

Role of Brand and Endorser Credibility in Brand Equity of Cell Phone in Pakistan

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The use of endorsers is an effective technique in marketing adopted by companies to get a competitive edge over other competitors and get a distinctive place by becoming more visible in the clutter of advertisements. Previous studies focused on impact of endorser on buying behavior towards brand. The purpose of the current study is to examine the role of endorser and brand credibility towards brand equity of cell phone in Pakistan. The study also examines the mediating role of brand credibility between endorser credibility and brand equity. A total data of 211 respondents from six universities from Islamabad, Lahore and Multan were collected using simple random and stratified techniques. The data were collected using questionnaire which was adopted from scales that were already used in different studies. Instrument was adopted after establishing the reliability and validity of the scales. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and mediation affect was checked in line with Baron and Kenny's model for mediation. The findings of the study support the previous studies which argued that endorser with higher credibility greatly effects the brand equity as compare to an endorser with less credibility. In addition, the results of the study show that the relation between endorser credibility and brand equity is mediated by brand credibility.

Key words: *Endorser Credibility, Brand Credibility and Brand Equity*

1. INTRODUCTION

Celebrity Endorsement is (hereafter CE) used by marketers around the world as an effective tool of marketing. Endorsement by celebrities affect in brand recall, purchase intention and buying behavior. Recent researches have shown that attitude towards the brand is highly affected from celebrity endorsements (Dwivedi, Johnson, & McDonald, 2015), whereby the real issue is that whether CE has a role in building the BE or not. Brand Equity (hereafter BE) demonstrates the gradual increase in value added because of the product's brand name (Bailey & Ball, 2006).

Background of the Study

Prior literature demands for further studies to be carried out in order to extract different aspects that help to construct brand equity (Baalbaki & Guzman, 2016). It is widely stated that advertisements are beneficial for constructing BE (Shafi & Madhavaiah, 2013), and if the brand uses a spokesperson, it will form an association with the brand in consumer's memory (Keller, 2013). A secondary association is created when a celebrity endorser appears for a brand (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011). According to Seno and Lukas (2007), the creation of equity is resulted when celebrity endorser behaves in the form of co-brand with respect to endorsed brand.

In Pakistan, the trend is shifting towards brands in the consumer market as the young generation is more inclined towards using the products of the top brands. The psyche of the young generation is that the quality of the product is high if it belongs to a known brand. The Pakistani consumer has started using branded cloths like Khaddi, Stoneage, Breeze, Nishat etc. Moreover, LG, Samsung, and Sony are enjoying more sales in TV industry while, mobile industry is captured by Samsung, Apple, Huawei and LG etc. So, there is a dearth of literature available for the Pakistani consumer market in CE and its impact on BE using credibility of the brand as a mediator. The present study fills this gap by incorporating these variables into consideration.

For many years the marketing divisions are using CE particularly athletes and actors. CE is usually termed as an agreement between celebrities and firms where the celebrity is bound to represent the firm over a certain period of a time with a particular scope. This relationship is considered as a positive and benefiting for both parties. The process involves different stages where first stage being the endorser carry meaning from his or her role from his field and same is transferred to the product or brand.

Endorsements are a main source of income for celebrities particularly athletes (Elberse & Verleun, 2012). It is further stated that during the year 2014 basketball players from American origin made more than \$20 million more from endorsements as compare to their salaries and winnings. On a larger scale, what Roger Federer made from endorsement than from his salaries and winnings.

Kaplan (2015), stated that brands like Nike spend more than 6.2 billion on endorsement during the year 2015 along with Adidas and Reebok which spent \$4.2 billion on endorsement contracts which provides and lucrative opportunity to earn for the celebrities.

At the same time brand when associated with famous celebrities also benefit these brands. As stated by Bryan (2016), American Basketball player Stephen Curry's association with footwear company Under Armour almost doubled the value of the brand in financial terms. Although previous studies suggest that to maximize the financial gains while selecting the celebrities due care must be observed. While selecting endorser usually two things are given consideration one whether the celebrity is perceived by the targeted audience as likeable and positive.

The effectiveness of celebrity endorser is examined by researchers which brought forward two descriptive reviews which attempted to combine the literature related to effectiveness of endorser in advertisements. Lueck (2015) identified the widespread types of endorser, benefits to using endorsers with celebrity status and problems and limitation associated to the use of celebrity endorser. Similarly, the effectiveness of celebrities, advantages and disadvantages linked with celebrity endorsements and the usage of source credibility and attractiveness model were reviewed quite a few times (Erdogan, 1999).

Generally, source model lay down the effects of endorser credibility and attractiveness for communication. For instance, the effectiveness of a CE depends on how he or she is perceived as an expert and trustworthy this is because if a celebrity is perceived as trustworthy, honest and reliable the easier for consumers to accept the influence from the celebrity regarding the information provided. Furthermore, if the perceived knowledge of celebrity about the endorsed product is more it will validate the claims made in advertisement with greater expertise (Winterich, Gangwar, & Grewal, 2018).

According to Uribe, Buzeta, and Velásquez, (2016), the main component of such assessment is not based on actual level of trustworthiness and expertise but the level of consumer's perception. At the same time, the physical attractiveness of celebrity endorsers is another persuasive factor. Although endorser credibility should be influential worldwide due to the universal acceptance for the value of integrity and knowledge related to trustworthiness and expertise. However, the level of expertise and trustworthiness communicated by the celebrity may differ in different culture.

According to source credibility model, individuals are more inclined toward a product if they see the source from where information is coming as credible. Sources which are highly credible are able to generate more inclined and a positive behavioural submission than source which are less credible. Source credibility model focuses on essential components for the credibility of source such as expertise and trustworthiness.

Several studies have suggested that physical attractiveness also help to create a positive response of consumer. To identify the effectiveness of endorser credibility attributes such as expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness are of prime importance.

As discussed earlier the expertise of an endorser enables him to provide the consumer with the correct information whereas the trustworthiness helps the individual to make belief that the information provided by the endorser is not biased and in actual very honest. Thirdly, attractiveness is the likeability of the consumer that he or she finds in the endorser. Hence, an endorser with sound knowledge, sincerity and physical attractiveness is perceived as more credible and therefor is responsible for generating a response with positive attitude and behavioural intentions (Derdenger, Li, & Srinivasan, 2018).

The believability of the provided information by a specific brand is known as brand credibility which influence the consumer during the process of consideration for a brand. Brand credibility not only influence the consumer's choice of brand but also impacts on moderating the consumer's sensitivity towards price (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

A set of signals of endorsed brand are always present in an endorsement, there is a possibility that the credibility of endorser will also be transferred to the subject brand. Hence, more credible a brand's signal for its positioning of product, there will be less risk of the consumer to incur cost on decision making and less time will be spent on information gathering resulting in quick response. Furthermore, firms focus on brand credibility generation as it is dependent on the quality of conveyed information via marketing tactics linked with a brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998).

Keeping these scenarios in mind and current trends of marketing techniques used in Pakistani cell phone market where celebrities are used by almost all the leading brands available in the country to attract consumer to increase the brand credibility but nothing much has been done in this regard so it is necessary to conduct a research to measure the impact of endorser credibility on the BE of cell phone in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

In previous research, it has been shown that celebrity endorser produces more recall for endorsed brand and advertisement (Atkin & Block, 1983). According to Dean (1999), celebrity also affects the perceived quality of the product. However, there is still lack of understanding as to how a credible endorser may affect the brand's equity. On the other hand, Erdem and Swait (1998), suggested that the credibility of a brand also helps to build BE because of additional consumer value towards brand. In this case whether the use of celebrities with credibility influence the BE when there is brand credibility acting as a mediator is to be investigated. The role of credibility of brand as a mediator is missing in relation to credibility of celebrity endorser and BE in the prior literature. Hence, present research fills this gap by investigating the credibility of the celebrity endorser in developing BE via the route of boosting brand credibility.

Research Questions

1. How brand credibility and endorser credibility influence on the BE of cell phone market in Pakistan?
2. What is the role of credibility of brand on the BE in the cell phone market of Pakistan?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the direct impact of endorser credibility on brand credibility in case of cell phone market of Pakistan.
2. To explore the direct impact of brand credibility and endorser credibility on the BE in relation to cell phone market of Pakistan.
3. To check the indirect impact of credibility of the celebrity endorser on the BE via building the credibility of the brand in the cell phone market of Pakistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Endorser credibility means to what extent the source is seen as an expert on the topic of communication and the level of trust that can be given to his or her opinion on the topic (Ohanian, 1990). Brand credibility stands for the belief the consumer puts on the product's information under the brand, depending on the readiness and capability of the firm to fulfill the promised product (Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, 2006). BE means the value that is additionally added to the product by the name of the brand (Bailey & Ball, 2006). The two widely renowned conceptualisations of BE are proposed by Keller (1993), and Aaker (1991), from a consumer point of view. BE consists of a set of facets such as brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and other facets proprietary in nature (Aaker, 1991). However, BE is termed as the effect on consumer's response in relation to the brand's marketing on the basis of the difference of brand knowledge (Keller, 1993).

Endorser Credibility

There is a lot of work done on celebrity endorsements rooting from the work of Hovland and others along with work of McGuire (1985). The research mainly focuses on factors such as credibility, attractiveness and trustworthiness. Furthermore, it is supposed that a credible celebrity who is attractive and seen as trustworthy have a constructive effect on brand evaluations. Some studies regarding credibility of celebrities treated it as multi-dimensional variable, on the other hand some studies have taken expertise as distinct variable and trustworthiness as separate variables. According to (Spry et al., 2011), discovered a constructive effect on brand evaluation when credibility is taken as one variable. Similarly, many other studies show a positive relation of expertise on brand evaluation but no positive effect of trustworthiness (Rossiter & Smidts, 2012).

According to Rossiter and Smidts (2012), trustworthiness which is perceived cannot result in a positive relation as consumer are aware of the fact that a sum of money is paid to celebrities for their endorsing services. According to Lord and Putrevu (2009), it is argued that expertise of a celebrity has much greater effect for informational communication strategies. Another factor involved is liking of celebrity, which on different instances labelled as celebrity likability. Celebrity likability has limited interest as it is considered that the celebrities that are hired for endorsements are selected because they receive a lot of appreciation or liking and very few brands would hire someone with less likability (Escalas & Bettman, 2015).

Individuals are likely to respond more positively when they are sure about the credibility of the information given to them. Endorsers with higher level of credibility are tend to generate more positive attitude and result in a more responsive behavioural compliance as compare to a less credible endorser (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1991). Most of the studies focus on endorser's credibility are inclined toward the key components such as trustworthiness and expertise (Ohanian, 1991).

Mainly the research pertaining to endorsement on the source characteristics that the endorser possesses as well as the meaning transfer between endorsed brand and endorser. In the following discussion the concept of CE and its models will be elaborated.

Celebrity Endorsement

According to (Spry et al., 2011), endorsement is a technique where brand use a distinguished person to support and recommend their product mostly an expert in the field or a celebrity. Rodriguez (2008) explains that a person who is a public figure or enjoys fame and support a brand or its product through a written testimonial or speaks for it increasing the value of product. Although, testimonials are usually used and given by ordinary citizen whereas endorsements are by celebrities.

Celebrity endorsements are used as a leverage as the consumers are attracted towards them and it influences due to secondary association between the brand and the celebrity and this positive transfer builds image of brand and create equity for the endorsed brand (Keller, 2008). Celebrities are individuals who are famous for their work in films, television artist or accomplished athletes (Rodriguez, 2008).

According to Seno and Lukas (2007), the endorsement by other professional of the fields such as product managers is less effective as compare to endorsements by celebrities. Endorsement provides an opportunity to increase awareness regarding the brand and product. Endorsement through celebrities are widely acceptable in consumers as they tend to believe that celebrities are more dynamic and likeable (Atkin & Block, 1983). Though the purpose of using a celebrity is to grab consumer attention towards the product being endorsed. Sliburyte (2009) suggests that the success of a product, consumer's decision to buy the product is not only dependent on

the looks of the celebrity which suggests that there must be other elements that should be paid due attention.

The negative aspects of CE can prompt the brands to use celebrities with higher persona and may use less personified or lay endorser. These are endorsers which are unknown to the general public and are chosen on the basis of needs and demographic of the audience and are available on lower price tag. They are usually categorized as ‘typical person’ that can be easily identified by the consumer (McCracken, 1989). However, this also covers the celebrities which are formed by the brand and are polished to show the brand’s image and personality (Keel & Natarajan, 2012). In addition, these endorsers are owned by the brand as those are the creator of that particular character that might be fictional in nature and used to personify the brand. This allows brand to dictate how the endorser is to be presented to the audience giving them a chance to align the endorser with story of the brand.

Brand Equity

The term BE was first used during the 1980s by US advertisers. It was not precisely defined at that time but was considered as brand’s long-term customer franchise and financial value of franchise (Barwise, 1993). In literature BE is studied with two principal and discrete point of views named as financial BE and consumer-based BE as discussed below.

Financial brand equity

In The first concept of BE is related to the point of view of financial market where value of the asset of a brand is reviewed (Sriram, Balachander, & Kalwani, 2007). In this concept brands are considered as financial assets and should be managed by top management and financial markets. Moreover, the financial value of brand depends on its strength (Barwise, 1993).

Consumer-based brand equity

BE is described as the value that the consumer gives to a product due to its association with a brand (Aaker, 1991). The superiority that is associated with the brand due to the perception of the consumer in comparison with other brands. It can be said that BE stands not for any other objective indicator but only for consumer’s perception (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995). Using the conceptualization of Aaker’s dimensions of brand equity, a conceptual framework is developed to measure the BE (Aaker, 1991). For which the facets are discussed in detail in the next section.

Brand awareness. Almost all the models proposed to measure BE contains awareness as a key element (Aaker, 1991; Maio Mackay, 2001). According to Keller (2003), brand awareness stands for “Ability of the consumer to recognize and recall the brand as shown by the ability to

recognize the brand under multiple situations and to associate the name of brand its symbol and logo and to link them in memory”.

According to Aaker (1996), besides recognition and recall there are other higher level or awareness. These includes dominance of brand, knowledge of brand and brand opinion. Whereas, Knowledge of brand means complete association linkage with the brand (Keller, 1993). Recognition is important for new brands but popular brands tend to pay more attention towards brand recall. Knowledge of brand and brand opinion can be used to increase the brand recall's measurement. According to Aaker brand awareness should lead to association with brand. Here it stands for a situation where the consumer will develop association only when he is already aware of the brand (Washburn & Plank, 2002).

Brand associations. According to Aaker and Biel (1993) a brand association is the most widely accepted determinant of brand equity. Brand associations means all the thoughts related to brand, images, beliefs and feelings and any linkage in memory about the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Different researchers have suggested multiple types of brand associations which contributes to brand equity. Chen (2001) identified two types of associations which are product associations and organizational associations.

Product associations. According to Chen (2001), functional attributes and non- functional associations are components of product associations. According to Pita and Katsanis (1995), consumers take into account the tangible features of a brand and if the brand does not provide the consumer with the performance, it promises than it will have a low BE level. Here the performance of a brand is described as consumer's judgement about the brand's error free and everlasting in operations and physical structure (Lassar et al., 1995). On the other hand, intangible features of the product such as symbolic attributes which are going to meet consumer's personal satisfaction and acceptance in social circle (Chernatony & McWilliam 1989).

Social image. Social image means the consumer's perception about the esteem in the social group where the consumer feels comfortable hold the brand. It comprises of the regard a consumer gets and what others think about the user of that brand. According to Lassar et al. (1995), the social dimension which is social image influences more to the brand equity.

Perceived value. Perceived value is defined as costs incurred on the brand against its utility, which is evaluated by the consumer after multiple considerations about what will be gained upon giving up. Consumer's evaluation of brand's utility and the price of brand if balances only then it will become primary choice of consumer (Lassar et al., 1995).

Differentiation/distinctiveness. Brands tend to provide consumers with differentiating products to benefit them at the same time helping by processing and retrieval of information (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). Similarly, there is also stress on distinctive character of brand to

ensure brand's success. Here, distinctiveness is described as the level to which the consumer sees the brand is different from its competitors (Kapferer, 1992). A price premium can be asked from consumers due to its distinctiveness from its rivals.

Country of origin. Consumer considers the brand's country of origin. Brand origin is defined as "the consumer's perception about the place, area or region from which the brand belongs". According to Keller (1993), the country of origin builds up a link in consumer's mind and act as an extrinsic signal that is quite similar to a name of brand. It is stated that consumer tend to place more attention towards the brand's country of origin rather than the place where the brand manufactures their product (Thakor, Mrugank, & Kohli, 1996).

Organizational associations. According to Chen (2001), organizational association means the ability of a firm in term of expertise to produce and delivering its goods made and also to fulfil its obligation to the society. It is assumed that consumer consider organization such as values and programs which are behind the brand. Organizational association is helpful when the brands are similar in terms of characteristics.

Theoretical Framework

Foregoing literature, on the basis of source credibility model, the following theoretical framework has been devised. The endorser credibility is an independent variable, BE is dependent variable and brand credibility is acting as a mediator.

Relationship of endorser credibility - brand credibility

A firm works to obtain large benefits in the process of strengthening the credibility of a brand from the quality information provided with the use of marketing tactics attached to a brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Keller, 2013). As the endorsement act as a tool of communication, it contains some of the indication of the brand endorsed and it is also possible that a credible endorser will transfer some value towards the brand. For instance, Hamza Ali Abbasi who is seen as a trustworthy celebrity due to his commitment towards poverty reduction. Whenever endorses Lipton tea, consumers' perception about the credibility of the brand will have a positive effect. In short, if the credibility level of the endorser is high it should result in the higher credibility of the brand. Similarly, the investment of a firm towards a brand also indicates the credibility of the brand, as it is thought that high investment in the brand is expected to cater the product promised (Erdem & Swait, 1998; Spry et al., 2011, Dwivedi et al., 2015).

Relationship of brand credibility - brand equity

According to Erdem and Swait (1998), theory of brand signaling suggests that BE can be built with credibility. A brand with credibility has less cost of information processing, the low

tendency for gathering information and lower apparent risk (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Spry et al., 2011). Furthermore, the positive effect on perception, the cost of information and apparent risk, it increases the utility of the brand in the mind of the consumer as more value is added to it. Hence, it is important that there should be the existent credibility of the brand in case of lacking it, the endorser with the highest credibility is expected to do very little in strengthening brand equity.

Relationship of endorser credibility- brand equity

According to Fiske and Taylor (1991), a direct relation between endorser credibility with consumer-based BE can be expressed using the associative network memory model. In this model, it is suggested that celebrity endorser can support recalling brand and recognition, which form an additional node in shape of celebrity endorser which is connected to brand node. In such situation when several associations for a single node are there, it is a lot easier to reach a node in memory as different ways available.

Biswas et al., (2006) suggested that endorser with high credibility will become a strongly related with the brand he is endorsing in the mind of the consumer. When highly credible brand Lays fall in the “Pig Fat controversy” in order to find their way back they made a TVC and a radio ad with Junaid Jamshed who after leaving the music scene became a more credible source endorsed Lays declaring it is Halal. According to Keller (2013), the control over the meaning attached to a brand in consumer’s memory is vital to management of the brand equity.

In previous researches, authors support that by strengthening secondary association to expand brand equity, same case in linking a brand with to another object such as a celebrity (Baalbaki & Guzman, 2016). Furthermore, the other object will have some meaningful associations, which should be transferred towards the brand (Spry et al., 2011). For Instance, Eden robe’s special addition was endorsed by Kevin Peterson, trusted English all-rounder in Pakistani market because of his performance in PSL by attaching association such a “perfection”. Therefore, a large network of association can be created as consumer not only link a celebrity with the brand but can also attach celebrity associations with the brand endorsed by celebrity. Similarly, perceived quality of a brand can also be affected by endorsement by celebrity.

According to Dean (1999), celebrities serve as a clue that reduces the confusion and uncertainty of consumer by inferring to information on product characteristics and quality. Moreover, in previous research with classical conditions shows the positive effect of an association with an object e.g. celebrity with the brand (McSweeney & Bierley, 1984; Dwivedi et al., 2015). Hence, the principles of conditioning state that endorsement by celebrity influence the brand loyalty by effect transfer and inferential belief information. Affect transfer means that consumer has a positive evaluation of a single object when there is an association with another object. On the other hand, inferential belief formation means due to the association of two objects the change in a person’s attitude with respect to a brand. Lastly, it is expected that celebrities with high

credibility will take the brand to the higher level of brand loyalty. Similarly, when a brand is established, it has its own credibility in such case the credible endorser's ability to change consumer's BE is comparative to brand credibility.

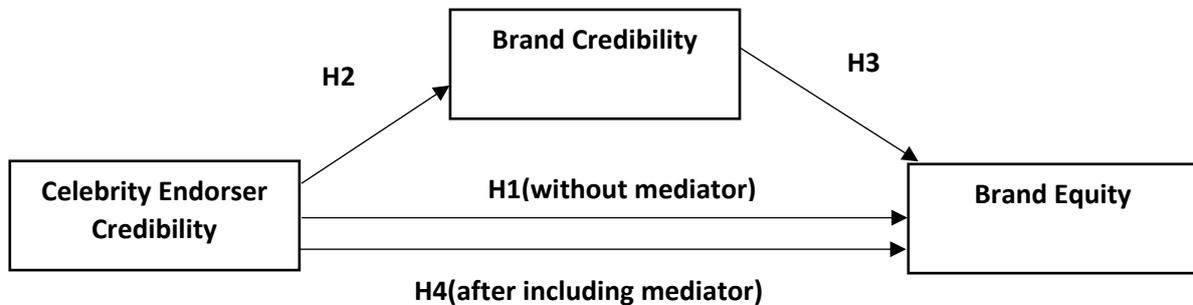


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Study

Hypotheses

H₁: The celebrity endorser's credibility has a significant impact on the brand equity.

H₂: The credibility of the celebrity endorser has a positive impact on the brand credibility.

H₃: There is a significant impact of credibility of the brand on the brand equity.

H₄: The relationship between the credibility of celebrity endorser and BE is mediated by the credibility of the brand.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used a quantitative methodological approach to address the research questions. Baron and Kenny Model was applied to investigate the mediating role of brand credibility between the independent and dependent variables of present study. The cause and effect relationships was investigated in current study.

Population

The population of the study is the cell phone users of Pakistan, the distribution of population if described in terms of age brackets, then the lowest chunk of users which is 9 percent are aged between 10 to 20 years, 12 percent are aged between age 31 and 40 above. However, the biggest contributor to this population are people falling in the age bracket of 21 to 30 years and makes up the 77 percent of this population this age bracket is the same as of the students studying in universities (PAS, 2017). There are total 189 Higher Education Commission (HEC) recognized higher education institutes in Pakistan. The students of these institutes were the population for present study. There are 112 public sector and 77 private sector HEC recognized universities in Pakistan. This is potentially a good setting as there is a mix of public and private



universities in Pakistan. As for the author, was lacking of resources to travel to far flung areas, time constraint and situation of law and order, only 6 Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) were selected in the sample frame from both public and private sectors of the HEIs market. The reason for the selection of university students was that the brands are popular among the young generation.

Sample

This study used non-probability sampling design technique for the selection of the sample. Furthermore, Convenience sampling was used for the selection of the sample as there was lack of resources such as financial and time constraint faced by the researcher. Six universities (two public and four private sector) were selected for data collection, which are Iqra University Islamabad, Preston University Islamabad, Air University Multan, Bahauddin Zakriya University Multan, Fast University Lahore Campus and University of Lahore on the basis of high enrollment of students in their management science department.

Moreover, data was collected from the management sciences students of those six universities as they were very well aware about the marketing concepts regarding branding and endorsements. Furthermore, data was collected from the Bachelor, Master and M.Phil students of management sciences departments. Present study collected data from 211 students using convenience sampling.

Scales and Measures

Scales and measures are used to quantify the primary data collected through questionnaire so that different statistical tests in SPSS can be applied. Therefore, for operationalization of data, the researcher used scales and measures of endorser credibility, brand credibility and brand equity. Where endorser credibility was measured on fifteen items measured on five-point Likert scale developed by Ohanian (1990). Brand credibility was measured on five items measured on five-point Likert scale developed by Erdem and Swait (2004). The BE of cell phone was measured with five item adopted from Yoo and Donthu (2001), Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000). Operational definitions of the variables and explained in next section.

Operational Definitions

How a researcher decides to measure the variables in a study is known as operational definition, this study include endorser credibility, brand credibility and BE which are explained below.

Endorser credibility

There are Three facets of endorser credibility:

Attractiveness. A positive image of brand is expected to be built when a famous celebrity endorses it due to his/her physical characteristics such as personality and status. According to Felix and Borges (2014), celebrity attractiveness means how appealing is the nature of endorser including physical beauty, likeability and familiarity to customers. Which contains five items measured on five-point Likert scale developed by Ohanian (1990).

Trustworthiness. To the extent a celebrity is recognized as knowledgeable or experienced to provide with a neutral judgment (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). When information comes from a credible source in our case a celebrity it can easily influence the attitudes, decision making and values of consumer (Stone, Joseph, & Ibrahim, 2015). It was five items measured on five-point Likert scale developed by Ohanian (1990).

Expertise. Expertise is said to be another component of credibility of celebrity (McCracken, 1989). It is argued by Thomas and Johnson (2017), that expertise with relation to credibility of celebrity is skill sets, knowledge of endorser. Similarly, Biswas et al. (2006) stated that celebrity endorsers are known to be expert of their related areas. Expertise were measured on five items measured on five-point Likert scale developed by Ohanian (1990).

Brand Credibility

There are Two facets of brand credibility:

Expertise

A brand is said to be expert if customers believe that the firm is delivering on its promises of service quality. It also comprises of the brand's capability to deliver what the brand offers to the consumers. It contained two items measured on five-point Likert scale developed by Erdem and Swait (2004).

Trustworthiness

Brand is said to be trustworthy when it fulfils its promises made in providing the value along with quality on regular basis (Delgado-Ballester & Aleman, 2005). It is also defined as how the reliability or what is expected about something in our case a brand (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). When the element of trust is established then it can result in the belief in the manufacturer's advertisement for a brand. Trustworthiness contained three items measured on five-point Likert scale developed by Erdem and Swait (2004).

Brand Equity

Operatinonal defination of BE is expressed as the positive differntial effect on the consumer response to the product or service of a brand that they know the name of (Keller, 1993). The

BE of cell phone was measured with five item adopted from Yoo and Donthu (2001), Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000).

Data Collection Procedure

First of all, letter of authorization for data collection was issued by the HoD, Department of Management Sciences, Preston University, Islamabad. In the first phase of data collection process, responses were collected from management sciences department of Preston University Islamabad and Iqra University Islamabad. Total 80 questionnaires were filled up by the student of these universities. In the second phase of data collection process, the researcher moved to Lahore. In Lahore, the responses were taken from the management sciences department of FAST University Lahore campus and University of Lahore.

Total 80 questionnaires were filled up by the student of these universities. In the third and final phase of data collection process, the researcher moved to Multan. In Multan, the responses were taken from the management sciences department of Air University Multan campus and Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan. Total 80 questionnaires were filled up by the student of these universities. After the completion of data collection process, there were 240 questionnaires collected. After the scrutinizing of questionnaires, there were only 211 properly filled questionnaires that could be used for data analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

The responses collected through 211 questionnaires were put into SPSS for data analysis. The descriptive statistics was applied to reveal the mean, median, kurtosis and skewness of the data. The kurtosis and skewness were used to check the normality of data. Furthermore, mediation effect is checked using the following test.

Preacher and Hayes Techniques for Assessing Indirect Effect in Single Mediator Model

Preacher and Hayes (2008) explained the different techniques to assess the indirect effect in single mediator model from which one is illustrated in the following section.

Baron & Kenny's Procedures for Mediation

According to Judd and Kenny (1981b), an estimation of a sequence of regression model is required. In order to test for mediation, estimation of three following equations of regression must be estimated: firstly, mediator's regression on the independent variable; secondly, dependent variable's regression on independent variable; thirdly, regression of dependent variable on both mediator along with independent variable. Each equation must have their own coefficients estimated and tested. Stepwise neither hierarchical regression nor the computation of partial or semi partial correlation are not required. Three equations of regression give out

tests for the link of the mediation model. For establishment of mediation, the conditions as following must be held: firstly, there must be an effect of independent variable on mediator; secondly, there should be an effect of independent variable on the dependent variable for the second equation; and thirdly, in the third equation there must be an effect of mediator on the dependent variable.

If the given conditions are met in the forecasted direction, in that case the independent variable's effect on the dependent should be lower than in the second equation. If the independent variable is not able to produce any effect when mediator is controlled, then perfect mediation will take place. It is because assumption is made that the independent variable causes the mediator and these two variables must be correlated. Multicollinearity is resultant in the presence of this type of correlation where the effects of mediator and independent on the dependent variable are projected.

All of this results in the reduction of power in testing the coefficients in the equation on third place. In that scenario, it is critical that one should not only inspect the significance but also the absolute size of the coefficients. For example, there is a possibility of a smaller coefficients of the independent variable when it only forecasts the dependent variable than when it along with the mediator are present in the equation and the smaller coefficient is significant but the larger one is not.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Present study aimed to examine the role of endorser credibility in creation of BE and investigate the impact of brand credibility in creation of BE for cell phone in Pakistan. Moreover, it was also important to take demographics including (age and gender) for analysis.

For conducting the descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, the interpretation of the results of demographics for age and gender of the respondents are done in table 2 and 3. Furthermore, the descriptive of all variables of the study includes Mean, Skewness and Standard Deviation in following tables.

Lastly, reliability and validity of the instruments used in the study are interpreted in table 4. The inferential statistics including Pearson's correlation (table 5), mediation was also applied and interpreted in subsequent tables. These analyses were applied using SPSS version 25.

Descriptive of the Demographics

The descriptive of the study are mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of all variables (N =211)

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	S.D	Skewness
Endcrd	24	66	45.52	7.86	-0.12
ECatt	5	25	15.16	4.42	0.00
ECexp	5	25	15.18	4.42	0.00
Ectr	5	25	15.17	4.36	-0.03
BC	6	25	14.92	4.50	0.03
BE	5	25	14.95	4.42	0.02

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents are from age group of 18-25, with a percentage of 72%. Similarly, the respondents from age group 26-29, are 18%, whereas, 10% are from age group 30 and above.

Table 2: Distribution of Age for Respondents (N = 211)

	Age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	18-25	151	71.6	71.6
	26-29	38	18.0	89.6
	30 & Above	22	10.4	100.0
	Total	211	100.0	

Table 3: Distribution of Gender for Respondents (N = 211)

	Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Male	167	79.1	79.1
	Female	44	20.9	100.0
	Total	211	100.0	

From table 3, it can be seen that males as compared to females are more in numbers in total data set. Males being 79% whereas females are 21%.

Table 4: Alpha Reliability Coefficient of all Scales (N =211)

Variables	Items	Alpha Coefficient
Endcrd	15	0.73
ECatt	5	0.80
ECexp	5	0.79
Ectr	5	0.88
Brand Credibility	5	0.80
BE	5	0.80

For the present study the scale used are reliable, which is shown by the reliability statistics for the instruments as mentioned in table 4. The alpha value for the variable Ectr is highest (0.88).

Table 5: Correlation of all Variables (N= 211)

Variables	Endcrd	ECatt	ECexp	ECtr	BC	BE
Endcrd	--					
ECatt	0.65**	--				
ECexp	0.56**	0.07	--			
ECtr	0.56**	0.09	-0.07	--		
BC	0.26**	0.17**	0.16*	0.13*	--	
BE	0.27**	0.21**	0.15*	0.12	0.92**	--

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 5 shows two factors of endorser credibility (attractiveness, expertise), having positive correlation with BE ($r=0.21$ $p < 0.01$, $r=0.15$ $p < 0.05$), for the dimensions of attractiveness, expertise respectively.

Similarly, all the facets of endorser credibility (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) have a positive correlation of significant level with brand credibility ($r=0.17$ $p < 0.01$, $r=0.16$ $p < 0.05$, $r=0.13$ $p < 0.05$), for attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness in the same order. Furthermore, there is also a positive correlation between BE and brand credibility ($r=0.92$, $p < 0.01$). Overall endorser credibility has a positive correlation with brand credibility and brand image ($r=0.26$, $p < 0.01$) and ($r=0.27$, $p < 0.01$), respectively.

Mediation Analysis

Current study follows requirements that are laid by Baron and Kenny (1986), to justify true mediation analysis. These are explained below as

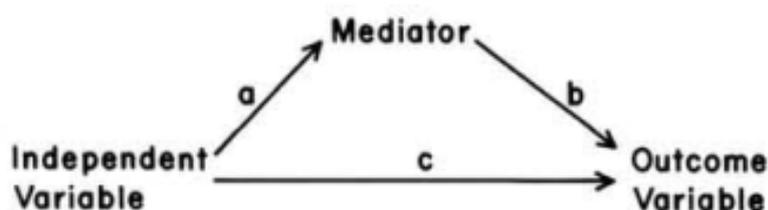


Figure 8: Baron and Kenny's (1986), Model for Mediation

According to the mediation model the following step were performed to satisfy mediation in current study.

Step 1:

In order to perform step 1, regress dependent variable i.e., BE to independent variable i.e., endorser credibility. In short to validate that independent variable has a significant impact on dependent variable.

Endorser credibility \longrightarrow Brand equity

Step 2:

For performing step 2, mediator i.e., brand credibility was regressed by independent variable (endorser credibility). This was done to establish that endorser credibility is a significant predictor of brand credibility. Moreover, if there is no association between mediator and independent variable, then there could be no mediation taking place.

Brand credibility \longrightarrow Endorser credibility

Step 3:

For performing step 3, dependent variable BE was regressed with both mediator i.e., brand credibility and independent variable endorser credibility. It can be said that this step shows that mediator is a significant predictor of dependent variable while keeping the independent variable controlled.

Step 4:

This step served as a point to demonstrate that whether the mediation occurred in the current study was partial or full. According to the conditions, if the values of beta in model 1 decreases as compared to beta value in model 3 and it becomes insignificant then it is said that full mediation has occurred. On the other side, if the value of beta in model 3 is decreased but it does not change its significance then it can be said that there is partial mediation having taken place.

Table 6 results demonstrate that the factor of endorser credibility verified as full mediation as the beta value of attractiveness reduced from 0.26 to 0.03. Endorser credibility became insignificant in step III although it was significant in step I and II. Furthermore, the table also demonstrate when brand credibility was included in step III, then the value of variance denoted in BE in step I, it experienced a significant level of increase from ($R^2= 0.78$) to ($R^2= 0.85$).

Table 6

Mediation analysis of brand credibility with endorser credibility factors and BE

(N =211)

Variables	B	S.E	B	t	Sig	R ²	F	ΔR ²
Model 1								
Endcrd	0.16	0.03	0.27	4.20	0.00	0.27	17.68	0.78
Model 2								
Endcrd	0.15	0.03	0.26	4.04	0.00	0.72	16.32	0.68
Model 3								
Endcrd	0.01	0.01	0.03	1.20	0.22	0.92	601.17	0.85
BC	0.92	0.02	0.91	33.05	0.00			

Discussion

Present study aimed to investigate the role of endorser and brand credibility on the brand equity. These aims were to examine the influence of brand and endorser's credibility on BE along with the role of brand credibility in of cell phone.

For the first hypothesis, which predicted that BE is greatly influenced by endorser credibility, it was proved that endorser credibility i.e., attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness positively effect BE ($\beta=0.27$, $t=4.20$, $p<001$). Associative network memory model explains the same which states that a credible endorser creates a cue in consumer's mind which results in creation of brand equity. For example, attractive endorsers result in making the brand valuable and hence increases the BE (Mathews et al., 2015). Whereas expertise also plays an important role as information coming from expert endorsers are considered more influential and for trustworthy celebrity also creates additional BE (Dwivedi, Johnson, Wilkie, & De Araujo-Gil, 2019).

In the second hypothesis, it was anticipated by researcher that endorser credibility has a positive impact on brand credibility. This hypothesis is proved as the endorser credibility have a positive impact on brand credibility ($\beta=0.26$, $t=4.04$, $p<0.01$). These results are in accordance with meaning transfer model, according to which consumer associated meaning towards an endorser transfer to brand endorsed. Bergkvist (2017) suggested the same that credible endorser will transfer some value towards the brand enhancing its credibility. This shows that if the endorser for a cell phone brand is accepted as credible the message delivered by him will be more acceptable to people and it will transfer its value towards the brand as well resulting in high credibility of cell phone in Pakistan.

The third hypothesis was proved by regression analysis (table 6), between brand credibility and BE has found to be positive ($\beta=0.91$, $t=33.05$, $p<0.01$). These results are also supported by brand signaling theory which supports the idea that brand credibility is the top most feature of a brand signal and plays important role in creation of brand equity. Keller (2013) also suggested that using credible information signal brand enhance their credibility which results in creation of brand equity. It means that the higher credibility brand which is seen as trustworthy, influence the consumer's perception about the brand which ultimately increases the BE of cell phone in Pakistan. The consumer tends to make their decision for the same brand if they see the cell phone brand as credible even if another cell phone provides the same features but has a low credibility.

According to the fourth hypothesis, where researcher predicted that the relationship of endorser credibility and BE is mediated by brand credibility, which was proved when the steps of Baron and Kenny were applied, the first step verified that endorser credibility as ($t= 4.20$, $p= 0.000$), with brand equity(table-6). In step 2, it was verified that endorser credibility remained significant with brand credibility of cell phone in Pakistan.

Whereas, in the last step the results demonstrated that when the mediator was included in step 3, then the variance was significantly increased ($R^2=0.75$ to $R^2=0.85$), as compared to BE in model I. It also proved that the endorser credibility is verified as full mediation as the beta value of endorser credibility reduced significantly(table-6). It means that the credibility of cell phone plays as a mediator for a relationship between credible endorser and BE of cell phone in Pakistan. Advertisers must keep in mind the role of cell phone credibility as well the higher the credibility the more it will help to create cell phone equity in Pakistan. Credibility of cell phone help the consumer pay very little attention towards pricing if they perceive a particular cell phone brand with high credibility so due care must be given to the credibility of cell phone brand as well while hiring a credible endorser to have a favourable impact on cell phone equity in Pakistan.

Literature supports that endorser credibility has a superior position. The power of endorser credibility is proved by a statement from Erdogan (1999). According to him endorser credibility is a competitive tool for marketing and in a condition where market is saturated and less choice are available for the consumers. It will result into a success if an endorser is hired at a right time for the right customers.

Match up Hypothesis helps to understand how endorsement can be made more effective. There should be a perfect fit between the endorser and endorsed brand. Similarly, meaning transfer Model helps to demonstrate the way endorsement process is carried out (McCracken, 1989).

Brand credibility facilitate a consumer in many ways, for example when there is less time to decide, less information available about the product and alternative available with same features. In such situation consumer will take the product with high brand credibility. Similarly,

it is argued that superior brands with high credibility reduces the risk linked with consumer's decision. Hence, brand credibility has a favourable impact on brand equity.

5. CONCLUSION

The basic aim of the study was to investigate the role of endorser credibility on BE with brand credibility as a mediator. To address the research questions of the current study and meet the objectives and to achieve a better insight data analysis is carried out. All three facets of endorser credibility that includes *attractiveness*, *trustworthiness* and *expertise* are verified as positively correlates with BE (table-5) using Pearson correlation. Whereas, mediation analysis (table-6), shows that endorser credibility is significant with brand equity. All of these factors play an equally important role. So, finding of the study proves that for cell phone in Pakistan when endorser is credible from consumer's perspective it will help to create BE of cell phone in Pakistan.

According to Baalbaki and Guzman (2016), the message delivered by a credible endorser will be more persuasive. Several other researchers argued that a credible endorser has more influence than an endorser with less credibility and adds more to BE (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Uribe et al, 2016). Furthermore, brand credibility and BE are significant and positively correlate. It is concluded, that relationship between endorser credibility and BE is mediated by brand credibility of cell phone in Pakistan

Limitations of the Study

This study has a few limitations which provides further avenues for exploring the relation between endorser credibility and BE in order to fully understand the role of endorser and brand credibility in creation of brand equity. Below mentioned are the limitation of study:

- The study only considered two demographics i.e., age and gender, nothing was done in order to investigate the impact of income level, residential area and marital status.
- For the given population size the sample size was comparatively smaller.
- Mainly the respondents in this study belonged to age group of 18-25, while respondents above 30 were less.
- Focus of the study were only university students, people from other age group e.g., senior citizens may have a different approach towards endorser credibility.
- Factors such as familiarity, likeability and multiple endorsement were not considered during the study.



Future Studies

Below are the areas which need to be explored by future researchers in order to fulfill the gap of the study:

- Future researchers can take another industry to investigate the effect of endorser and brand credibility on brand equity, whereas this study only focused on cell phone market in Pakistan.
- Future researchers can work with additional demographics e.g. income level and marital status as well.
- Senior citizens can also be taken as respondents to investigate their input on celebrity endorser and brand credibility.



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APPENDIX (Questionnaire Survey)

While you are purchasing a cell phone to what extent do you consider celebrity and branding features, please respond to the following statements as per given scale	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Celebrity is Attractive	1	2	3	4	5
2. Celebrity is Classy (Stylish)	1	2	3	4	5
3. Celebrity is Beautiful	1	2	3	4	5
4. Celebrity is Elegant (Graceful)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Celebrity is Sexy	1	2	3	4	5
6. Celebrity is Expert	1	2	3	4	5
7. Celebrity is Experienced	1	2	3	4	5
8. Celebrity is Knowledgeable	1	2	3	4	5
9. Celebrity is Qualified	1	2	3	4	5
10. Celebrity is Skilled	1	2	3	4	5
11. Celebrity is Dependable	1	2	3	4	5
12. Celebrity is Honest	1	2	3	4	5
13. Celebrity is Reliable	1	2	3	4	5
14. Celebrity is Sincere	1	2	3	4	5
15. Celebrity is Trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
16. Brand reminds me of someone who's competent and knows what he/she is doing	1	2	3	4	5
17. Brand has the ability to deliver what it promises	1	2	3	4	5
18. Brand's product claims are believable	1	2	3	4	5
19. Brand has a name you can trust	1	2	3	4	5
20. Brand delivers what it promises	1	2	3	4	5
21. It makes sense to buy my preferred brand instead of other brands available, even if they are same	1	2	3	4	5
22. Even if other brands have same features, I would prefer my preferred	1	2	3	4	5
23. If there is another brand as good as my preferred brand, my first choice will be my preferred brand	1	2	3	4	5
24. To me brand is more than a product	1	2	3	4	5
25. I have complete trust in my preferred brand	1	2	3	4	5