

Exploring the Nexus of Celebrity Endorsement, Brand Love and Word-of-Mouth in the Telecommunication Sector of Pakistan

Ehsan Iftikhar¹ and Saman Attiq²

1. PhD Scholar, Air University Islamabad. Pakistan
2. Professor, NUST Business School, NUST University, Islamabad. Pakistan

This study investigates the dynamic interaction between celebrity endorsement, brand love and word of mouth within the competitive landscape of Pakistan's telecommunication sector. Despite a challenging economic environment in Pakistan, this sector has experienced unprecedented growth with a record-breaking revenue of Rs. 694 billion in 2021-22 and substantial investment of USD 2,073 million. This study involved a sample of 290 respondents and data was gathered using a survey questionnaire. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between celebrity endorsement and the development of brand love. Furthermore, the research establishes that brand love serves as a catalyst for word-of-mouth (WOM). This research offers a theoretical advancement by employing a tri-component attitude model in the domain of behavioral studies. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by extending the application of this model to a novel area, thereby enhancing our understanding of behavioral phenomena.

Keywords: Celebrity Endorsement, Brand Love, WOM, Tri-component Attitude Model

1. Introduction

In the fiercely competition landscape of the telecommunications sector in Pakistan overseen by PTA has witnessed significant expansion (Qayyum et al., 2013). The telecommunication industry's remarkable advancement has led to a historic revenue peak of Rs. 694 billion in the fiscal year 2021-22. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Annual Report for 2022, the sector garnered a total investment of US \$ 2,073 million. It made a substantial contribution to the national exchequer, amounting to Rs. 325.2 billion.

According to the recently released Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA, 2022) report, it emphasizes positive telecom statistics and the increasing utilization of telecom services throughout Pakistan, attributed to a forward-looking and supportive regulatory environment. This growth comes amid a challenging year characterized by escalating inflationary pressures and concerns about profitability.

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority report revealed that (PTA, 2022) Pakistan boasts a telecom subscriber base exceeding 197 million (inclusive of fixed and mobile users), achieving a tendency of 90%. Additionally, the number of biometrically verified SIMs/subscribers has risen to 194 million, while broadband subscriptions have reached 125 million, achieving a

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penetration rate of 56%. The annual mobile data usage has surged to 9,970 petabytes, translating to an average of 6.8 GB per subscriber per month, indicating a substantial annual growth of 31%.

Cellular companies in competition consistently prioritize the cultivation of favorable customer attitudes (Liu & Chou, 2015). Due to the limited points of differentiation in the cellular service sector, companies actively explore innovative methods to boost customer loyalty (Park & Kim, 2019; Qayyum et al., 2013). To achieve this objective companies, strive for consumer loyalty and word-of-mouth (WOM). The role of brand love has become a pivotal aspect of marketing strategies. The affection towards a brand love has been identified as a catalyst for numerous results, such as heightened brand preferences, favorable word-of-mouth, and brand allegiance (Alber et al., 2023). This sentiment possesses the ability to transfer consumers into passionate advocates who are prepared to support and champion their cherished brands in a highly competitive market.

Brand love characterized by a deep emotional connection and loyalty towards a brand, has been shown to influence consumers' attitudes and behavior (Veloutsou et al., 2022). Marketing scholars' content that prioritizing a loyal customer base characterized by brand love should be the foremost concern for a firm, as it serves as a pivotal indicator of the customer-firm relationship (Zhou et al., 2020; Junaid et al., 2019). In contrast to customer satisfaction, commitment, and trust, the academic exploration of brand love is still evolving (Javed & Khan, 2021), capturing the attention of both scholars and practitioners eager to delve deeper into its intricacies.

Simultaneously, Choi et al (2023) study postulates that celebrity endorsement also wields significant influence in shaping consumers' perceptions and impacting their decision to make a purchase. Extensive research has been conducted on the impact of celebrity endorsements, which are widely acknowledged as a prevalent global advertising strategy consuming a substantial portion of an organization's overall advertising budget (Ding et al., 2011). The data indicates that the highest-earning celebrities globally amassed a collective \$6.1 billion, even in the midst of the global pandemic (Shiva et al., 2022).

In Pakistani context now a days the leading sports men especially of Pakistan cricket team are appearing in the advertisement of different brands. PTCL Group (PTCL & Ufone), the leading telecommunication service provider in Pakistan, has enlisted the endorsement of renowned Pakistani cricket stars, Babar Azam, Haris Rauf, and Naseem Shah, to serve as brand ambassadors for the Group throughout its ICC Cricket World Cup 2023 promotional campaign.

Celebrities wield increased influence over individuals through social media channels, guiding them towards product purchase by fostering a positive word of mouth (Gong et al., 2019; Siqueira Jr et al., 2019). With the widespread adoption of social media channels among the general population electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a potent and influential tool for cultivating brand advocates (Abbas & Billah, 2022). Despite numerous studies on the telecommunication sector in Pakistan, the specific dimensions of branding, particularly on celebrity endorsement and brand love remain largely unexplored. This research aims to address this gap by delving into the branding aspects of the Pakistani telecommunication industry, specifically examining the influence of branding on word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. While previous literature establishes that brand love precedes word-of-mouth (WoM) intentions

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and repurchase intention (Batra et al., 2012). Consequently, this study seeks to investigate the role of celebrity endorsement and brand love as critical marketing tools in the television industry, aiming to elucidate their impact on fostering positive WOM communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Celebrity Endorsement

Consumers seek inspiration from celebrities to enhance their self-confidence, aspiring to attain a lifestyle akin to that of celebrities (Abbas & Billah, 2022). Consumers mirror the celebrities they idolize. The influence of celebrities extends beyond merely attracting public attention; they imbue the brand message with additional significance, elevating the advertisements' appeal to a broader audience (Masuda et al., 2022; Turnwald et al., 2022). Celebrities can be categorized into various groups depending on their achievements, including actors, television personalities, models, athletes, musicians and artists (Min et al., 2019). Kaur & Greg (2016) study postulates that the utilization of celebrities to endorse a brand is a widely employed marketing strategy, with celebrity endorsement becoming a ubiquitous aspect of the multibillion-dollar advertising industry. Gladson & Stella's (2015) study on Nigerian consumer and perceptions of celebrity endorsements revealed advertising as the primary and effective means for brand awareness. Findings showed that 23% of respondents aged 20-30, out of 34%, make daily purchase of branded products, emphasizing the substantial impact of celebrities in enhancing product attractiveness.

Abbas & Billah (2022) in their revealed that consumer gravitate towards glamorous celebrities who embody the trends, swiftly making an impact in media circles and influencing their communities. A captivating celebrity holds greater influence, impacting consumer attitudes towards both the brand and its product line (Peng 2022). Previous literature shed some light on the impact of celebrity attractiveness on consumer behavior, with empirical studies underscoring the pivotal role of source credibility, encompassing attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness, in crafting effective messages (Lee 2017; Masuda et al 2022).

The trustworthiness of a celebrity comprises attributes such as dignity, believability, affinity, and honesty (Yuan et al. 2022). To efficiently persuade consumers and foster a positive brand attitude, an educated celebrity can be instrumental (Abbas & Billah 2022). The research by Turnwald et al. (2022) highlights that a celebrity's apparent expertise is conveyed through their qualifications, contributing to the overall impact. Following a thorough examination of the research, it can propose that:

H1: Celebrity Attractiveness relates positively to Brand Love

H2: Celebrity Trustworthiness relates positively to Brand Love

H3: Celebrity Expertise relates positively to Brand Love

2.2 Brand Love

Brand love represents an enthusiastic and positive emotion toward a brand that is generated by a benign interaction between the consumer and the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Love, as a constructive emotion, signifies an emotional connection that surpasses mere brand preference, as indicated by research by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) & Rossiter (2012). The

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examination of Brand love within the context of consumer behavior was undertaken by Shimn & Madden (1988) and Fournier (1998), who utilized the triangular theory of love proposed by Sternberg (1986). Furthermore, Fournier (1998, p. 363) expounded upon the consumer brand relationship, emphasizing the presence and socio-emotive attachments characterized by love, passion, and self-connection.

Literature has argued that strong ethnic identification is a precursor of Brand love and has a strong effect on Brand love (Madadi et al; 2021). Several studies have shown that love can be predicted from brand experience and Brand Authenticity (Asif et al., 2020), celebrity endorsement and parasocial interaction (Zhang et al., 2020) Sports stars' personal brands and Global brand equity (Zhou et al., 2020) and Cognitive Brand Loyalty and Cognitive Engagement (Shin et al., 2019) etc. Shen et al (2021) describe that perceived value function are strong contributors to satisfaction and Brand love, that leading towards recommendations and revisit casual dining restaurants.

H4: Brand Love relates positively to WOM

2.3 Word of Mouth (WOM)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing involves marketing strategy where opinion leaders or market mavens hold significant influence in promoting a brand's products through the dissemination of recommendations and personal feedback (Li & Du, 2011). Word-of-mouth (WOM) serves as an informational resource regarding the quality of brands' products and the services they provide, thus alleviating associated risks.

Researchers have drawn upon diverse theoretical models to elucidate the association between word-of-mouth (WOM) credibility and its determinants. Based on previous studies (Ismagilova et al., 2017; Moran & Muzellec, 2017), and theoretical support, Verma Deepak et al. (2020) proposed an integrated model of WOM credibility. The model incorporated four key elements: "Content", "Communicator", "Context", and "Consumer". "Content refers to the textual and visual aspects of an WOM messages, while the "Communicator:" represents the individual or organization delivering the WOM message. The study of the Masuda et al (2022) demonstrate that the individuals exhibiting brand loyalty and fostering a robust connection with the brand extent word of mouth. Studies indicate that loyal customers often transition into positive word of mouth and recommendation, and the recommendations of these play a pivotal role in attracting new customers (Chun & Kim, 2011; Masuda et al., 2022).

Recent research has emphasized the mediating influence of brand love in triggering favorable reactions from consumers (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019; Trivedi, 2020). In this study, the researchers propose that brand love acts as a mediator in the relationship between celebrity endorsement and WOM.

2.4 Theoretical background and conceptual framework:

This study relies on Rosenberg and Hanland's (1960) tricomponent attitude model, which delineates the formation of consumer attitude through a three-dimension psychological process. The cognitive phase involves personal knowledge and beliefs related to mental processing where Celebrity Endorsement (specifically Attractiveness, Expertise, and Trustworthiness) significantly influences decision making.

Next, during the affective phase, changing subjective affects (such as feelings of liking, hating. Loving or disliking towards specific objects) proved to be the most challenging aspect. Despite a complete shift in cognition, altering affect remains a formidable task, leading to a persistent lack of change in decision making behavior.

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Third, the conative component of the tri-component model is represented by word-of-mouth, which serves as an actionable manifestation of attitudes. The research explores the action of consumers in spreading positive sentiments.

Based on the aforementioned hypothesis statements, the following theoretical framework formulated:

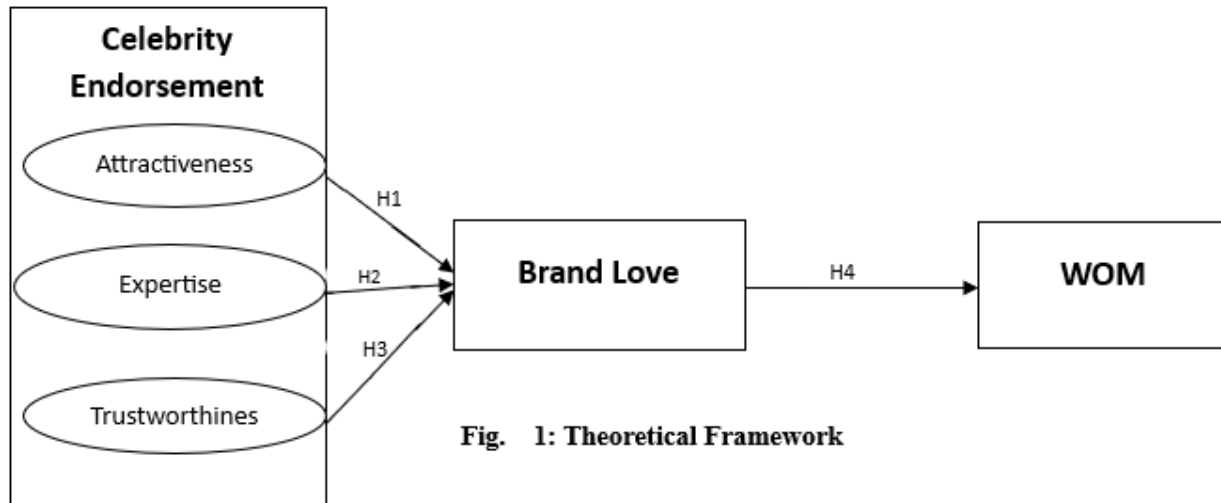


Fig. 1: Theoretical Framework

3. Research Methodology

This research employed quantitative methodology and utilized a cross-sectional design. Data is gathered from each participant using a survey strategy at a single point in time. The sampling approach employed in this study was convenient, non-probability sampling, aligning with established practices in the social sciences (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This sampling technique because of its practicality, especially when faced with accessibility challenges in obtaining a comprehensive sample. It proves cost effective in resource-constrained scenarios, providing researchers with a quick means to data collection in the dynamically evolving telecommunication sector. The determination of the sample size was guided by the item response theory proposed by Nummaly in 1975. In accordance with this theory, the sample size is determined by multiplying the overall number of items by 10. As a result, 190 responses were gathered for the 19 items in the survey. The continued significance of this sampling technique and the utilization of item response theory are evident in contemporary social science research, as indicated by recent literature (Liu et al., 2022). Data collection occurred in Lahore and Islamabad. These cities offer a diverse demographic and socioeconomics landscape. In Pakistan there are four cellular service providers: Jazz, Telenor, Zong and Ufone. Prior to the field survey the researcher collected data on all four operators. The study focused on social media users ages 18 to 45 who had encountered any celebrity in cellular service provider advertisements within the preceding 3 months. Identification of these respondents occurred through a screening question presented at the initial. Furthermore, individuals within this age range were chosen due to the predominant role as active consumers, particularly in the realm of cell phones.

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3.1 Research Instrument

In the study structured questionnaire served as the research instrument. The study utilized a 5-point Likert scale for measuring all variables. The Likert scale spanning from 1 to 5, where 1 denotes “Strongly disagree” and 5 represents “Strongly Agree”, facilitated a comprehensive spectrum of responses. The adoption of items set the 5-point Likert scale was grounded in their adaptation from reputable research studies, as referenced Table 1.

Table 1: Measures

Variable	Item	Source
Attractiveness	4	McCracken 1989, Ohanian 1990
Trustworthiness	4	McCracken 1989; Ohanian 1990
Expertise	4	McCracken 1989; Ohanian 1990
Brand Love	4	Karjaluoto et al. (2016)
Word of Mouth	3	D. Kim et al. (2015).

The data was gathered through Google forms, an established data collection method extensively employed in various global research studies. This method facilitates efficient data generation without the need for paper, contributing to environmental sustainability by conserving natural resources. The survey was structured into seven sections. The initial part aimed to collect demographics details such as name, age, education, and household income. Subsequent sections delved into information on the cellphone network, inquired about social media habits, preferred platform, and their intended purposes. The second section provided visual exposure to well-known celebrity-endorsed cellular network advertisement, offering a participant’s contextual overview of the content being discussed. The third, fourth and fifth section addressed independent variables items for audience inquiry. The sixth section delved into Brand Love as mediator and seventh section centered on the dependent variable i.e., word of mouth (WOM).

SPSS was employed for data analysis, including demographic presentation and descriptive findings. regression analysis using Hayes’ Process Macro, mediation model 4 in SPSS.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics serve as a comprehensive overview of quantifiable data, offering detailed insights into a dataset. The examination of descriptive statistics assists in condensing, illustrating, and simplifying statistical information into a comprehensible and meaningful format. Additionally, it provides insights into the central tendency by exploring mean and standard deviation values for the given dataset.

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Table 2: Demographic Variables

Variable	Group	Frequency	%age
Age	18-24	80	42.3
	25-30	55	28.2
	31-36	36	19.1
	37-42	13	7.3
	43+	6	3.2
Education	Undergraduate	73	38.6
	Graduate	45	23.2
	Postgraduate	72	38.2
Monthly Income	20k-40k	28	15
	41k-90k	53	28.2
	91k-140k	56	29.5
	141k to 190k	37	19.1
	Above 190k	16	8.2
Connection Type	Prepaid	158	83
	Postpaid	32	17

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Conducting a reliability analysis aims to determine the internal consistency of the data gathered through the survey. The subsequent section outlines the reliability outcomes for our research.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Items	Alpha
Attractiveness	4	0.821
Expertise	4	0.813
Trustworthiness	4	0.801
Brand Love	4	0.911
Word of Mouth	3	0.815

Given that all variables – celebrity Attractiveness, Celebrity Expertise, Celebrity Trustworthiness, Brand Love and Word of mouth exhibits Cronbach Alpha values exceeding 0.8, it indicates the presence of reliability.

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4.2 Correlation Analysis

As depicted in the preceding tables, the variables exhibit a positive correlation, with a few displaying weak and robust positive correlations. The existence of moderate or weak correlations suggests the absence of multicollinearity. Examples of weak positive correlation are observed in variables such as celebrity attractiveness and celebrity expertise, as it is no obligatory for an attractive celebrity to possess expertise in the relevant field required to provide feedback on the endorsed brand.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

	Celebrity Attractiveness	Celebrity Expertise	Celebrity Trustworthiness	Brand Love	Word of Mouth
Celebrity Attractiveness	1				
Celebrity Expertise	.747**	1			
Celebrity Trustworthiness	.724**	.749**	1		
Brand Love	.891**	.779**	.733**	1	
Word of Mouth	.983**	.765**	.712**	.826*	1

Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

To examine the effects, regression analysis was conducted using SPSS. Initially, the investigation focused on establishing a cause-and effect relationship between Celebrity Attractiveness, Celebrity Expertise, Celebrity Trustworthiness and Brand love.

Table 5: Model Summary

Variable	β	R ² square	ΔR^2	Sig.
Celebrity Attractiveness	0.574	0.526	0.523	0.000
Celebrity Expertise	0.546	0.558	0.556	0.000
Celebrity Trustworthiness	0.847	0.725	0.724	0.000

a). Independent Variables: Celebrity Attractiveness, Celebrity Expertise, Celebrity Trustworthiness

b). Dependent Variable: Brand Love

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The result in Table 7 reveals that the relationship of celebrity attractiveness with brand love is significantly important in the telecommunication industry. Celebrity attractiveness corresponds to 57% increase in brand love ($\beta=0.574$). this signifies a substantial positive influence on brand love, supported by statistically significant results (p-

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value=0.000<0.05). Consequently, it is imperative for companies in the telecommunication sector to adopt this approach to foster brand love.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The result of celebrity expertise has significant and positive association with brand love in context of cellular industry ($\beta=0.546$, p-value=0.000<0.05). Therefore, celebrity expertise is considered as an important cue to enhance brand love.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): postulates a positive relationship between celebrity trustworthiness and brand love. The detailed examination presented in Table 7 elucidates that a mere one-unit augmentation in celebrity trustworthiness is associated with a remarkable 84% surge in brand love, as reflected in the beta value of 0.847. Importantly, the robustness of this impact is confirmed by the statistically significant of the results, as indicated by a p-value of 0.000, well below the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This suggests that the observed correlation is not likely due to random chance but is a meaningful and reliable association between celebrity trustworthiness and brand love. Overall, hypothesis 3 provides valuable insights into the influential role of trustworthiness in shaping consumers' emotional attachment to brand.

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing

Variable	β	R ² square	ΔR^2	Sig.
Brand Love → WOM	0.578	0.509	0.506	0.000

Hypothesis 4 (H4): asserts a positive correlation between Brand Love and Word of Mouth

The finding unveil a compelling insight: a single-unit elevation in brand love aligns with a substantial 57% upswing in brand love ($\beta=0.578$). This discovery emphasizes a meaningful and positive influence. The statistically significant results (p-value=0.000<0.05). reinforce the credibility of this impact. In essence, the data implies that a consumers' affection for the brand increases, so does their inclination to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication.

5. Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed framework. The selection variables were meticulous, informed by a comprehensive review of recent research articles, and their interconnections were established in accordance with suggestions from researcher scholars. Each variable maintains its individual significance, and the associations with other variables are substantiated with evidence presented in the literature review section. The independent variable emphasized in this research encompasses celebrity attractiveness, celebrity expertise and celebrity trustworthiness. Furthermore, brand love serves as a mediator in the relationship between independent variable and the dependent variable.

To empirically examine and scrutinize the relationship among these variables, a survey questionnaire was devised. The primary goal of this survey was to collect data from the target population, which in this study comprised cellphone users. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, the item scale and questions were adopted from existing literature.

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The questionnaire was structured into seven sections, each dedicated to a specific variable, with questions tailored accordingly. A Likert scale was employed to facilitate the quantification of results. The data collected from sample population supported our claims, indicating the success of the study. The initial hypothesis, asserting a positive relationship between celebrity attractiveness and brand love, was substantiated by the data. Regression analysis results demonstrated a significant positive relationship, and correlation analysis further confirmed the positive association between celebrity attractiveness and brand love. This suggests that an increase in celebrity attractiveness corresponds to an increase in brand love among the population. Consequently, celebrity attractiveness not only instigates materialistic envy but also influences consumer purchasing behavior. The acquisition of a quality product endorsed by a celebrity automatically cultivates brand love among the target audience.

The study's second hypothesis which found support, asserts that there is a positive connection between celebrity expertise and brand love. The correlation analysis reveals a positive association between these two variables. The analysis findings also depict the vital role of celebrity expertise in establishing brand love. The data strongly supports the third hypothesis, establishing a positive connection between celebrity trustworthiness and brand love. According to the research findings, the three dimensions of celebrity endorsement (attractiveness, expertise & trustworthiness) form the fundamental for their success. The correlation analysis reveals a positive association between celebrity trustworthiness and brand love.

In nutshell, when customers trust a celebrity, they are likely to extend that trust to the brand they endorse. Further, the regression analysis reinforces this positive relationship, evidenced p-value falling below 0.05. The data supports the fourth hypothesis, indicating that there is a positive and significant correlation between brand love and word of mouth. Our analysis reveals a robust positive relationship between love and word of mouth, implying that an increase in brand love leads to a corresponding increase in word of mouth.

The regression analysis for variables X and Y is crucial, confirming the significance of the relationship between the variables. Brand love acts as a catalyst in bridging the gap between these two variables. Further, reliability analysis affirms the dependable nature of the variables under investigation.

5.1 Limitations and Future Direction

Despite several limitations, this study is mainly confined to the telecommunication industry, although the methodology has potential applicability to other sectors. Moreover, the study is confined to five variables, suggesting the potential for further expansion to enrich our knowledge base and facilitate more comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, the study is cross-sectional, conducted at a single point in time, implying that audience responses may be subject to change with evolving circumstances, limiting the research's applicability to a specific time frame. Despite these constraints, these limitations offer numerous opportunities for future research endeavors.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Several potential directions for future research emerge from these theoretical considerations. Allocating more time for longitudinal studies to observe response patterns in one avenue. Examining whether responses undergo changes over time provides intriguing insights

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for the research. Furthermore, there is room to extend the study's scope beyond a singly industry to encompass various others. Notably, the contemporary landscape is dominated by digital marketing, with a specific emphasis on micro-celebrities. Moreover, the study also adds valuable information to the broader comprehension of brand love, a concept that despite its evident benefits remains relatively scarce in existing literature. This paper offer three significant contributions

1. This investigation establishes a link between celebrity endorsement, brand love, and word of mouth (WOM), enhancing our understanding of these interconnected relationships.
2. Brand love is explored as the mediator in the connection between celebrity endorsement and relational outcomes.
3. The study delves into the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand love, emphasizing the significance of a unique commitment to a brand. Given the innovative nature of this research in the television industry its crucial to acknowledge that these contributions build prior studies, particularly those by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Rossiter (2012), who have explored some antecedents and consequences of brand love. This study is anticipated to contribute to the theoretical enrichment of the presented theme, providing valuable insights for better brand and market management.

On the practical side, the research stands to assist decision-makers and brand managers in crafting social media advertising campaigns. This assistance particularly applies to celebrities who possess the attributes scrutinized in our research, such as credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Given the rising prominence of word of mouth in the era of social commerce, future research should emphasize social media platforms and digital celebrities over their traditional counterparts.

5.3 Conclusion

The research aimed to investigate the impact of celebrity influence, encompassing attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, on building brand love and fostering word of mouth. With the surge in digital marketing platforms, heightened brand competition due to easier market entry led brands to shift focus from traditional advertising to prioritize feedback, ratings, and positive word of mouth. This innovative approach has proven profitable, prompting brand managers to actively boost the buzz effect through positive comments and feedback, enhancing brand visibility and driving sales and revenue.

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