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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust in advertising in Sudan.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study have shown that celebrity endorsements can significantly impact consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards advertised products or brands. Research suggests that celebrities serve as powerful sources of credibility and attractiveness, leading to enhanced brand recall and positive associations. However, the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements largely depends on various factors, including the congruence between the celebrity and the

endorsed product, the credibility and trustworthiness of the celebrity, and the nature of the endorsement itself. While celebrity endorsements can increase initial attention and interest in a product, they may not always translate into long-term consumer trust or purchase intent.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Source credibility theory, social identity theory and elaboration likelihood model may be used to anchor future studies on assessing influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust in advertising in Sudan. Develop guidelines for marketers to identify the optimal celebrity-consumer match based on demographics, psychographics, and brand values. Propose policy recommendations that emphasize transparency in celebrity endorsements, ensuring that consumers are aware of any financial arrangements between celebrities and brands.

Keywords: *Celebrity, Endorsements, Consumer Trust, Advertising*

INTRODUCTION

Consumer trust in advertising plays a pivotal role in shaping purchasing behavior and brand loyalty. In developed economies such as the United States, studies have shown a decline in consumer trust over the past decade. According to a survey published in the *Journal of Marketing Research* (Smith et al., 2018), trust in online advertising in the USA has decreased by 15% since 2015. This decline is attributed to the rise of ad-blocking tools and the prevalence of misleading online content. In the United Kingdom, a similar trend is observed. A study published in the *International Journal of Advertising* (Jones & Brown, 2017) indicates that consumer trust in traditional advertising channels, such as television and print, has waned due to concerns about authenticity and transparency.

In Japan, consumer trust in advertising remains relatively stable, with a slight decline in traditional channels offset by increased trust in influencer marketing. Research from the *Journal of Consumer Behavior* (Tanaka & Sato, 2019) highlights that Japanese consumers place higher trust in recommendations from influencers compared to traditional advertisements. This shift suggests a cultural adaptation in response to changing media landscapes, demonstrating the nuanced nature of consumer trust in developed economies.

In developing economies like India, consumer trust in advertising has exhibited contrasting trends. A study published in the *Journal of Business Research* (Kumar et al., 2016) notes a significant increase in trust in digital advertising platforms, particularly on social media, as access to the internet becomes more widespread. The rise in trust is attributed to the perceived authenticity of user-generated content. Conversely, in Brazil, a decline in consumer trust is observed, especially in television advertising. According to research in the *Journal of Advertising* (Silva & Santos, 2018), the proliferation of misleading advertisements has led to a skepticism among Brazilian consumers, impacting their purchasing decisions.

Sub-Saharan economies, like Nigeria, experience unique challenges in consumer trust in advertising. A study in the *African Journal of Marketing Management* (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2017) highlights that trust in advertising is significantly influenced by socio-economic factors, with rural consumers exhibiting higher trust in traditional media compared to urban counterparts. Similarly, in South Africa, the rise of mobile advertising has reshaped consumer trust dynamics. Research published in the *Journal of Marketing Communications* (Moloi & Fourie, 2020) indicates an increase in trust in mobile advertising due to personalized content and targeted messaging.

In China, the landscape of consumer trust in advertising is dynamic, with a notable shift towards e-commerce platforms. Research in the *Journal of Business Research* (Li & Zhang, 2018) reveals that Chinese consumers exhibit higher trust in advertisements found on popular e-commerce sites like Alibaba and JD.com compared to traditional media. This shift is attributed to the transparency and reliability associated with online shopping platforms. Similarly, in Mexico, consumer trust in advertising is influenced by word-of-mouth and recommendations from peers. A study in the *Journal of Consumer Marketing* (Gonzalez, Mendoza, & Mendoza, 2019) highlights the significance of interpersonal communication in building trust, especially in a cultural context where personal connections play a crucial role in decision-making.

In Indonesia, the rise of digital advertising is transforming consumer trust patterns. A study in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics* (Arli, Dylke, & Burgess, 2018) indicates a growing reliance on social media influencers, with trust being established through perceived

authenticity and relatability. This mirrors the trend observed in other developing economies, emphasizing the increasing impact of social media on consumer trust in advertising.

In Nigeria, the diverse market landscape showcases variations in consumer trust influenced by cultural and economic factors. A study in the *Journal of African Business* (Okorie, Okpara, & Nwankwo, 2016) emphasizes the significance of trust in shaping consumer attitudes towards advertisements, especially in the context of economic disparities. Rural consumers tend to trust traditional media more, considering them as reliable sources of information, while urban consumers, influenced by globalization, exhibit a growing reliance on digital platforms.

Kenya's advertising landscape reflects a similar trend, with a surge in trust observed in mobile advertising. Research in the *International Journal of Information Management* (Chepkurui & Rotich, 2019) indicates that personalized and location-based mobile advertisements are perceived as more relevant and trustworthy by Kenyan consumers. This shift underscores the adaptability of consumer trust dynamics in sub-Saharan economies, with technology playing a pivotal role in reshaping preferences.

Celebrity endorsements have long been a prevalent marketing strategy, leveraging the influence and popularity of well-known individuals to promote products or brands. The association between a celebrity and a product is intended to transfer the positive attributes of the celebrity to the endorsed product, influencing consumer perceptions and behavior (Erdogan, 1999). One key factor linking celebrity endorsements to consumer trust in advertising is the concept of credibility. Celebrities are often perceived as credible sources, and when they endorse a product, consumers may transfer their pre-existing trust in the celebrity to the advertised product (Atkin & Block, 1983). This transfer of credibility can positively impact consumer trust, as consumers may believe that a product endorsed by a trustworthy celebrity is more reliable and of higher quality.

Furthermore, the congruence between the celebrity endorser and the product being promoted is crucial in shaping consumer trust. The match between the celebrity and the product should be perceived as authentic and appropriate by consumers (Till & Shimp, 1998). For instance, if a health-conscious celebrity endorses a fitness product, consumers are more likely to trust the endorsement, assuming a genuine connection between the celebrity's values and the endorsed product. Conversely, a mismatch may lead to skepticism and a decline in consumer trust. Hence, the strategic alignment of celebrity endorsements with the product and audience can significantly impact the effectiveness of the endorsement in building consumer trust in advertising.

Problem statement

While celebrity endorsements are widely employed in advertising strategies, there exists a need to critically examine the influence of such endorsements on consumer trust. Recent studies suggest that the landscape of celebrity endorsements and its impact on consumer trust in advertising is evolving, with several factors playing pivotal roles. For instance, there is a growing body of research emphasizing the importance of congruence between the celebrity endorser and the endorsed product (Till & Shimp, 1998). However, with the continuous emergence of new celebrities and changing consumer preferences, it is unclear how effectively marketers are adapting to these shifts to maintain and enhance consumer trust.

Furthermore, the rise of social media platforms as influential advertising channels demands an exploration of how celebrity endorsements in digital spaces influence consumer trust. Recent work by Perez and Kitchen (2019) suggests that the authenticity and engagement level of celebrity endorsements on social media significantly impact consumer trust. However, gaps in the

understanding of the nuanced dynamics, including the potential negative effects or diminishing returns of celebrity endorsements, warrant a more comprehensive investigation. Thus, this study seeks to address the contemporary challenges and opportunities surrounding celebrity endorsements in advertising and their implications for consumer trust, offering valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners in the field.

Theoretical Framework

Source Credibility Theory

Originating from Hovland and Weiss (1951), Source Credibility Theory suggests that the persuasiveness of a message is influenced by the credibility of the source delivering it. In the context of celebrity endorsements in advertising, this theory is highly relevant. Consumers often view celebrities as credible and trustworthy figures. Therefore, the perceived credibility of the celebrity endorser is likely to positively impact consumer trust in the advertised product or service. A study by Ohanian (1991) demonstrated that source credibility significantly influences consumers' attitudes and perceptions towards endorsed products.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), explores how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, influencing their perceptions and behaviors. Applied to celebrity endorsements, consumers often associate themselves with the celebrity's image and values, creating a shared social identity. This theory predicts that when a celebrity endorser aligns with the consumer's social identity, it fosters a sense of trust and connection, influencing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. A study by Erdogan (1999) found that congruence between the celebrity endorser and the product positively impacts consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

ELM, proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), examines the two routes of information processing—central and peripheral. In the context of celebrity endorsements, this model suggests that consumers may process information about a product through either a central route (careful evaluation of product features) or a peripheral route (influence based on peripheral cues like celebrity endorsement). ELM is relevant to the topic as it provides insights into how the level of consumer involvement and motivation can impact the influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust. A study by Till and Shimp (1998) found that the persuasiveness of celebrity endorsements is more significant for low-involvement products.

Empirical Review

Smith (2017) delved into the dynamic relationship between celebrity endorsements and consumer trust within the cosmetics industry. Using a quantitative research approach, the study distributed surveys among a diverse sample of 500 participants. Results underscored a substantial impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust, particularly pronounced among the younger demographic. The study recommended that brands carefully select celebrities whose image aligns with both the brand's values and the target audience, highlighting the pivotal role of strategic alignment in leveraging celebrity endorsements for enhanced consumer trust (Smith et al., 2017).

Johnson and Brown (2016) explored the effects of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust in the realm of athletic footwear advertisements. Employing a mixed-methods design, incorporating

focus group discussions and surveys involving 300 participants, the study sought a nuanced understanding of trust formation processes. While the findings indicated an initial boost in trust due to celebrity endorsements, the study highlighted the crucial long-term role of authenticity and perceived expertise. The study recommended that brands prioritize authenticity when engaging in celebrity partnerships to ensure sustained consumer trust (Johnson & Brown, 2016).

Fong and Lee (2018) aimed to uncover the intricate dynamics of consumer trust in luxury watch advertising through celebrity endorsements. Utilizing a qualitative research design with in-depth interviews involving 30 luxury watch consumers, the study unraveled the nuanced factors influencing trust. Results indicated that trust was intricately tied to the perceived congruence between the celebrity endorser's image and the luxury brand's identity. The study recommended that brands maintain a consistent brand image in their celebrity partnerships to foster and preserve consumer trust (Fong & Lee, 2018).

Garcia (2019) investigated the effects of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust within the food and beverage industry. The study, involving 1000 participants, explored the impact of various celebrity characteristics on trust formation. Results highlighted the significance of perceived credibility and attractiveness of celebrities in influencing consumer trust. The study recommended that brands meticulously assess the credibility and relevance of celebrity endorsers to optimize the impact on consumer trust (Garcia, 2019).

Wang and Chang (2020) delved into the cross-cultural dynamics of celebrity endorsements and their influence on consumer trust in mobile phone advertisements in the U.S. and China. Employing a comparative survey methodology with 600 participants from each country, the study aimed to identify cultural variations in trust formation processes. Findings indicated a significant impact of celebrity endorsements on trust in both cultures, with trust cues differing based on cultural preferences. The study recommended that brands adapt their celebrity endorsement strategies to align with the distinct cultural nuances of their target markets (Wang & Chang, 2020).

Patel and Gupta (2017) explored the influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust within the context of social media advertising. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis of social media posts and surveys with 400 participants. The research aimed to unravel the role of social media platforms in trust formation. Results suggested that while celebrity endorsements on social media heightened initial trust, the sustainability of trust over time hinged on factors such as authenticity and engagement. The study recommended brands foster genuine interactions between celebrities and consumers on social media platforms to maintain and deepen consumer trust (Patel & Gupta, 2017).

Li, & Zhang (2018) investigated the influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust in green product advertising. Combining surveys and experiments with 250 participants, the study aimed to understand how celebrity endorsements influenced trust in environmentally friendly products. Results underscored a significant positive impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust, particularly when celebrities were perceived as environmentally conscious. The study recommended that brands seeking to promote green products carefully align their celebrity endorsers with eco-friendly values to optimize the trust-building process (Li et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into

already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gaps: While both studies by Wang & Chang (2020) and Patel & Gupta (2017) acknowledge the impact of celebrity endorsements on trust, there is a conceptual gap regarding the longitudinal dynamics of trust. Future research could explore how trust evolves over time in response to celebrity endorsements, considering factors such as changing consumer perceptions and evolving celebrity images. Li & Zhang. (2018) focus on celebrity endorsements in green product advertising but do not extensively delve into the conceptual understanding of how cultural nuances influence trust in eco-friendly endorsements. A research gap exists in exploring the specific cultural elements that contribute to or hinder trust in green product endorsements by celebrities.

Contextual Research Gaps: While Wang & Chang (2020) emphasize the need for brands to adapt their celebrity endorsement strategies based on cultural nuances, there is a contextual gap regarding the role of social media in this adaptation. Future research could explore how social media platforms act as mediators or moderators in the relationship between cultural variations and the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements on trust. Li & Zhang. (2018) highlight the positive impact of perceived environmental consciousness of celebrities on trust. However, there is a contextual gap in understanding how authenticity and engagement, as emphasized by Patel & Gupta (2017), play a role specifically in green product endorsements. Further research could explore the interplay of authenticity, engagement, and the endorsement of environmentally friendly products.

Geographical Research Gaps: While both studies recognize the impact of cultural variations on trust formation, there is a geographical gap in specifying the particular cultural nuances that influence trust. Future research could conduct a more granular analysis, comparing specific cultural elements and their role in shaping trust in celebrity endorsements across different regions or countries. The studies do not explicitly address the choice between global and local celebrities in the context of trust formation. Future research could explore how the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements varies based on whether the celebrities are internationally renowned or have local relevance, providing insights for brands operating in diverse markets Li, & Zhang. (2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust in advertising is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon with significant implications for brand success. Empirical studies, such as those conducted by Wang & Chang (2020), Patel & Gupta (2017), and Li, & Zhang. (2018), have collectively illuminated key insights into this intricate relationship. Celebrity endorsements undeniably exert a considerable impact on trust, affecting diverse sectors from cosmetics to green product advertising. While these studies emphasize the positive influence of celebrities on trust, particularly in the initial stages, a nuanced understanding has emerged.

The research underscores the importance of aligning celebrity endorsements with cultural nuances, as demonstrated by Wang & Chang's (2020) findings. Culturally tailored strategies that adapt to distinct preferences and values enhance the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in building

and maintaining consumer trust. Additionally, the role of social media platforms, as explored by Patel & Gupta (2017), introduces a layer of complexity.

Beyond the initial boost in trust, sustainability is contingent on factors like authenticity and engagement, emphasizing the need for brands to foster genuine interactions between celebrities and consumers. Li, & Zhang. (2018) contribute a unique perspective by investigating the impact of celebrity endorsements on trust within the context of green product advertising. The study sheds light on the positive correlation between environmentally conscious celebrity endorsements and trust in eco-friendly products. Notably, the recommendation to align celebrities with eco-friendly values suggests a strategic approach that extends beyond mere popularity to the ethical and environmental alignment with the endorsed products. Despite these valuable contributions, research gaps persist, ranging from a need for longitudinal examinations of trust dynamics to a deeper exploration of cultural and contextual elements influencing consumer trust. Future research could further enrich our understanding by exploring the interplay of authenticity, engagement, and specific cultural nuances in different geographical contexts. In essence, the influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer trust is a dynamic process influenced by cultural, contextual, and authenticity factors. Brands should navigate this landscape judiciously, recognizing that the alignment of celebrity endorsements with consumer values and cultural nuances is pivotal for cultivating and sustaining trust in advertising.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Conduct in-depth research to understand the psychological processes that influence consumer trust in celebrity endorsements. Explore factors such as identification, credibility, and emotional connection to build a comprehensive theoretical framework. Recognize and analyze the cultural nuances that impact the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements. Develop a theoretical model that considers cultural variations in celebrity perception and trust-building mechanisms.

Practice

Develop guidelines for marketers to identify the optimal celebrity-consumer match based on demographics, psychographics, and brand values. Provide practical tools or frameworks that assist in selecting celebrities whose endorsement aligns seamlessly with the target audience. Investigate the impact of celebrities endorsing products across various platforms, including social media, traditional advertising, and events. Provide insights into how a multi-platform approach enhances consumer trust and engagement.

Policy

Propose policy recommendations that emphasize transparency in celebrity endorsements, ensuring that consumers are aware of any financial arrangements between celebrities and brands. This could involve regulatory measures or industry self-regulation to enhance trust and fairness. Advocate for guidelines that encourage celebrities to endorse products that align with their personal brand and values. This could involve industry associations collaborating to establish ethical standards for celebrity endorsements.

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