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## Understanding Sri Lankan Consumers' Perception towards Celebrity Endorsement

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### A B S T R A C T

Celebrities are idealized characters we see in the media with perfect appearances and personalities. The influence of their interesting lifestyle and culture is creeping into consumers' minds in many ways, such as on to their interests, their views, behaviour, beliefs, and their fashion choices. However, there is a severe lack of prior research exploring how Sri Lankan fashion consumers' physiographical and behavioural characteristics are evoked by celebrity endorsements. Given this empirical background, this preliminary research seeks to understand Sri Lankan consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement. Furthermore, this research predicts that gender could affect consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement. Adopting a survey approach, a sample of 169 consumers participated in this study. The findings show that celebrity-endorsed advertisements could indeed capture consumers' attention easily, create faster awareness, and a long-lasting impact on consumers' minds. Moreover, consumers are willing to buy celebrity-endorsed products, because of the good look of the celebrity as well as due to their trustworthiness. Further, celebrity-endorsed products are classier, desirable, a symbol of status, glamorous, and increase their self-confidence. Importantly, consumers perceived celebrity endorsement as an effective mode of advertising. Moreover, across our analysis, we found that male consumers were more influenced by celebrity endorsements than female consumers. This current research adds to the emerging body of literature on celebrity endorsement by showing the effectiveness of celebrity-endorsed advertisements. Importantly, this study is the first to investigate the effects of consumers' gender on their perception of celebrity endorsement. Moreover, this research offers some practical implications to Sri Lankan fashion marketers to focus on celebrity endorsement as a means to enhance marketing communications.

**Keywords:** celebrity endorsement, Sri Lankan fashion consumers, gender differences, celebrity-endorsed advertisements, TEARS model

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## **1. Introduction**

Celebrities can be categorized as an outstanding segment in society. The influence of their interesting lifestyle and culture is creeping especially into consumers' minds in many ways, such as into their interests, their views, behaviour, beliefs, and their fashion (McCormick, 2016). If we dive into celebrities' social media, we will probably be able to observe the number of followers they have ranging from thousands to millions of audience. They are tempted to know what is happening in celebrities' lives, such as what they are currently doing, how they spend their leisure time, about their day-to-day life, and more importantly how they dress. Due to the rapid improvements in social media, technologies, and mass communication in the last few years, the influence of celebrities on society has exhumed dramatically (Şahin & Atik, 2013). Particularly, the young generation tends to look at these celebrities in a more influential and powerful way (Sukhdial et al., 2002). Youth admires them, as a result, they follow or imitate them. Consequently, celebrities have a significant impact on the young crowd, particularly, in the context of fashion, because 'dressing just like them' is the easiest way to imitate them (Greene & Adams-Price, 1990).

Sri Lanka is a uniquely profiled market within the South Asian market context (Perera et al., 2018). A few prior research studies have shown that in Sri Lanka most of the consumer goods are endorsed by celebrities, such as artists and athletes. In particular, Sri Lankan service sectors, such as financial services and telecommunication, use celebrity endorsement intensively compared to other sectors (Dissanayake, 2015; Koththagoda & Weerasiri, 2017). However, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence on Sri Lankan consumers' perception of celebrity endorsements (Perera et al., 2018). In particular, there is a severe lack of academic research exploring Sri Lankan fashion consumers' physiological and behavioural characteristics, such as attitudes, beliefs, and purchase intention evoked by celebrity endorsements. Given the background, this preliminary research mainly seeks to understand Sri Lankan consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement. Consequently, this research aims to add to the emerging body of literature on celebrity endorsement within Sri Lankan context.

Understanding gender differences is key to predicting consumer behaviour. Much past research has shown that males and females differ in their information processing which influences their attitudes and judgments (Martin, 2003; Ranaweera & Wasala, 2020). Thus, this research further predicts that gender could affect consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement. To fulfill the set research goals, this explorative research adopted a survey approach and collected data from a random sample of 169 consumers.

In the following sections, this paper briefly reviews literature around the construct of celebrity endorsement. The paper then presents the methodology that examines the key premise of this study. The next section presents the key findings of this research. The paper concludes with implications of the findings and avenues for future research.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Celebrity endorsement**

Celebrity endorsement is defined as an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Many prior authors have recognized the role of "celebrity" in various perspectives: A celebrity is a famous personality (Shimp, 2000); celebrity is a term made by news (Van der Walldt et al., 2009); the concept of a reference group (Schiffman et

al., 2006) credible speakers (Warner, 2014); one of the idealized personalities recognized by society (Choi & Berger, 2010); and a psychological bond that attaches consumers to respond to relevant brands (Kumara, 2016).

Celebrity endorsement has been identified as one of the expanded areas impacting consumer behaviour, consumer psychology, brand equity, brand loyalty, as well as its sustainability for a brand. For example, Hung et al. (2011) explore the relationship between celebrity and purchase intention in China. Similarly, Spry et al., (2011) examine how celebrities are credible in creating the influence of celebrity endorsement on customer-based brand awareness and brand loyalty. Nevertheless, for an effective endorsement, along with the attractiveness of the celebrity, talents, attitudes, respect, features, and the experiences of the celebrity have to match with the brands' attributes. Some prior literature discusses celebrity endorsement deals. First is a one-off celebrity deal in which a celebrity is expected to wear or use the relevant brands' product for an event. The second type is the unofficial deals. Here the brand sends free products as gifts to celebrities to endorse the product without hiring them. Then the third one is long-term deals. Here the brand will recognize the staying power of the celebrity and they commit to a long-term partnership (Erdogan, 1999; McCracken, 1989).

## **2.2. The effect of celebrity endorsement on consumer behaviour**

Consumers are deeply influenced by the idealized images and physical attractiveness of celebrities (Bordo, 2004; Nichter & Nichter, 1991). Among modern consumers, the desire to improve physical attractiveness continues to motivate the consumption of products, especially fashion products. Personality is the unique and reliable psychological makeup of a person. This affects his or her responses to the social environment. Hence, consumers admire a celebrity not only for his/her physical attractiveness, but also for their personalities as well (Solomon et al., 2013). Most celebrities are represented as ideal people, and they stimulate young consumers to attain these ideal personalities (Hirschman & Thompson, 1997). On the other hand, undesirable personalities could create a negative impression and these negative attitudes of the celebrity could also impact endorsed products. The ideologies of celebrities can also become sources of admiration for young consumers. The images of these ideologies are adopted by consumers in order to communicate the faith in that particular ideology (McCracken, 1989).

There is limited research on the effect of consumer-related factors on celebrity persuasion (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). With respect to age differences, Atkin and Block (1983) found greater celebrity endorsement effects on younger than older consumers. Nevertheless, Ohanian (1991) failed to find age-related differences in response to celebrity endorsements. Few studies that have examined gender differences in response to celebrity-endorsed advertising offer some interesting findings. For example, Bush et al. (2004) found a stronger celebrity role model influence on female teenagers than males. In a similar study, Liu and Brock (2011) found that male consumers were more responsive to female celebrity attractiveness than female consumers. However, Ohanian (1991) did not find any significant gender difference in either celebrity source factors or brand evaluations. The research is further motivated by these inconsistencies of the prevailing knowledge on the gender differences in the response to celebrity-endorsed advertising. Thus, we seek to investigate whether gender could affect consumers' perception of celebrity-endorsed advertisements.

### **2.3. Celebrity endorsement in advertising**

Since celebrities can inspire society in many ways, many brands tend to use celebrities as endorsers to deliver their marketing messages to potential consumers. Advertisers have preferred celebrity endorsers on the basis of their attractiveness or their physical appearance. The attractiveness of the endorser is vital in visual-based advertising media, such as television, print advertisements (newspapers, magazines, etc.), and social media (Singer & Singer, 1983). Thus, advertisements using celebrities can achieve greater attention compared to advertisements without celebrities. Moreover, celebrity endorsement positively and significantly influences advertising effectiveness and brand recognition. Prior literature shows that celebrity-endorsed advertisements were more believable to people and the communications of the celebrity-endorsed advertisements were more effective (Biswas et al., 2006); particularly if the advertisement caters to youth. Since the youth is mostly infatuated with the celebrities' images they can be easily persuaded. However, it is vital to select the compatible celebrity that the young generation could be attracted to easily for the advertisement (Dotson & Hyatt, 2005).

### **2.4. The source credibility model**

Celebrities can be identified as credible sources of marketer's information and messages about the product they endorse. Characteristics of a celebrity can be measured by using five separate attributes defined in "TEARS model" as trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, respect, and similarity (Shimp, 2000). This model contends that the effectiveness of a message depends on the perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness of an endorser (Erdogan, 1999). These five characteristics can be identified as source credibility (Amos, 2008). Moreover, personality, ideology, and values-lifestyles are also some key characteristics of celebrities that inspire consumers (Erdogan, 1999). The notion of source credibility can be captured by the Source Credibility Scale, (McCracken, 1989). Trustworthiness talks about the honesty, honour, and believability of the endorser. It depends on the opinions and perceptions of the target audience. Thus, advertisers take advantage of trustworthiness by choosing endorsers who are widely regarded as honest, believable, and trustworthy (Shimp, 2000). Expertise can be defined as the extent to which a communicator is supposed to be a source of valid statements and messages. Expertise is contained with the knowledge, experience, and skills possessed by the endorser (Ohanian, 1990; Riley, 1954).

### **2.5. Celebrity endorsement in the context of the Sri Lankan fashion sector**

The fashion retail industry is a novel and emerging sector in Sri Lanka. It was almost non-existent about three years ago, while today it is estimated that local retailers are earning over 10 million US dollars annually (Ranaweera & Halwatura, 2014). Celebrities are recognized as one of the effective communication models used in fashion advertising in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, celebrities can be categorized as movie actors, television stars, models, and famous sportspersons (Munasinghe, 2016). Some prior research shows that celebrity-endorsed advertisements have a significant influence on Sri Lankan consumers' purchase intention (Kumara, 2016; Perera et al., 2018; Wanninayake & Randiwela, 2007). Two examples of a successful celebrity endorsement by well-known batik brand 'Buddhi Batik', and men's fashion brand Emerland are illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2.



Figure 2: Celebrity Endorsements of 'Buddhi Batiks' Using International Actress Jacqueline Fernandez,

Source: [www.Buddhibatik.com](http://www.Buddhibatik.com)



Figure 1: Emerland International (Pvt)Ltd.'S Ad Campaign Using Iconic Cricket Legends Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardena,

Source: [Https://Emerald.Lk/](https://Emerald.Lk/)

Despite, little empirical evidence about the impact of celebrity endorsement on Sri Lankan consumers' buying intentions, few recent research studies provide some insights. In particular, Perera et al. (2018) show that celebrity worship motives impact consumer brand relationship with service brands. In a similar study, Dissanayake and Ismail (2015) examine the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand attitude towards financial services brands in Sri Lanka. More specifically, they show that the trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of celebrities were highly correlated with perceived brand attitude, whereas these were weakly correlated with perceived brand attitude. Given the background, the key research objectives of the current research are:

- RO1: To understand Sri Lankan consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement.
- RO2: To examine whether there are gender differences in consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement?

### 3. Methodology

This research adopted a quantitative survey approach to fulfill the set research goals. The target population of this study was young individuals within the age group of 25-35 in Sri Lanka. As the sample frame of this research, university undergraduates and employees belonging to the above age group from various districts of the country (Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Nuwara-Eliya, Rathnapura, Galle, etc.) were approached. A simple random sampling method was adopted. The unit of analysis was considered at the individual level. The questionnaire which was written in the English language contained 20 questions developed using prior literature. More specifically, we have adopted pre-validated questions from two recent research papers on celebrity endorsement (Adam & Hussain, 2017; Chavda, 2015). The online survey questionnaire was created and distributed using google forms. It was distributed among 200 respondents and 169 were returned. Data were analysed using the

SPSS statistical software package. The research used descriptive statistics to assess the characteristics of the data. No missing data were observed in the analysis. The research mainly used descriptive statistics to assess the characteristics of the data. To determine the predicted gender differences one-way ANOVA was used. Gender was dummy-coded (female: "1"), and all other variables were continuous variables.

## **4. Findings and discussion**

### **4.1. Demographic information**

The majority of the respondents who participated in this study were female (62.1%) as opposed to male (37.9%). As expected, a high percentage of participants (78.8%) surveyed belonged to the age group of 25-30, whereas only 21.2% belonged to the 30-35 age group.

### **4.2. Awareness and choice of the medium of celebrities endorsed fashion advertisements**

80% ( $M=1.09$ ) of the respondents stated that they were well aware of celebrity-endorsed fashion advertisements. As expected, there was a significant difference in this awareness between men and women ( $M_{male} = 1.17$  vs.  $M_{female} = 1.04$ ,  $F(1, 168) = 9.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, (53.2%) stated the internet as the most successful medium to convey celebrity-endorsed advertisements, whereas 43% of respondents have selected the television medium.

### **4.3. Sri Lankan consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement**

As predicted, a high percentage (76.1%,  $M= 1.09$ ) of the consumers stated that celebrity endorsed advertisements capture the consumers' attention easily. This result was significant across gender: ( $M_{male} = 1.16$  vs.  $M_{female} = 1.05$ ,  $F(1, 167) = 5.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ). 84.3% ( $M=1.99$ ) of respondents believed that celebrity endorsed products create faster awareness in the consumer's mind which is again significant across male and female: ( $M_{male} = 2.17$  vs.  $M_{female} = 1.89$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 6.99$   $p < .05$ ).

Further, a high percentage (71.9%,  $M=1.99$ ) agreed that celebrity-endorsed advertisements could create a long-lasting impact on consumers' minds. This result too was significant across gender: ( $M_{male} = 2.23$  vs.  $M_{female} = 1.85$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 10.67$   $p < .001$ ). This supports the prior literature finding claims that consumers are influenced to buy from brands that are endorsed by celebrities whose state is closely connected to the brand functions. This makes faster awareness and positive attitude toward the endorsed brand on consumer mind (Ohanian, 1990). This sheds some light on the view that when the associations of the celebrity fit with the desired image of the brand, the celebrity then serves to create and strengthen existing associations for that brand, further this creates a long-lasting memory in the consumer mind.

Moreover, 72.8% ( $M=2.76$ ) of respondents reveal that they are willing to buy a celebrity-endorsed product, because of the good look of the celebrity. This result was also significant across gender: ( $M_{male} = 3.06$  vs.  $M_{female} = 2.60$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 8.825$   $p < .05$ ). Previous research has also suggested that physically attractive endorsers are more effective than less attractive ones. However, more attractive or credible sources are always more successful endorsers (McCracken, 1989).

Furthermore, a moderate number of respondents (40%,  $M=2.94$ ) said that they are willing to buy the product, because they trust the celebrity and they trust the message that they convey:  $M_{male} = 3.27$  vs.  $M_{female} = 2.76$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 13.422$   $p < .001$ ). This supports prior

findings which suggest that using celebrities as endorsers tend to make the advertisement more believable and trustworthy (Biswas et al., 2006). Further, (40.2%,  $M=2.86$ ) respondents stated that they think that the celebrity has enough experience about the product he/she endorsed:  $M_{male} = 3.14$  vs.  $M_{female} = 2.70$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 10.04$   $p < .005$ ). Both of these findings suggest that male consumers are more responsive to celebrity endorsements than female consumers.

Next, we sought respondents' opinions regarding whether celebrity-endorsed products are classier, desirable, or a symbol of status. As predicted, a high percentage (41.9%,  $M=2.62$ ) of respondents agreed with this statement. This finding also posits that male consumers are more influenced by celebrity endorsements than female consumers.:  $M_{male} = 2.89$  vs.  $M_{female} = 2.47$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 10.43$   $p < .001$ ). This supports McCracken's (1989) argument that celebrities build up their celebrity identities (images) as a collection of meanings that they draw from their roles in TV, mass media, cinema theatre, etc., and reveal these meanings through their day-to-day lifestyles, behaviours, and personalities. In particular, the ownership of these meanings is ensured by reflecting them continuously in front of the public. In fact, they act as the symbol of the status (Erdogan, 1999). Furthermore, (43.6%,  $M=2.64$ ) believed that celebrity-endorsed fashion products make them feel more glamorous and increase their self-confidence. This result was also significant across gender:  $M_{male} = 2.88$  vs.  $M_{female} = 2.50$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 7.38$   $p < .05$ ).

A high percentage of respondents (40%,  $M=2.64$ ) were neutral regarding the notion that you buy the product because celebrity fits your own culture, while 30.5% agreed with it. This is in line with previous findings which suggest that similarity to be an important concept in marketing communication. In particular, when the endorser, source, and receiver share similar needs, objectives, interests, and lifestyles, the source is better appreciated and his position easily understood (Kelman, 1961).

A (76%,  $M=2.49$ ) of consumers stated celebrity endorsements an effective mode of advertising:  $M_{male} = 2.69$  vs.  $M_{female} = 2.37$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 5.90$   $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, (33.9%,  $M=2.69$ ) claimed that they are willing to purchase products endorsed by celebrities:  $M_{male} = 2.94$  vs.  $M_{female} = 2.54$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 10.79$   $p < .001$ ). Moreover, (47%,  $M=3.00$ ) stated that they always pay more for products due to their favourite celebrities:  $M_{male} = 3.38$  vs.  $M_{female} = 2.79$ ,  $F(1, 169) = 14.96$   $p < .001$ ). In line with our previous findings, we again observed significant gender differences among these responses.

Our results clearly support previous findings, which show that celebrity endorsements are among the most successful marketing communication practices used by marketers around the world, especially in breaking message clutter, increasing the effectiveness of advertisements, improving brand recognition (Petty et al., 1983), motivating positive attitudes of consumers towards brands (Kamins, 1990), and finally, growing sales and profits (Choi & Berger, 2010; Erdogan, 1999). Similarly, this current research also revealed that celebrity endorsement is an effective communication mode that could positively impact consumers' purchase intention. More importantly, across our analysis, we found that male consumers were more responsive to celebrity endorsements than female consumers.

## 5. Conclusion

Celebrities can be categorized as an outstanding segment in society. The influence of their interesting lifestyle and culture is creeping into consumers' minds in many ways, such as in to

their interests, their views, behaviour, beliefs, and their fashion choices (McCormick, 2016). Given this empirical background, this preliminary research sought to understand Sri Lankan consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement. Furthermore, this research predicted that gender could affect consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement. In particular, we focused on celebrity characteristics and attributes described in the "TEARS model": trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, respect, and similarity (Shimp, 2000).

The findings of our research clearly show that celebrity-endorsed advertisements capture consumers' attention easily, create faster awareness, and a long-lasting impact on consumers' minds. Moreover, consumers are willing to buy celebrity-endorsed products, because of the good look of the celebrity as well as due to their trustworthiness. Further, celebrity-endorsed products are classier, desirable, a symbol of status, glamorous, and increase their self-confidence. Furthermore, we found that consumers perceived celebrity endorsements as an effective mode of advertising. Moreover, as predicted, across our analysis, we found that male consumers were more influenced by celebrity endorsement than females.

This current research contributes to the emerging body of literature on celebrity endorsement by showing the influential nature of celebrity endorsement on Sri Lankan consumers. This study is the first to investigate the effects of consumers' gender on their perception of celebrity endorsement.

Furthermore, this research offers some practical implications to fashion marketers within the context of Sri Lanka to focus on celebrity endorsement as a means to enhance marketing communications. More specifically, they could focus on celebrity characteristics and attributes such as trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness when developing their advertising and promotion strategies. In addition, this research suggests that marketers consider gender differences in consumers' perception of celebrity endorsement when developing their marketing campaigns.

While significant findings are attained from this research, certain limits are inherent in it, which may provide direction for future research investigations. First, this research only included a sample of a young consumer cohort from Sri Lanka. Future research could examine other ages or generations. Second, an inductive research approach could offer further insights into this phenomenon. Third, future studies could study the impact of celebrity endorsement on consumers across different cultures in Sri Lanka. Future research could examine the correlational or causal relationship between celebrity endorsement and other marketing constructs, such as conspicuous consumption (O'cass & McEwen, 2004) and impulsive purchasing behaviour (Rook & Fisher, 1995).

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