The Influence of Celebrity Endorsements and Brand Image on Millennials' Purchase Decisions: Evidence from Pakistan

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Abstract: This study examines the effect of celebrities' endorsements and the image of the brand on the purchase decisions of millennials, more particularly on Pakistan. With the Meaning Transfer Model and brand image theory frame works, the studied emphasizes the ever growing relevance of both concepts aiding in purchase decision making in the globalized world in which we live in. Employing a quantitative cross sectional survey research design, information was collected from 300 Pakistani millennials who are fascinated and/ or employed in the retailing and fashion sector. The study was based on previously done works and measures which underwent the processes of reliability, descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis. The data revealed that brand image and celebrity endorsements positively influence purchase decisions of millennials, with brand image serving as the strongest predictor. These findings are consistent with international research, while also being informative in relation to Pakistan. With respect to the growing body of research consumer behavior, this study evidences the fact that brand equity and endorsers' credibility are still the determining factors that influence the purchase behavior of millennials. Considering the use of marketing and endorsement of celebrities together with the strategies needed to build a brand and full consumer loyalty on both a short and a long-term essence, a focus should be placed on the integration of the celebrity endorsement campaigns with the brand-building strategies. There are also limitations and suggestions for future research provided.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsements, Brand image, Purchase decisions, Millennials, Pakistan

1. Introduction

In recent years, with advances in the global market, Marketing methods have begun to place more emphasis on the use of psychological and emotional arguments to motivate purchases. Among them, celebrity endorsement and brand image have emerged as some of the most important influencers of consumer behavior. On the global scale, celebrity endorsement is recognized as a highly effective marketing tool that increases product visibility, credibility, and consumer trust (Spry et al., 2011, Jin & Ryu, 2020). The association with a famous personality tends to eliminate consumer doubts and increases the intention to make a purchase, owing to the celebrity's fame and trustworthiness

(Amos et al., 2008; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Likewise, brand image is increasingly important in determining purchase decisions in all sectors, as a favorable brand image enhances brand equity and enables emotional attachment, which fosters consumer loyalty and repeat purchase behavior (Keller, 2013; Shahid et al., 2022).

Since the dawn of the digital era, each generation has had its own distinct features that set them apart consumer wise, and with respect to the millennial generation, they are among the most unique consumer segments millenniums. They are the so-called digital natives who, in comparison to the older generations, tend to use more symbolic consumption, emotional connections, and social interactions in their purchase decision-making process (Williams et al., 2012; Smith, 2021). Social media. where they are more actively inclined to, has provided access to celebrity marketers, thus allowing them to be more favorable toward use of celebrity marketing (Djafarova& Trofimenko, 2019). In countries like Pakistan, which are in their growth stage, the millennial population is relatively large, thus making the marketers focus on them. Almost 64% of the population which is below 30 years of age in Pakistan, according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, indicates that a large number of millennials serve to be the backbone of this country, thus strongly impacting the market (PBS, 2021).

In Pakistan, both celebrity endorsements and brand image value are important in their own right. With their powerful positions, celebrities in the Pakistan entertainment and sports industry are regarded as role models in the consumer society, and their thoughts and surely their ways of life are considered of great value (Ahmed & Ashfaq, 2013; Hussain & Javed, 2019). At the same time, the Pakistani consumer is highly brand conscious, and in the fashion, food, and technology industry which are highly competitive, brand image is a significant part of product differentiation (Saeed et al, 2020; Awan et al, 2021). The global attention paid to these variables is, however, not supported by adequate empirical work in Pakistan about the impact celebrity endorsements and brand image are having on millennials purchase decisions, leaving a gap in the literature on the subject. This is important to work on, for the economic, cultural, and social systems in Pakistan tend to make people view celebrity culture and brand culture in ways that are different to the rest of the world.

This study attempts to understand the correlation between celebrity endorsements brand strategy and purchase behavior amongst the millennial population in Pakistan. This study contributes to the growing body of work in the area of consumer behavior and offers applicable recommendations to marketers operating in emerging markets by juxtaposing global frameworks with domestic paradigms. This research aims to understand how Pakistani millennials engage with these variables, allowing businesses to tailor effective marketing strategies to enhance the brand equity in this difficult market, thus strengthening their position both internationally and domestically.

1.1 Supporting Theory

The research continues to be anchored on McCracken's (1989) Meaning Transfer Model (MTM) . The MTM explains the phenomenon of image association and endorsement in regards to celebrity influence on the consumer's decision process in brand purchasing. The model suggests that a celebrity holds a certain cultural construction of attractiveness, lifestyle, status and credibility, and these meanings get attached to the brands a celebrity endorses, and later to the consumers of those brands.

In this instance, the celebrity functions literally as a bridge, transferring desirable traits to the product, thereby augmenting the brand image and modifying the brand's perception to be more favorable from the consumer's perspective (McCracken, 1989; Dwivedi et al, 2021). This symbolic brand association bias, once formed, is likely to be internalized into the consumer's self perception, which in turn, greatly alters their buying behavior (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Jin & Ryu, 2020). This is particularly the case for millennials who look for aspirational and consumption driven identities. This is particularly the case for millennials who look for aspirational and consumption driven identities. They deploy both celebrities and brands as self expressive and social signaling tools (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Smith, 2021). In Pakistan, where cultural figures in sports, drama and entertainment have a major impact on the aspirations of the youth, MTM provides a strong theoretical framework to delineate the impact of celebrity endorsements on brand image and, more importantly, on the millennials' purchase propensity towards the endorsed products (Ahmed & Ashfaq, 2013; Hussain & Javed, 2019). Thus, while the Meaning Transfer Model dose incorporate the impact of celebrity endorsements on brand image and subsequent purchase decisions, it is the cultural impact to millennial consumers in developing countries, which is more significant.

2.   Literature Review

2.1 Celebrity Endorsements and Purchase Decisions

The practice of celebrity endorsements has been popularly noted as one of the most impactful marketing strategies aimed at changing consumer behavior. Celebrities as endorsers of a product or service use their fame, looks, and useful information as a means of attracting consumers and shaping their intentions to purchase the item (Amos et al, 2008; Dwivedi et al 2021). Studies show that consumers tend to ascribe to the endorsed product positive qualities that the celebrity endorsing the product has. This phenomenon is explained by the Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken 1989). Such association on the psychological level proves to strengthen the consumer's attitude and purchase intention towards the product. Among the consumers, especially, millennials, celebrity endorsements tend to have the most persuasive benefits because consumers at this age are more likely to use social media and interact with a greater number of celebrities, especially strong opinion leaders and influencers (Djafarova & Trofimenko 2019; Jin & Ryu 2020). Across the world, research has shown that most endorsements by a celebrity tend to have a primary focus on attaining an instant purchase but in the long run, they build emotional bonds and strengthen brand loyalty with consumers (Spry et al 2011; Choi & Rifon 2012).

In countries such as Pakistan, the power of a celebrity endorsement is heightened due to prevailing socio-cultural underpinnings. Achievers in sports, drama, and the entertainment indsutry become aspirational figures, and accordingly, their endorsements affect the purchase behavior of a much younger demographic looking to pattern their lifestyle after such a celebrity (Ahmed & Ashfaq, 2013; Hussain & Javed, 2019). The younger population of Pakistan, and especially the millennials, form a large proportion of the population and therefore the responsive segment to such campaigns as they tend to purchase the endorsed products because such endorsements are in line to the public personas (Awan et al., 2021). Also, with the advent of digitalization, Pakistani millennials are exposed to cross-country branding campaigns concentrated on celebrites, and as a result, become more responsive to their purchase behavior. There is, however, a gap in the literature as little research has been conducted on the impact of celebrity endorsement on the buying behavior of millennials in Pakistan. Filling this gap will enrich the prevailing understanding about a consumer market in Pakistan. It will also suggest new principles of marketing needed to target the audience in the area of study.

Hypothesis 1: Celebrity Endorsements significantly influence Millennials' Purchase Decisions

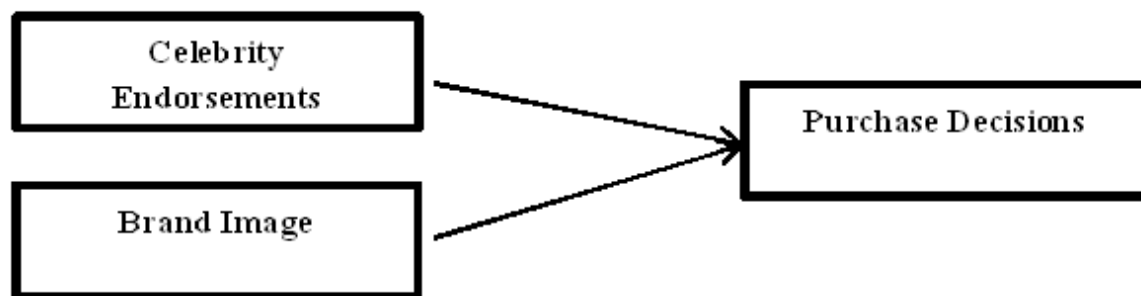### *2.2 Brand Image and Purchase Decisions*

Brand image has been an integral part of marketing and consumer behavior studies with considerable emphasis placed on its role in purchase decision-making. A brand image is defined as a set of perceptions, associations, and beliefs held by a consumer. It has an impact on both the rational and emotional processes associated with a product (Keller, 2013; Shahid et al, 2022). Trust in a brand that has a strong and positive brand image will likely reduce the purchase decision's uncertainty and increase its symbolic worth, which in turn increases the likelihood of purchase (Nguyen et al, 2019; Smith, 2021). Cross-cultural studies show that a distinctive feature of the millennial generation is brand awareness and strong emphasis on products that go beyond the functionalist approach to reflect symbolic aspects of their personality and values (Williams et al, 2012; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). More so than any other generation, millennials use brands for self articulation and identity construction, which gives brand image considerable impact on their purchase decision. Moreover, research shows that millennials are more willing to buy products from brands which they regard as authentic, innovative, and socially responsible. Hence, brand image has a more complex role in determining consumer choice than is commonly perceived (Smith, 2021; Dwivedi et al, 2021).

In Pakistan, the importance of brand image has increased due the expansion of the consumer market and increased competition in the region. Brand image and reputation are now being acknowledged and talked about by Pakistani millennials, particularly in the fashion, technology and food aswell as other industries where brand differentiation is key (Saeed et al. 2020. Awan et, al. 2021). For younger consumers, brand image is associated with quality and social capital, recognition, lifestyle appeal, aspirational value and myriad other factors tied to a person's attire, outward behavior, and their overall disposition. The advent and increased utilization of social networking sites in Pakistan also increased the importance of brand images as millennials capture and participate in brand-centric content, aligning their consumption choices with associative brand imagery framed by the market leaders. Although brand image has become an influential factor with regard to the buying behavior of millennials, not much has been researched in Pakistan and this is the gap which needs to be researched~~.

This study wants conduct a brand image consideration and its purchase decision impactin's Pakistan's millennial market within the context of the then-existing literature. Moreover, the study aims to provide marketers practical strategies formulated to improve brand image within the developing consumer market of Pakistan.

Hypothesis 2: Brand Image significantly influences Millennials' Purchase Decisions

Research Model

Figure 1: Research Model

3.   Methodology

This research used a quantitative cross sectional study approach to assess the influence of celeb endorsements along with brand image differences on the buying behavior of Pakistan millennials. From the 18 to 35 years old population, particular emphasis was placed on targeting millennials actively engaged in brand-oriented shopping, particularly in the heavily endorsed clothing, cosmetics, food and beverage, and technology sectors with strong brand image and celebrity endorsement ties. These are brand sensitive sponsoring sectors, and as such are ideal for the current study. A non probability purposive sampling technique was used to target millennials for whom celebrity marketing and brand consumption is a commonplace phenomenon. Data was collected through online structured questionnaires assisted by Google forms, and Social Media, as well as in-person in shopping malls and universities for diverse data. 250 responses were culled, vetted and analyzed, well above the gold standard for regression analyses which provided strong statistical support for hypothesis testing (Hair, et al. 2019). This approach allowed for the unique insight of targeting the perceptions of Pakistani millennials on celebrity endorsements and brand image along with the relevant quantitative information pertaining to the influence on the purchasing decisions.

3.1 Instrumentations

The study utilized questionnaires and adapted these instruments using the scales of reliability and validity tested in previous studies. Celebrity endorsement was measured using the 6-item scale designed by Ohanian in 1990 and utilized in subsequent studies by Dwivedi et al (2021) pertaining to the dimensions of celebrity endorsement– Credibility, Attractiveness and Trust. Brand Image was measured by the 5-item scale developed by Keller in 1993 and used by Shahid et al. (2022) which targeted the customer viewpoint, brand associations, and the symbolism attached to a brand. Purchase Decisions was measured using the 4-item scale by Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal in 1991 and was modified by Ha and Jang in 2010 concerning the likelihood of buying the advertised brand and subsequent purchase intentions. Each item was scored using a five-point Likert scale (1 'strongly disagree', 5 'strongly agree') which aimed

to assess the level of agreement among participants. These empirically designed scales proved useful to the study as the instrument crafted was tailored to the Pakistani millennial consumer market and hence ensured content validity.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis of Study Variables

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Status
Celebrity Endorsements	6	0.874	Reliable
Brand Image	5	0.861	Reliable
Purchase Decisions	4	0.846	Reliable
Overall Scale	15	0.867	Reliable

According to the reliability analysis, all the constructs of the study had considerable internal consistency as evidenced by the Cronbach's alpha (α) statistic all exceeding the threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In the case of Celebrity Endorsements (α = 0.874), Brand Image (α = 0.861), and Purchase Decisions (α = 0.846), all attained positive and plausible reliability scores which in turn indicates that the instruments used to measure these constructs were indeed reliable and valid. Moreover, the total Cronbach's alpha of 0.867 increases the degree of certainty that the survey instrument is reliable and, thus, appropriate for higher-order statistical procedures such as regression analysis and hypothesis testing. This also shows that the different scales of measurement that were derived from previous studies were reliable, even in the case of the millennial population of Pakistan.

4.   Results

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Celebrity Endorsements	250	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.74
Brand Image	250	1.00	5.00	3.92	0.71
Purchase Decisions	250	1.00	5.00	4.01	0.69

This section's focus and the sub-variables' variability are detailed in the descriptive statistics section. It shows all the constructs have quite high means and the Purchase Decisions mean topped all the constructs (M = 4.01, SD = 0.69) along with Brand Image (M = 3.92, SD = 0.71) and Celebrity Endorsements (M = 3.87, SD = 0.74) which closely followed. This means the respondents had positive perceptions concerning both celebrity endorsements and brand images, which had a positive impact on their purchase decisions. The standard deviations across variables (0.69 to 74) also ilustrate the respondents' perceptions were moderate variability means the responses were quite aligned. Even tho the respondents were a sample, the minimal and maximum values also indicates the column utilized all the 5 Likert scale point were utilized by respondents, indicating opinion variability. Finally, the descriptive statistics without a doubt showed positive perceptions concerning celebrity endorsements and brand image have been reported by Pakistani millennials. This means the expectation concerning the factors that influence Pakistan millennials purchase behavior have been met.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Celebrity Endorsements	1.000		
2. Brand Image	0.532**	1.000	

3. Purchase Decisions	0.487**	0.569**	1.000

Note: p < 0.01 (2-tailed).

The results of the correlation analysis indicate that all the study variables have statistically significant positive relationships. Celebrity Endorsements had positive relations with both Brand Image (r = 0.532, p < 0.01) and Purchase Decisions (r = 0.487, p < 0.01), which means improving consumers' attitudes towards celebrity endorsements leads to better attitudes towards the brand and a higher likelihood of purchase. Also, Brand Image had positive correlation with Purchase Decisions (r = 0.569, p < 0.01) which means a positive brand image is likely to increase the purchasing propensity of consumers. All correlation coefficients were lower than 0.80 which is an indicator of the absense of multicollinearity and that the variables are separate constructs (Hair et al., 2019). This data offers initial evidence of the proposed relationships, suggesting that in the case of Pakistan, celebrity endorsements and brand image are key influencers of millennials' purchase decisions.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	β (Beta)	t-value	Sig. (p)	R²	Result
H1	Celebrity Endorsements	Purchase Decisions	0.312	5.421	0.000	0.237	Supported
H2	Brand Image	Purchase Decisions	0.418	7.128	0.000	0.324	Supported

The regression analysis results provide strong empirical support for both proposed hypotheses. Celebrity endorsements in question for H1 were shown having a significant positive effect on purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.312$, t = 5.421, p < 0.001) which shows that positively viewed celebrity endorsements significantly increase propensity for millennials to purchase endorsed products. In considering R^2 value of 0.237, it is reasonable to assume that celebrity endorsements account for at least 24% of variance in purchase decisions, which illustrates their value in consumer decision making.

H2 indicates that the brand image had an even stronger effect on the purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.418$, t = 7.128, p < 0.001) which shows how critical the brand image is for buying decisions of the millennials. In this particular instance, $R^2 = 0.324$, brand image alone accounts for 32% of the variance in purchase decisions, signaling much stronger influence than the celebrity endorsement. This suggests that although both factors are important in determining the decision of purchases, brand image carried much more weight in the case of Pakistani millennials. In short, the regression results validate the hypotheses and highlight the role of celebrity endorsement and brand image as crucial in determining consumer purchasing behavior in Pakistan.

5.   Discussion

The findings of this research examine the role of celebrity endorsements and the perceptions of a brand as they relate to the buying behavior of millennials in Pakistan. Having confirmed the hypotheses, it is clear that these variables have a significant impact on this cohort's consuming behavior.

Results obtained have also reaffirmed Hypothesis 1 which analyzed the correlation of celebrity endorsement and the purchasing decision of millennials which was positively correlated. This thesis correlates with McCracken (1989), who, through the Meaning Transfer Model, offered an explanation of the tremendous value of endorsements made by prominent figures. This is, because through their fame and fortune, they are capable of altering the perception of consumers and swaying their opinion. Also, Spry and his colleagues in 2011 suggested that celebrity endorsements have a positive impact, the added fane value increases the brand assessment and the likelihood of purchasing it. In case of the research of Djafarova and Trofimenko 2019, it was pointed that millennials are greatly obsessed with celebrities and social media due to the idolized nature of the profession. Within Pakistan, this was also pointed out in

the research of Ahmed and Ashfaq 2013, where even local people buy and use the products of celebrities because they are considered as their role models.

This coincides with Erdogan's 1999 study which also highlights the ability to advocate for the Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness Theories, thus explaining why individuals purchase endorsed products. Hence, having the belief that celebrity endorsements are a monetizable approach to target advertisers for millennials in Pakistan is to a reasonable degree, accurate, mentioned in the text the influence is less strong relative to the brand image.

Hypothesis 2 stated that brand image has an influence on purchase decisions, and the resulting regression analysis showed this influence stronger than that of celebrity endorsements. This indicates the importance of brand image for consumers and the support the theory has brand image theory (Keller, 2013). This theory states that positive perceptions and associated elements regarding a brand encourage consumer patronage and loyalty. The results showed millennial consumers' brand consciousness and tendency to use brands for self and social identity as reported in cross country work done by Shahid et al. (2022) and Smith (2021). Moreover, as pointed out by Nguyen et al. (2019), strong brand image diminishes post purchase dissonance, and enhances trust in the brand, which ultimately increases purchase intention. In the Pakistani context, Saeed et al. (2020), and Awan et al. (2021) reported brand image and reputation to be the most important among young consumers in the fashion and technology industries where brand equity is scarce. This observation is also in line with the sociocultural observation that Pakistani brand consumers tend to view brands as lifestyle elements and therefore brand image is thought to be a more enduring and influential reason for purchasing than the force of celebrity endorsement which is more ephemeral.

All in all, the research corroborates that the image of a brand not only enhances the impact of celebrity endorsements, but also is paramount in influencing consumer behavior.

In summary, these insights augment the existing literature on the topic by reinforcing the notion that although celebrities on endorsements and brand image considerably impact the consumers, the brand image tends to have a greater impact in shaping the purchasing behavior of millennials in Pakistan. This supports the claim that endorsements serve as a stimuli to capture the first level of attention, however, the enduring purchasing behavior is primarily shaped by the brand image that is salient in the mind of the consumer.

6.   Implications of the Study

There are several important theoretical and practical implications of this study. First, from a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the consumer behavior literature on celebrity endorsement and brand image, which influences purchase decision on millennials, particularly in Pakistan, where research on these is just beginning to develop. It extends the Meaning Transfer Model and Brand Image Theory by showing that celebrity endorsements can capture attention and stimulate purchase intentions, but only brand image completely account for long-term consumer loyalty and decision-making. It has practical implications in the sense that it has provided marketers and brand managers with a framework. Companies should assess which endorsement is more likely to have stronger impact and attributable to in terms of endorsement and credibility, attractiveness, and shared brand values. A greater effort should be made to formulate a positive image which is enduring, consistent, and anchored on ethical conduct, quality communications, and good products. Therefore, in the fashion, cosmetics and technology sectors where millennial consumers are the dominant demographic, strategies focusing on brand equity are far more effective than reliance on celebrity endorsement.

Moreover, the research shows that the combination of the strongest type of celebrity marketing and the most intensive brand equity-building activities is one of the most effective ways of reaching millennial consumers in the developing Pakistani market.

7.   Limitations and Future Research Directions

The research highlights certain contributions, some of which are quite novel, but also suffers from some limitations. One of the issues which arise from the very nature of the sampled population is that of the respondents' cultural backgrounds. Bandura asserted the decisive influence of one's cultural background, along with other equally decisive

variables, on the construction of one's behavior and social patterns. It would also be overstretching to assume that the results would hold across markets. Second, the self-administered surveys carry social endeavor and response bias which, as quite self-evident, compromises the constancy and precision of the outcome. Third, the scope of the research was restricted to- and solely focused on the phenomenon of celebrity endorsements along with the image of the brand concerned. Other other variables which influence purchase decisions, such as the significance of peer marketing, price sensitivity, and the peers' digital marketing prowess, are also fundamentally very important but were ignored. The theory would predict that more range-bound and focused variables would discover the purpose of more external validity when testing the other variables along other statistics. More specific causal inferences, in contrast, would be gleaned from cross-sectional research or marketing practices that integrate the strategies of the buyer's reaction that were studied. More configurative patterns of results can be gleaned from other developing and emergent economies when analyzing endorsements alongside and brand perceptions with cross-country inquiries. It is in endeavors like these that the marginal shifts in understanding different contexts yield greater results.

8. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the impact of celebrity endorsements along with brand image on purchase choices of millennials in the Pakistani context acheiving. Considering both brand image and endorsements influence the consumers behavior bafflingly, the study focus endorsements were pale in comparison to the influence of the brand image on purchase decisions. It was understood that while celebrity endorsements are successful in capturing the attention of target consumers and shaping the initial impressions, the long standing advocacy of the brand image are what foster the purchasing behavior of millennials. This study finds integration between the results with the existing theories and prior research and thus, enhances understanding of consumer behavior in emerging markets while concurrently emphasizing the strengthening role of brand equity in consumer behavior of the developed markets. This study concludes that companies with a millennial target market are better off pursuing a dual strategy that combines celebrity endorsements with robust advocacy of brand image to influence purchasing behavior in the short and long term.

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