

The Relationship between Celebrity Endorsement and Masstige Brand Value: The Moderating Effect of Brand Credibility

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Abstract

Drawing on signaling theory, this research is conducted to fill a gap in knowledge by examining the effects of celebrity endorsement on masstige brand value and the role of brand credibility as a moderator. The research has two objectives: (i) to explore the effects of celebrity endorsement on masstige brand value; and (ii) to explore the moderating effect of brand credibility in the relationship between celebrity endorsement and masstige brand value. A survey of 494 respondents was conducted in Pakistan. The results show that celebrity endorsement has a positive effect on masstige brand value and that this effect is moderated by brand credibility. The significant implications for managers and researchers are highlighted.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement, Masstige brand value, Brand Credibility

1 Introduction

Masstige's strategy helps traditional luxury businesses penetrate deeper and make luxury reachable to the masses. Marketers and academicians agree upon the rise of masstige (prestige for the masses) branding strategies in theory and with a wide range of practical applications worldwide (Gupta et al., 2023). Owing to the expected increase in the luxury goods market at a CAGR of 3% to 4% in the coming 5 years (Roberts et al., 2020) and a rise in the income of the middle-class population (Alagarsamy et al., 2024), solid ground is set for masstige brands to expand. Witnessing the changing demographics, there has been a notable increase in luxury-consuming millennials and youngsters that is >50% by 2024 (Thomsen et al., 2020), a real-time opportunity for businesses to increase brand awareness and brand equity. Many high-end luxury fashion brands, such as Louis

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Vuitton, Burberry, Michael Kors, and Coach, etc., have taken the initiative and followed the masstige strategy by offering premium products at prices accessible to middle-income consumers. For example, LV has successfully balanced its prestige image along with its high-end luxury image by using celebrity endorsement and sports sponsorship following the masstige marketing approach (Haig, [2005](#); Paul, [2015](#))

Our review of existing studies indicated gaps in promotional strategies for masstige brands and how brands can position themselves as masstige in customers' minds. There has been a consensus among scholars that masstige is a nascent concept and needs empirical verifications in measuring masstige brand value and what contributes towards attaining masstige brand value (Kumar et al., [2021](#)). Despite the importance of masstige brand value, little attention has been given to the attainment of masstige brand value by adopting promotional strategies such as celebrity endorsement. Many high-end masstige brands already use celebrity endorsement, but empirical verification is needed to put it in the broad spectrum of masstige brand management.

An array of research has witnessed that masstige brand value is significantly affected by perceived quality and product attributes (Chatterjee et al., [2023](#)), brand image and price (Singh, [2023](#)), social influence (Shahid et al., [2024](#)), and product design and innovation (Gilal et al., [2022](#)). However, the role of celebrity endorsement towards masstige brand value needs investigation. Marketers and academicians agree upon the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement as an advertising strategy by brands all around the globe (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, [2020](#)).

Brand credibility may also interfere with masstige brand value (Paul, [2019](#)). It has been established that perceived credibility influences brand quality (Molinillo et al., [2022](#)). Brand credibility has been investigated in the areas of airline, tourism, and smart retailing (Guo & Luo, [2023](#)). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first research to explore the moderating effect of brand credibility in the context of masstige brands. An investigation of brand credibility can provide extra evidence concerning how this particular brand characteristic can moderate the effects of celebrity endorsement on masstige brand value.

The current research explores the moderating impact of brand credibility and the direct influence of celebrity endorsement on masstige brand value.

Based on the identified theoretical gaps and practical problems, we designed the following research objectives:

- To identify the effects of celebrity endorsement on masstige brand value
- To investigate the role of brand credibility as a moderator

The current research incorporated celebrity endorsement, brand credibility, and masstige brand value into the research model.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Masstige

Masstige blends mass and prestige words (Kumar & Paul, [2018](#)). This portmanteau was devised by Silverstein and Fiske, ([2003](#)) in a Harvard Business Review article. Masstige marketing is defined as “a marketing strategy used to develop and enhance the prestigious status of brands while keeping the brand affordable for middle-income mass consumers by inculcating in product and promotion strategies and charging comparatively high prices” (Kumar et al., [2019](#)).

The ultimate success of businesses mostly relies upon attaining the most market share (Das et al., [2021](#); Shukla et al., [2022](#)). With the advent of masstige marketing, it was established that luxury brands can also grow by building masstige brand value (Paul, [2015](#)). Globally, luxury brands have already embraced the masstige strategy to remain exclusive and enhance market share. Adopting a masstige marketing strategy is a win-win for brands, as a brand can grow by enhancing market share and, at the same time, maintaining its premium image. Therefore, many high-end brands

have undergone a downward extension, so middle-income consumers could also consume their premium but attainable market offerings. For example, Ralph Lauren has gone as low as \$9 in prices for their premium Polo t-shirts, which are also affordable for the middle-income consumer group. Armani Exchange is also the downward extension of high-end luxury brand Giorgio Armani (Gupta et al., [2023](#)). The companies that follow the masstige strategy charge comparatively higher prices and focus more on product, place, and promotion (Silverstein & Fiske, [2003](#)). Paul ([2019](#)) established that promotional strategies are vital for successfully implementing masstige marketing strategies such as celebrity endorsement.

2.2 The Signalling Theory

This study is grounded on the tenets of signaling theory. This theory explains the use of various signals brands give to clarify their perceived positions in customers' minds (Erdem & Swait, [2004](#); Leischnig et al., [2012](#)). The firms use various strategies to reduce information asymmetry such as endorsing a celebrity that signals credibility. A credible source reduces asymmetric information and amplifies the credibility of other connected sources (Erdem & Swait, [2004](#)). The purpose of using signaling theory is to apply celebrity credibility and brand credibility as a signal and then examine its effect on the masstige of a brand i.e., to check the effect of celebrity endorsement on the masstige of a brand and to check whether the presence/absence of brand credibility strengthens/weakens the influence of celebrity endorsement on masstige.

2.3 Celebrity Endorsement and Masstige

Celebrity endorsement is a marketing strategy where a brand collaborates with a well-known public figure, typically a celebrity from the entertainment industry, sports, or other influential domains, to promote its products or services (Halder et al., [2021](#)). According to the signaling theory, the celebrity endorser gives positive signals about the brand that hired it (Pecot et al., [2018](#)). For example, Sajal Aly is a famous Pakistani actress who has won many national and international awards and is well-known for her beauty and fashion choices. If she is linked to a fashion brand, such as in a brand advertisement, it is possible to a great extent that her positive effects are transferred to the connected brand and enhance the brand's value. Generally, it can be recommended that a well-established celebrity endorser enhances the value of a brand, i.e., masstige brand value in the present research. Many previous pieces of research have supported the positive influence of celebrity endorsement on masstige brands. Recently, Gilal et al. ([2023](#)) investigated the positive association between attractive celebrity endorsers and brand passion for masstige brands. In a recent study, celebrity endorsement is also found to enhance the masstige brand value of fashion brands (Jabbar et al., [2023](#)). As there is limited research on the influence of celebrity endorsement on masstige brand value, the present study aims to investigate the association between celebrity endorsement and the masstige brand value of a brand. Therefore, we present the following hypothesis:

H1: *Celebrity endorsement is positively associated with masstige brand value.*

2.4 Moderation Effect of Brand Credibility

Brand credibility is the major cause behind a strong association between consumers and brands (Masrun et al., [2023](#)). According to Erdem and Swait ([2004](#)), brand credibility comprehends the consumer's belief in the trustworthiness and expertise of the brand. If a brand fails to deliver what it promises, the brand equity, which is masstige in the present scenario, will wear down. Brand Credibility refers to the degree to which consumers perceive the brand as credible in three areas: perceived expertise (competency, innovation, and market share of a brand), trustworthiness (dependency of a customer on a brand), and likability (how exciting and enjoyable a brand is). In easy words, a brand is credible when consumers think that it is a good brand that takes care of its customers.

According to Rao (2012), brand credibility is a determinant of brand equity, which is an alternative to masstige in the present scenario. Previous research has also established that brand prestige (a major component of masstige) and brand credibility work together (Baek et al., 2010) to achieve positive marketing outcomes.

The role of brand credibility in the association between celebrity endorsement and masstige can also be explained using brand signaling theory. Brand signaling theory validates that credibility is vital for creating brand equity (Spry et al., 2011). Singh & Banerjee, (2021) suggested that combining celebrity endorsement and brand credibility results in stronger brand equity. For instance, if a credible celebrity endorses a masstige fashion brand but the credibility of the brand is doubtful, the impact of the advertising strategy of using the celebrity endorsement could be less (Spry et al., 2011). However, if the same credible celebrity endorses a brand that is known as a highly credible brand among customers, the influence of the celebrity endorsement would amplify. For that reason, we have confidence that the strength of the relationship between celebrity endorsement and masstige brand value will be more in the presence of brand credibility than in the absence of brand credibility. Depending on the above discussions, we suggest the following hypothesis.

H2: *Brand credibility moderates the positive association of celebrity endorsement with the masstige brand value such that the relation is stronger at higher levels of brand credibility.*

The research framework is given in Figure 1.

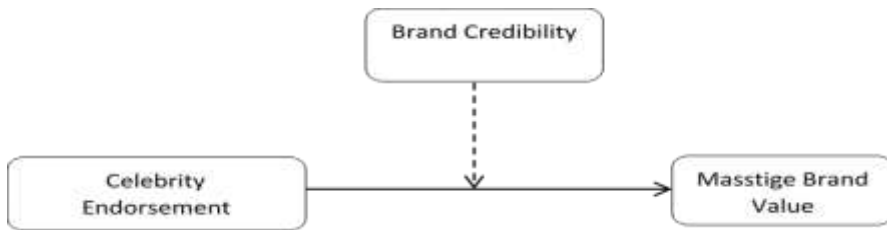


Figure 1: Research Framework

3 Methodology

The masstige brand value of a brand varies across countries depending on cultural norms and values (Das, Saha, Jebarajakirthy, et al., 2022); economic factors such as purchasing power and income level (Das, Saha, & Balaji, 2022); market maturity (Kassie & Bang, 2022); and other social and demographic factors (Bae & Jo, 2024). The present research work is done in Pakistan because it is an emerging Asian economy with a population of 241 million, according to the Population and Housing Census, 2023. According to Ajay Kumar et al. (2019), studying masstige brand value in emerging markets offers valuable insights into consumer behavior, market dynamics, and cultural influences, providing companies with the knowledge they need to succeed in these fast-growing and dynamic markets. The fashion industry of Pakistan continues to evolve as Pakistan is home to a talented pool of fashion designers who have gained domestic and international recognition. Designers such as Hassan Sheheryar Yasin (HSY), Sana Safinaz, Deepak Perwani, and Maria B. are renowned for their innovative designs and contributions to the fashion industry.

Celebrity endorsement is a prevalent and effective marketing strategy in the Pakistani fashion industry, helping brands establish credibility and stay competitive. The present research uses a self-administered survey in which a structured questionnaire format is used. It was ensured that the participants were the actual users of the masstige fashion brands. This was done by reaching out to the customers at the point of sale in the various shopping malls in Pakistan's main cities (Karachi, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and Lahore). The customers who made the purchase were

invited to fill out the questionnaire. The research gathered 625 sample responses, of which 494 were complete and used to conduct the analysis. We used smart PLS to conduct factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and moderation analysis.

3.1 Measurements

A structured questionnaire having 32 items was designed to gather customer data.

Celebrity endorsement was measured by using a scale given by Ohanian (1990). This scale comprises three dimensions each having five items: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. Brand credibility seven-item scale is adopted from Erdem and Swait (1998). Masstige brand value is operationalized by the ten-item scale propounded by Paul (2015).

4 Data Analysis and Results

PLS-SEM is opted for its ingrained utility being a two-step process, as suggested by (Sarstedt et al., 2014). Initially, it assesses the measurement model and examines the structural ones. The assessment of the measurement model is the initial stage analysis managed through PLS-SEM, which is also termed the outer model. The measurement model explains how accurately all the items load with that of their corresponding construct. Likewise, the given analysis reflects that the variable items are rightly measuring the construct that they are supposed to measure, ensuring the validity and reliability of the variable under consideration. Table 1 shows measurement results.

Table 1: Measurement model assessment

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Celebrity Endorsement	0.885	0.911	0.673
Masstige Brand Value	0.900	0.931	0.773
Brand Credibility	0.864	0.900	0.644

4.1 Structural Model (Direct Relationships)

After examining the measurement model, the structural one (i.e., the Inner model) is studied to assess the direct and indirect association between the constructs used by Hair et al. (2014). According to Hair et al.'s (2014) rule of thumb, if the—t-value for one-tailed relations is greater than 1.64, then the relationship is considered significant. Table 2 shows the direct hypothesis results.

Table 2: Direct Hypothesis Results

Direct Hypothesis Testing	Beta	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
CE → MBV	0.204	0.083	2.445	0.007	Supported
Moderating Role of Brand Credibility	0.462	0.071	6.533	0.000	Supported

5 Discussion

Celebrity endorsement is a powerful marketing strategy for enhancing the masstige brand value of fashion brands by leveraging celebrities' attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise to elevate popularity among consumers. The association with a well-known celebrity endorser enhances the brand's perceived prestige (Gilal et al., 2023). As suggested by Jabbar et al. (2023), this study provides evidence that the association of a brand with an appropriate celebrity endorser will help the masstige brand positioning leading to enhanced masstige brand value. As celebrities are well-known public figures, they may enhance a brand's visibility. This heightened exposure helps to position the brand as desirable and aspirational, contributing to its masstige appeal. Celebrity endorsements create aspirational appeal among consumers, motivating them to emulate the lifestyle and attributes of their favorite celebrities (Lloyd & Luk, 2010). Consumers may perceive owning a product endorsed by a celebrity as a way to align themselves with their idol's image and status, enhancing the masstige brand value of the product. Thus, the association with a well-known

personality sets the brand apart, making it more memorable and desirable to consumers seeking prestige and exclusivity.

Findings suggest that brand credibility moderates the relationship between celebrity endorsement and masstige brand value. A credible brand with a strong reputation adds legitimacy to the celebrity endorsement, reinforcing the perception of prestige associated with the endorsed product. Consumers are more likely to view the product as prestigious when it is endorsed by both a credible brand and a celebrity (Spry et al., 2011). When a credible brand collaborates with a celebrity endorser, it amplifies the effectiveness of the endorsement. Consumers perceive the endorsement as more authentic and trustworthy, leading to a stronger association between the celebrity and the brand's masstige brand value. Concluding the results, marketers are recommended to invest in celebrity endorsement advertising strategy and build strong brand credibility to position their brand as masstige.

5.1 Implications

The managerial implications of celebrity endorsement strategy for masstige brands include several considerations intended to enhance the effectiveness of the endorsement. Masstige brands should carefully select celebrities whose image, values, and appeal align with the brand's positioning and target audience. Managers should consider factors such as the celebrity's, credibility, attractiveness, and trustworthiness to ensure an effective endorsement strategy. A strong alignment between the celebrity and the brand enhances the authenticity and credibility of the endorsement, contributing to its effectiveness in enhancing masstige brand value. It is also suggested to establish a long-term partnership with the celebrity endorser to build familiarity and credibility with consumers over time. Consistent endorsement reinforces brand association and strengthens the masstige brand value of the brand. The managers should also build a credible brand by maintaining high standards of product quality, craftsmanship, and designs to uphold the brand's reputation for excellence. Consistently delivering superior products reinforces consumer trust and confidence in the brand's credibility as a provider of premium offerings. These strategies will ultimately strengthen the masstige position and enhance the masstige brand value of the brand in the minds of the customers.

5.2 Conclusion

This research work is aimed at understanding the role of celebrity endorsement in enhancing the masstige brand value of brands and how the presence of brand credibility strengthens this relationship. The results conclude that celebrity endorsement is an effective marketing strategy to position a brand as a masstige in the minds of customers. The results further suggest that a celebrity endorsement strategy would be more effective if the brand has established credibility. The presence of brand credibility will amplify the effects of celebrity endorsement on masstige brand value. The present results are also supported by some of the past research. For example: Jabbar et al. (2023) recently established the positive association of celebrity endorsement with masstige brand value. Spry et al. (2011), also provided evidence that celebrity endorsement and brand credibility are positively related to brand equity. Research on the role of celebrity endorsement and brand credibility in positioning a brand as masstige is non-existent as compared to the research on these constructs in mainstream marketing academic literature. Therefore, the present study is valuable in empirically verifying the role of celebrity endorsement and brand credibility towards masstige brand value.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The research work is not free from limitations. The present research has been carried out in four cities of Pakistan. The outcomes may differ if the same research is carried out in other countries. To enhance the generalizability, the responses from different countries must be analyzed. Future

research could also include other moderating variables such as fear of missing out, brand-endorser fit, and brand love. The same study could also be carried out by collecting data from other masstige products industry. For example, hospitality, airlines, consumer electronics etc.

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