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CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION IN THE URBAN SPORTSWEAR MARKET: Empirical Evidence from Puma Sports Shoes in Bangalore, India

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Abstract

Celebrity endorsement has emerged as a dominant advertising paradigm across competitive consumer markets, yet its differential effects on purchase intention remain inadequately theorized within geographically specific, product-category-focused contexts. This study investigates the impact of celebrity endorsement attributes—namely credibility, expertise, and attractiveness—on consumers' purchase intention toward Puma sports shoes, drawing on a sample of 106 urban residents in Bangalore, India. Employing a descriptive, quantitative research design, data were gathered through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire and subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. The empirical results reveal a hierarchical structure in consumers' perceptions: credibility attained the highest mean score (M = 3.15), followed by expertise (M = 3.12) and attractiveness (M = 3.00). Paradoxically, correlation analysis demonstrated that expertise (r = 0.23) exhibited the strongest positive association with purchase intention, whereas credibility showed a near-zero correlation (r = -0.01)—a phenomenon termed the 'Credibility Paradox.' Furthermore, a notable awareness gap emerged, with approximately 38.7% of respondents lacking awareness of Puma's endorsement campaigns, despite the brand's investment in high-profile ambassadors. Awareness level proved to be a meaningful moderator of purchase intent, with highly aware consumers recording a mean purchase intention score of 3.14 compared to 2.97–2.98 among neutral and low-awareness cohorts. These findings extend the Source Credibility Theory and the Meaning Transfer Model within an emerging-market, sportswear-specific context and offer actionable managerial implications for endorsement strategy optimization.

Keywords: celebrity endorsement, purchase intention, source credibility, expertise, sportswear marketing, urban consumers, India

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary marketplace is characterized by an unprecedented proliferation of brand messages, rendering the task of sustained consumer attention acutely challenging for marketers. Against this backdrop, celebrity endorsement—defined as a marketing communication strategy in which a prominent public personality lends their image, credibility, and cultural capital to a brand—has ascended as one of the most widely deployed promotional mechanisms globally (Erdogan, 1999; Knoll & Matthes, 2017). The strategic logic underpinning this approach is grounded in the premise that positive attributes associated with a celebrity—including perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and physical attractiveness—can be systematically transferred to the endorsed product, thereby shaping consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (McCracken, 1989).

Within the sportswear industry, where brand differentiation is acutely contested and where functional performance, lifestyle aspiration, and social identity converge, celebrity endorsements occupy a particularly strategic position. Brands such as Nike, Adidas, and Puma have historically aligned themselves with elite athletes and cultural icons, seeking to embed their products within broader narratives of excellence, aspiration, and contemporary lifestyle. Puma, as a globally recognized sportswear brand with a substantial presence in the Indian market, has pursued an aggressive endorsement strategy that spans professional athletes and Bollywood personalities, with the intent of augmenting brand equity and stimulating consumer demand.

India's urban consumer landscape, exemplified by cosmopolitan cities such as Bangalore, presents a particularly dynamic research context. Bangalore, as a technologically advanced metropolis with a young, digitally engaged, and aspirationally oriented population, constitutes a market wherein celebrity endorsements are mediated through multiple touchpoints—including social media platforms, digital advertising, and traditional broadcast channels. Consumers in this environment are simultaneously sophisticated and susceptible to celebrity influence, making the city an appropriate locus for examining endorsement effectiveness.

Despite the substantial body of global scholarship on celebrity endorsement, a lacuna persists in terms of localized, brand-specific, and product-category-specific empirical investigations. Existing studies frequently adopt a macro-level perspective that does not account for the nuances of specific product categories or geographically distinct consumer segments (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). This study seeks to address this gap by examining, with granular empirical rigor, how specific celebrity attributes influence the purchase intention of urban consumers in Bangalore toward Puma sports shoes. In doing so, the study contributes both theoretical refinements to established consumer behavior frameworks and practically actionable insights for brand managers operating within the competitive Indian sportswear market.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Celebrity Endorsement

Academic inquiry into celebrity endorsement is anchored in several foundational theoretical frameworks. The Source Credibility Theory, originally advanced by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953), posits that the persuasive efficacy of a communicative message is contingent upon the audience's assessment of the source along two primary dimensions: expertise—the degree to which the communicator is perceived as possessing valid, relevant knowledge—and trustworthiness—the extent to which the communicator is believed to convey information objectively and without ulterior motive. In the context of celebrity endorsement, these

dimensions translate, respectively, into the perception that a celebrity possesses genuine, domain-relevant knowledge of the endorsed product and that the celebrity's advocacy reflects sincere conviction rather than purely financial incentivization (Ohanian, 1990; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999).

Complementing source credibility, McCracken's (1989) Meaning Transfer Model advances a culturally grounded account of endorsement effectiveness. According to this framework, celebrities function as repositories of culturally embedded meanings—comprising personality traits, social status, lifestyle associations, and aspirational identities—which are progressively transferred to the endorsed brand and, subsequently, to the consumer upon product adoption. This model is particularly salient within the sportswear context, where brands seek to appropriate the athletic prowess, discipline, and competitive spirit associated with sports celebrities, embedding these qualities within the perceived identity of their products.

A third relevant framework is the Match-Up Hypothesis, developed through the empirical work of Kamins (1990) and subsequently elaborated by Till and Busler (2000). This hypothesis contends that endorsement effectiveness is contingent upon the congruence between the celebrity's perceived characteristics and the product's brand image. For a performance-oriented sportswear brand such as Puma, this implies that endorsers whose public identity is anchored in athletic excellence and physical performance are likely to generate superior brand-consumer resonance compared to celebrities whose appeal is primarily aesthetic or entertainment-based.

Finally, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) offers a process-oriented account of how celebrity cues exert influence under varying conditions of consumer motivation and cognitive engagement. When consumers are not deeply motivated to engage in effortful evaluation of product attributes, celebrity endorsements function as peripheral heuristic cues that simplify decision-making by invoking associative affect, familiarity, and social proof. The practical implication is that celebrity endorsements can accelerate purchase decisions even in the absence of comprehensive product knowledge, particularly within high-involvement product categories such as branded sportswear.

2.2 Celebrity Attributes and Consumer Behavior

Empirical scholarship has disaggregated the general construct of celebrity endorsement into discrete attribute dimensions and examined their respective contributions to advertising effectiveness and purchase intention. Ohanian (1990) developed a foundational multi-dimensional scale encompassing three primary constructs: expertise (perceived knowledge, competence, and experience), trustworthiness (perceived honesty, sincerity, and reliability), and attractiveness (perceived social value, likeability, and physical appeal). Subsequent meta-analytic syntheses, including those by Amos, Holmes, and Strutton (2008) and Knoll and Matthes (2017), have confirmed the predictive validity of these attributes, while also revealing context-dependent variations in their relative importance.

With respect to expertise, the literature consistently identifies this attribute as a particularly potent driver of purchase intention in product categories where functional performance is salient. Endorsers who are perceived as possessing domain-specific knowledge—such as professional athletes endorsing sports equipment—are evaluated more favorably and exert stronger influence on consumers' product assessments than general celebrities without relevant domain expertise (Till & Busler, 2000). Trustworthiness, while widely recognized as essential for establishing brand credibility and mitigating consumer skepticism, has been shown to exert a more diffuse and indirect influence on purchase intention (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). Attractiveness, encompassing both physical appearance and social desirability, has been found to enhance brand image and product evaluations, particularly in lifestyle and fashion-oriented categories, though its direct effect on purchase conversion is comparatively modest (Lee & Thorson, 2008).

Choi and Rifon (2012) introduced the concept of self-congruity into this analytical framework, demonstrating that endorsement effectiveness is amplified when consumers perceive alignment between the celebrity's image and their own ideal self-concept. In the aspirationally charged Indian urban market, this mechanism is particularly operative, as consumers frequently employ branded products as instruments of identity expression and social signaling (Habiba et al., 2022). The acquisition of celebrity-endorsed sportswear thus serves a dual function: the functional acquisition of athletic performance attributes and the symbolic appropriation of the celebrity's aspirational identity.

2.3 Celebrity Endorsement in the Indian Market Context

The Indian advertising landscape is characterized by a deeply ingrained cultural reverence for celebrity, particularly athletes and Bollywood personalities, who command significant parasocial relationships with large segments of the population (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). The rapid expansion of digital media infrastructure has further amplified celebrity influence by enabling continuous, multifaceted engagement between celebrities and their audiences through social media platforms, content collaborations, and real-time communication. Urban consumers in technologically advanced cities such as Bangalore are particularly susceptible to these dynamics, given their elevated digital literacy, frequent media consumption, and exposure to global brand narratives.

Notwithstanding the extensive global literature on celebrity endorsement, empirically grounded, brand-specific investigations within the Indian sportswear context remain scarce. Existing Indian market studies have predominantly adopted generalized frameworks that do not account for the specific dynamics of the sportswear category, the particular attributes of the Puma brand, or the unique consumer profile of Bangalore's urban population. This research gap constitutes the principal motivation for the present study.

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Research Problem

Sportswear brands invest considerable financial resources in celebrity endorsement campaigns, operating on the assumption that such investments translate into measurable enhancements in consumer brand perceptions and purchase intentions. However, the mechanisms through which specific celebrity attributes exert differential influences on purchase intention remain imperfectly understood within localized, brand-specific contexts. In the case of Puma in Bangalore, several unresolved questions persist: Which celebrity attribute—credibility, expertise, or attractiveness—constitutes the most potent driver of purchase intention? Does awareness of endorsement campaigns functionally moderate purchase intent? And how do these dynamics manifest within the specific socio-cultural and consumer behavioral context of urban Bangalore?

3.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine how celebrity endorsement awareness influences urban consumers' purchase intention toward Puma sports shoes.
2. To assess the relative influence of celebrity credibility, expertise, and attractiveness on consumer purchase intention.
3. To investigate the moderating role of awareness level on the relationship between endorsement exposure and purchase intention.

4. To derive theoretically grounded and practically actionable recommendations for Puma's endorsement strategy in urban Indian markets.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive research design. Descriptive research is appropriate when the primary analytical objective is to characterize the attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies of a defined population, without manipulating or artificially controlling the variables under investigation (Kothari, 2004). Given that the study aims to capture and describe consumers' existing orientations toward Puma's celebrity endorsement campaigns and their consequent purchase intentions, this design provides a structured and systematic framework for data collection and analysis.

4.2 Sampling

The target population comprised urban consumers residing in Bangalore who possessed prior awareness of the Puma brand and familiarity with celebrity endorsement as a marketing phenomenon. Purposive convenience sampling was employed to select respondents who satisfied the inclusion criterion of Puma brand awareness, thereby ensuring that the data captured reflects substantive, informed consumer perceptions rather than uninformed responses. A total of 106 valid responses were obtained—a sample size considered adequate for the application of descriptive and correlational statistical analyses given the study's scope and design constraints (Hair et al., 2014). Data were collected through both online survey platforms and in-person administration at commercial locations including retail centers, educational institutions, and corporate premises in Bangalore.

4.3 Measurement Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed comprising twenty closed-ended items employing a five-point Likert scale, anchored at 'Strongly Disagree' (1) and 'Strongly Agree' (5). The instrument measured four principal constructs: celebrity endorsement awareness and exposure frequency (items 1–3); celebrity credibility (items 4–6); celebrity expertise (items 7–9); celebrity attractiveness (items 10–12); brand image (items 13–15); and purchase intention (items 16–20). The instrument's content validity was established through alignment with established scales in the celebrity endorsement literature, particularly Ohanian's (1990) tri-dimensional celebrity endorser model and Erdogan's (1999) comprehensive review framework.

4.4 Analytical Techniques

Data analysis proceeded through three sequential stages. First, descriptive statistics—including frequency distributions, mean scores, and standard deviations—were computed to characterize respondent awareness and attribute perceptions. Second, mean perception scores for the three celebrity attribute constructs were aggregated and compared across the credibility, expertise, and attractiveness dimensions to establish a perceptual hierarchy. Third, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the strength and direction of linear relationships between each celebrity attribute construct and purchase intention, as well as between brand image and purchase intention. All analyses were conducted using standard statistical procedures appropriate for the measurement level and sample size of the data.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Celebrity Endorsement Awareness and Exposure

Analysis of endorsement awareness revealed a markedly polarized distribution. Approximately 42.4% of respondents affirmed awareness of Puma's celebrity endorsement campaigns (Agree + Strongly Agree), while a substantial 38.7% reported being unaware (Disagree + Strongly Disagree), with 18.9% occupying a neutral position. Correspondingly, advertisement exposure frequency exhibited a comparable bifurcation: 42.5% reported frequent encounter with Puma's celebrity-endorsed advertisements, while 40.6% indicated minimal or no exposure.

These findings reveal a significant awareness deficit that merits analytical attention. Despite Puma's investment in high-profile brand ambassadors—including prominent cricket personalities—the campaigns have demonstrably failed to achieve uniform penetration within the urban Bangalore market. This pattern is consistent with the phenomenon of 'banner blindness' documented in the digital advertising literature (Cho & Cheon, 2004), wherein consumers in high-media-saturation environments develop attentional filters that selectively exclude undifferentiated advertising content. The near-identical proportion of high- and low-exposure respondents further suggests that the primary challenge confronting Puma's endorsement strategy is not the quality of creative content but rather the efficacy of media placement and channel selection.

5.2 Celebrity Attribute Perceptions: A Hierarchical Analysis

Mean scores for the three celebrity attribute constructs, measured on a five-point scale, are presented in Table 1.

Celebrity Attribute Construct	Mean Score (1–5 Scale)	Interpretive Classification
Credibility (Trustworthiness)	3.15	Moderate–High Agreement
Expertise (Competence)	3.12	Moderate–High Agreement
Attractiveness	3.00	Neutral–Moderate Agreement

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Celebrity Attribute Constructs (n = 106)

The data establish a clear perceptual hierarchy wherein credibility is the most highly endorsed celebrity attribute (M = 3.15), followed closely by expertise (M = 3.12) and attractiveness (M = 3.00). The relative elevation of credibility suggests that Puma has succeeded in positioning its endorsers as trustworthy and believable figures—a perception reinforced by the fact that 3.26 was the highest sub-item score within the credibility construct, specifically the belief that celebrities genuinely use or support the product. This finding is broadly consistent with source credibility theory, which identifies trustworthiness as a foundational precondition for effective message persuasion (Hovland et al., 1953).

The marginally lower score for attractiveness (M = 3.00), which falls precisely at the scale midpoint, suggests that while Puma's ambassadors are not perceived negatively on this dimension, aesthetic appeal does not constitute a salient perceptual driver for this consumer segment. This finding is consistent with the Match-Up Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), which predicts that attractiveness-based endorsements are most effective in product categories where physical appearance is category-relevant—a characteristic that is arguably less central to functional sports footwear than to, for instance, cosmetics or fashion apparel.

5.3 Correlation Analysis: Endorsement Attributes and Purchase Intention

Pearson correlation coefficients between each celebrity attribute construct, brand image, and purchase

intention are summarized in Table 2.

Variable Pair	Pearson r	Relationship Strength
Expertise → Purchase Intention	0.23	Positive (Strongest)
Brand Image → Purchase Intention	0.16	Positive (Moderate)
Attractiveness → Purchase Intention	0.13	Positive (Weak)
Credibility → Purchase Intention	-0.01	No Relationship

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix – Celebrity Attributes and Purchase Intention (n = 106)

The correlation analysis produces findings that diverge substantially from the perceptual hierarchy established in Section 5.2, generating what the present study terms the 'Credibility Paradox.' Expertise emerges as the sole celebrity attribute with a meaningfully positive correlation with purchase intention (r = 0.23), indicating that as consumers' perception of a celebrity's domain-relevant competence increases, so does their willingness to purchase the endorsed product. Brand image demonstrates a moderate positive association (r = 0.16), while attractiveness exhibits only a weak positive relationship (r = 0.13). Most strikingly, credibility—despite commanding the highest mean perception score—demonstrates a near-zero correlation with purchase intention (r = -0.01), implying the virtual absence of any linear relationship between perceived trustworthiness and buying motivation.

This paradoxical finding can be theorized through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Credibility, as a trait perceived by consumers, appears to function as what may be characterized as a 'passive hygiene factor'—its presence does not actively motivate purchase behavior, but its absence or violation (e.g., through perceived inauthenticity or commercial overexposure) would likely precipitate significant brand damage. Expertise, by contrast, appears to operate as an 'active motivator' by providing consumers with a functionally grounded rationale for product adoption: if the endorsing celebrity is a domain expert, their product use constitutes a form of performance validation that reduces perceived purchase risk and enhances product desirability. This interpretation is consistent with Till and Busler's (2000) demonstration that expertise-based match-up between celebrity and product generates superior purchase intent outcomes in functional product categories.

The weak but positive correlation for attractiveness (r = 0.13) suggests that aesthetic celebrity appeal retains marginal influence over purchase intent—plausibly through aspirational identity mechanisms described by Choi and Rifon (2012)—though this influence is insufficient to constitute a primary strategic driver in the sportswear context. The modest correlation for brand image (r = 0.16) further indicates that while endorsement-driven brand enhancement contributes indirectly to purchase intention, this mediated pathway is substantively weaker than the direct expertise-intent mechanism.

5.4 Awareness as a Moderator of Purchase Intention

To investigate how endorsement awareness functionally moderates purchase intention, respondents were segmented into three awareness cohorts based on their responses to the awareness item: High Awareness (Agree/Strongly Agree), Neutral, and Low Awareness (Disagree/Strongly Disagree). Mean purchase intention scores were computed for each segment and are presented in Table 3.

Awareness Segment	Mean Purchase Intention Score	Interpretation
High Awareness	3.14	Above Neutral (Positive Intent)
Low Awareness	2.98	Near Neutral
Neutral Awareness	2.97	Near Neutral

Table 3: Mean Purchase Intention Scores by Awareness Segment (n = 106)

The data confirm a pronounced awareness dividend: consumers who actively recognize Puma's endorsement campaigns exhibit meaningfully higher purchase intention (M = 3.14) compared to those with low or neutral awareness (M = 2.97–2.98). The approximately 0.16-point elevation in purchase intent associated with high awareness, while statistically modest, carries significant strategic implications at scale: converting even a fraction of the 38.7% unaware segment into the high-awareness category would translate into a measurable uplift in purchase propensity.

Notably, the near-identical purchase intention scores of the neutral (2.97) and low-awareness (2.98) cohorts indicate that passive or indeterminate awareness—where consumers have encountered the campaign but have not formed a clear cognitive registration—is functionally equivalent to total unawareness in terms of purchase motivation. This finding aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model's distinction between peripheral processing (mere exposure without active engagement) and elaborative processing (active recognition and encoding). Only active, elaborative awareness—reflected in the 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' endorsement awareness responses—appears to generate the cognitive and affective engagement sufficient to translate campaign exposure into purchase intent.

6. KEY FINDINGS

This study generated five principal empirical findings with theoretical and managerial significance:

5. **The Awareness Gap:** Approximately 38.7% of urban Bangalore consumers remain unaware of Puma's celebrity endorsement campaigns, indicating a systemic media reach deficiency that attenuates overall campaign effectiveness.
6. **The Perceptual Hierarchy:** Celebrity credibility is the most highly perceived attribute (M = 3.15), followed by expertise (M = 3.12) and attractiveness (M = 3.00), indicating that Puma's endorsers are primarily coded as trustworthy rather than aesthetically aspirational.
7. **The Credibility Paradox:** Credibility, despite being the most favorably perceived celebrity attribute, demonstrates a near-zero correlation with purchase intention (r = -0.01), indicating that trustworthiness alone operates as a passive brand stabilizer rather than an active purchase motivator.
8. **The Expertise–Intent Nexus:** Celebrity expertise constitutes the strongest and only distinctively positive predictor of purchase intention (r = 0.23), validating the strategic superiority of domain-relevant endorsers (i.e., professional athletes) in functional sportswear marketing.
9. **The Awareness Dividend:** High consumer awareness of endorsement campaigns generates a meaningful uplift in purchase intention (M = 3.14 vs. 2.97–2.98), whereas passive or neutral awareness produces effects equivalent to unawareness, underscoring the imperative of active rather than mere exposure-based campaign engagement.

7. CONCLUSION

This investigation advances understanding of celebrity endorsement effectiveness by demonstrating that the perceptual salience of a celebrity attribute does not necessarily correspond to its behavioral influence. Specifically, while credibility registers as consumers' most highly regarded celebrity attribute, it is expertise—the perception of domain-relevant athletic competence—that most directly propels purchase intention in the urban sportswear context. This expertise–intent relationship constitutes the central theoretical contribution of the present study, refining the Source Credibility Theory by disaggregating the predictive utility of its component dimensions within a specific product-category and geographic context.

Concurrently, the study documents a substantial awareness gap—with nearly 40% of the urban Bangalore market insufficiently exposed to Puma's endorsement initiatives—that constrains the brand's capacity to convert celebrity investment into purchase behavior. The finding that active, high-recall awareness generates a meaningful purchase intent uplift, while passive or neutral exposure does not, further underscores the importance of engagement-oriented media strategies over mere impression-volume maximization.

From a managerial standpoint, these findings counsel Puma to reorient its endorsement communication toward functional expertise narratives—explicitly connecting the athletic credentials of its ambassadors to the performance characteristics of its footwear. Simultaneously, a strategic overhaul of media channel allocation is warranted, prioritizing targeted digital platforms, fitness-adjacent content ecosystems, and experiential engagement formats capable of converting passive media exposure into active brand awareness and recall. Together, these strategic adjustments would better position Puma to translate its considerable celebrity investment into sustained purchase intention growth within the competitive urban Indian sportswear market.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several methodological limitations circumscribe the scope and generalizability of this study's findings. First, the geographical confinement of the sample to Bangalore restricts the external validity of conclusions to other Indian urban markets, which may exhibit divergent consumer profiles, media consumption patterns, and celebrity preference structures. Second, the convenience sampling methodology, while pragmatically justified given the study's scope, introduces potential selection biases that may render the sample unrepresentative of the broader Bangalore consumer population. Third, reliance on self-reported survey data introduces susceptibility to social desirability bias and retrospective rationalization in respondents' accounts of their purchase motivations. Fourth, the cross-sectional research design precludes causal inference; the correlational relationships documented in this study are descriptive rather than explanatory. Fifth, the relatively modest sample size of 106 respondents, while adequate for the current analytical objectives, limits the statistical power available for more complex multivariate modeling.

9. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study generates several directions for future scholarly inquiry. Longitudinal research designs that track awareness, attribute perceptions, and purchase behavior across extended timeframes would enable causal attribution and illuminate the temporal dynamics of endorsement effectiveness. Comparative investigations contrasting the effectiveness of macro-celebrity endorsers against micro-influencers and niche fitness experts would contribute to the growing scholarly conversation on influencer marketing efficacy within specific product categories. Experimental or quasi-experimental methodologies—such as conjoint analysis or

advertising exposure experiments—would enable stronger causal claims than the correlational design employed here. Additionally, multi-city comparative studies spanning diverse Indian urban markets would enhance the generalizability of findings and illuminate the role of regional cultural factors in moderating endorsement responses.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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