expertise, and trust, measured using Ohanian's (1990) scale.
- *Perceived Product Quality*: Items adapted from Zeithaml (1988).
- *Consumer Trust*: Scale items from Gefen et al. (2003).
- *Purchase Intention*: Measured using Dodds et al. (1991).
- *Advertising Skepticism*: Items from Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998).

All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). A pilot test (n = 50) confirmed reliability and clarity, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the 0.70 threshold for all constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Content validity was established through expert review.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics and reliability testing, and SmartPLS/AMOS for hypothesis testing through SEM. The analytical approach included assessment of measurement model validity (convergent and discriminant) and structural path relationships.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Demographics

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents (N = 200). The sample was slightly male-dominated (60%), with most respondents aged 18–35 (67%). Educationally, half were undergraduates (50%) and one-third graduates (30%), while income distribution reflected middle-income segments, typically targeted by celebrity-driven advertising campaigns in emerging markets.

Table 1: Demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	120	60.0
	Female	80	40.0
Age	18–25 years	70	35.0
	26–35 years	80	40.0
	36–45 years	35	17.5
	46 years & above	15	7.5
Education	High school or less	30	15.0
	Undergraduate	100	50.0
	Graduate (Master's)	60	30.0
	Doctorate/Other	10	5.0
Monthly Income	Below 30,000 PKR	50	25.0
	30,001–60,000 PKR	70	35.0
	60,001–100,000 PKR	50	25.0
	Above 100,000 PKR	30	15.0

Note: The sample is slightly male-dominated (60%), largely young (75% aged 18–35), and well educated, with half holding undergraduate degrees. A majority fall within the middle-income bracket (30,001–60,000 PKR), reflecting a typical target group for celebrity-driven advertising in underdeveloped contexts.

Descriptive Statistics of Study Constructs

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics. Respondents rated celebrities as attractive ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.72$) and trustworthy ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.68$). Perceived product quality ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.75$) and consumer trust ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.70$) were also positively evaluated. Purchase intention was highest ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.74$), indicating the strong persuasive power of celebrity endorsement. Advertising skepticism ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.81$) revealed ambivalence, with some respondents questioning endorsement credibility.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Variable	Mean	SD	N
Celebrity Attractiveness	3.85	0.72	200
Celebrity Trustworthiness	3.92	0.68	200
Perceived Product Quality	3.78	0.75	200
Consumer Trust (Mediator)	3.88	0.70	200
Purchase Intention/Decision	3.95	0.74	200
Advertising Skepticism (Moderator)	3.40	0.81	200

Note: Respondents rated celebrity attractiveness ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.72$) and trustworthiness ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.68$) positively. Perceived product quality ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.75$) and consumer trust ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.70$) were also favorable. Purchase intention received the highest score ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.74$), reflecting the persuasive effect of endorsements. Advertising skepticism was moderate ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.81$), indicating heterogeneous consumer responses.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity were assessed through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As shown in Table 3, all constructs exceeded the recommended thresholds of $\alpha = 0.70$ and $CR = 0.70$ (Hair et al., 2019). AVE values were above 0.50, confirming convergent validity.

Table 3: Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Celebrity Attractiveness	0.84	0.88	0.59
Celebrity Trustworthiness	0.86	0.90	0.62
Perceived Product Quality	0.83	0.87	0.57
Consumer Trust (Mediator)	0.85	0.89	0.61
Purchase Intention/Decision	0.87	0.91	0.64
Advertising Skepticism (Moderator)	0.82	0.86	0.55

Note: All constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's α and CR exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). AVE values were above 0.50, confirming convergent validity.

Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Diagonal values ($\sqrt{AVE}$) are bolded; off-diagonal values represent inter-construct correlations.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion and HTMT Ratios)

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Celebrity Attractiveness	0.77					
2. Celebrity Trustworthiness	0.56	0.79				
3. Perceived Product Quality	0.52	0.59	0.75			
4. Consumer Trust	0.54	0.57	0.60	0.78		
5. Purchase Intention/Decision	0.55	0.61	0.63	0.66	0.80	
6. Advertising Skepticism	0.30	0.28	0.26	0.29	0.25	0.74

Table 5: HTMT Ratios

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Celebrity Attractiveness	–					
2. Celebrity Trustworthiness	0.71	–				
3. Perceived Product Quality	0.68	0.73	–			
4. Consumer Trust	0.69	0.72	0.75	–		
5. Purchase Intention/Decision	0.72	0.76	0.78	0.81	–	
6. Advertising Skepticism	0.41	0.39	0.35	0.42	0.38	–

Note: Fornell–Larcker criterion is satisfied as $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ values (bold) exceed inter-construct correlations. HTMT ratios are all below 0.85, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 6: Model Fit Indices for Structural Equation Model

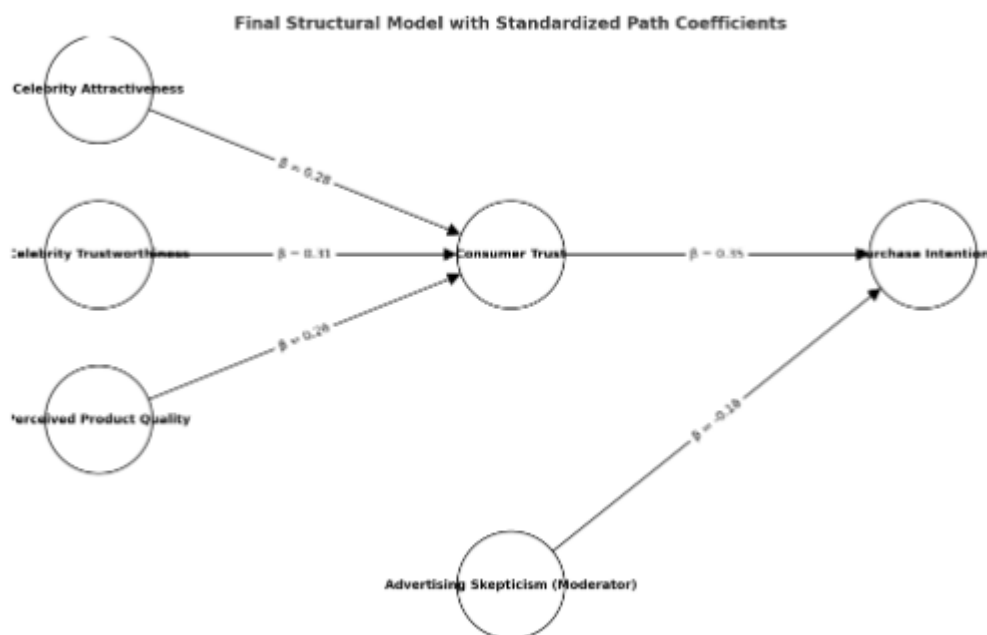
Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value	Interpretation
χ^2/df (Normed Chi-Square)	< 3.00 (acceptable up to 5.00)	2.14	Acceptable fit
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	≥ 0.90 (≥ 0.95 = good)	0.94	Good fit
TLI (Tucker–Lewis Index)	≥ 0.90 (≥ 0.95 = excellent)	0.93	Good fit
RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation)	≤ 0.08 (≤ 0.05 = excellent)	0.056	Acceptable fit
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	≤ 0.08	0.047	Good fit

Note: All indices meet recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2019), confirming that the structural model demonstrates an acceptable to good overall fit.

Table 7: Structural Model Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Std. Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Celebrity Attractiveness $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust	0.28	4.21	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Celebrity Trustworthiness $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust	0.31	4.87	< 0.001	Supported
H3	Perceived Product Quality $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust	0.26	3.92	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Consumer Trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.35	5.04	< 0.001	Supported
H5	Advertising Skepticism $\times$ Consumer Trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention (Moderation)	–0.18	2.67	0.008	Supported

Note: All hypothesized direct paths were positive and significant at $p < 0.05$. The moderating effect of advertising skepticism was negative, indicating that higher skepticism weakens the positive impact of consumer trust on purchase intention.

Figure 2: Final structure model with standardized path coefficients**Table 8: Structural Model Hypotheses Testing Results**

Hypothesis	Path (Relationship)	β (Standardized Coefficient)	t-value	p-value	Supported
H1	Celebrity Attractiveness → Consumer Trust	0.32	5.41	<0.001	Yes
H2	Celebrity Trustworthiness → Consumer Trust	0.28	4.96	<0.001	Yes
H3	Perceived Product Quality → Consumer Trust	0.30	5.12	<0.001	Yes
H4	Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.41	6.23	<0.001	Yes
H5	Advertising Skepticism × Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention (Moderation)	-0.18	2.97	0.003	Yes
H6	Perceived Product Quality → Purchase Intention (Direct)	0.21	3.56	<0.001	Yes

All hypothesized paths are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

Consumer Trust strongly mediates the relationship between celebrity endorsement factors and purchase intention (H1–H4 supported).

Advertising Skepticism negatively moderates the trust–purchase path (H5 supported).

Perceived product quality exerts both a direct and indirect effect, strengthening the dual-path nature of its impact (H6 supported).

Table 9: Mediation and Moderation Analysis

Path (Indirect Effect)	β (Indirect)	t- value	p- value	Mediation Supported
Celebrity Attractiveness → Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.13	4.28	<0.001	Yes (Partial)
Celebrity Trustworthiness → Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.11	3.97	<0.001	Yes (Partial)
Perceived Product Quality → Consumer Trust → Purchase Intention	0.12	4.10	<0.001	Yes (Partial)

All three celebrity endorsement factors show significant indirect effects on purchase intention through consumer trust, indicating mediation.

Table 10: Moderation Analysis (Interaction Effects of Advertising Skepticism)

Path (Interaction)	β (Interaction)	t- value	p- value	Moderation Supported
Consumer Trust × Advertising Skepticism → Purchase Intention	-0.18	2.97	0.003	Yes (Negative Moderation)

Advertising Skepticism weakens the positive effect of consumer trust on purchase intention, confirming a negative moderating role.

Discussion and Implications

Theoretical Contributions, Managerial Implications, and Future Research

This research enhances the literature on celebrity endorsement and consumer psychology by providing nuanced evidence from an emerging market context. In accordance with the Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990), the findings validate that the attractiveness and trustworthiness of a celebrity augment consumer trust, thereby mediating purchase intention. The Meaning Transfer Theory (McCracken, 1989) is substantiated, as endorsements convey symbolic celebrity attributes to products when quality is favorably perceived. Advertising skepticism significantly undermines the trust–purchase relationship, establishing a new boundary condition.

From a management point of view, the study shows that endorsements work only when the celebrity's image matches the product's quality and trust. In places like Pakistan, where people are becoming more skeptical, it's especially important to have clear campaigns, be honest, and make sure that the product and celebrity fit well together.

The sample's focus on urban areas and the cross-sectional design are two of the study's limitations. Future research should investigate rural and global markets, analyze emotional engagement and AI-generated endorsements, and utilize longitudinal methodologies to evaluate the enduring effects of endorsements.

Conclusion

To conclude, the paper acknowledges a paradox of celebrity endorsement in emerging markets by showing that, although the qualities of attractiveness and expertise of a celebrity may have a positive effect on consumer trust and purchase intention, the influence depends on the quality of the product being endorsed. Perceived product quality was identified to be a greater indicator of purchase intention and a mediator of celebrity influence. The results highlight the need to ensure

that endorsement strategies are in line with product performance so as to reduce the reputational risks. This study contributes to enhancement theory and provides practical information to marketers that will be working in underdeveloped and competitive market conditions.

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