

# The Analysis of the Moderating Role of Brand Type in the Association of Endorser Credibility With Endorser Congruence and Consumer Based-Brand Equity

Arash Naghash<sup>1</sup>, Hossein Rezaei Dolatabadi<sup>2\*</sup>, Seyed Fathollah Amiri Aghdaie<sup>3</sup>

1. PhD Candidate of Marketing Management, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

2. Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

3. Associated Professor, Department of Management, Faculty of Administrative Sciences and Economics, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

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## Abstract

One of the important strategies to build powerful consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) for products is to connect them to celebrities. The use of this key marketing strategy is growing around the world. The present study aimed to explore the effects of endorser credibility and endorser congruence on CBBE while considering the mediating role of congruence and the moderating role of brand type (strong/weak). The statistical population of the study was comprised of the buyers of megamalls in Tehran, from among whom 186 completed questionnaires were gathered using the simple random sampling method. Structural equation modeling in SmartPLS software was used to test the hypotheses. The results of the hypothesis tests showed that celebrity endorser's credibility had a significant positive effect on endorser congruence and CBBE. In addition, endorser congruence had a positive impact on CBBE. The findings revealed that in the statistical sample of the present study, the effect of the variable celebrity endorser on congruence and CBBE did not differ from the perspective of brand type (strong/weak) and that this variable had a positive and significant effect on paths between 'celebrity credibility-celebrity congruence' and 'celebrity credibility-CBBE'. Important theoretical and managerial implications have been derived from these findings.

**Keywords:** celebrity credibility, celebrity convergence, CBBE, brand type, qualitative moderator variable.

## 1. Introduction

Business competition between companies in gaining market share is increasingly getting tighter, so each company makes efforts to attract consumers' attention to its products. One way to attract consumer attention is through advertising using the services of celebrity endorsers, packaged creatively and attractively, to generate brand awareness (Sri Wiludjeng, 2021). In today's competitive market, where lots of advertising affect consumers on a daily basis, companies are looking to make the biggest impact by using celebrities in their advertisements. Such a marketing strategy has been strongly considered in Iran as an effective and quick solution, so marketers and business owners have turned to it extensively.

Celebrity endorsement (CE) means the use of celebrities to suggest or advertise a service or product visually (Subbiah & Sathish, 2019). The use of celebrity endorsers in a marketing strategy has become one of the interesting topics to be investigated (Chin et al., 2019; Osei-

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\* Corresponding Author, Email: rezaei@ase.ui.ac.ir

Frimpong et al., 2019). Currently, the use of celebrity endorsement has become a common topic in the marketing world; one in four promotions takes advantage of celebrity endorsement (Soleimani et al., 2020). Celebrity endorsement is a strategy where a product is endorsed by a celebrity to support the company's marketing campaign. However, companies cannot select the celebrity endorser arbitrarily. Companies have to choose the correct celebrity endorser that possesses endorser credibility, endorser attractiveness, and the match-up with the company (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020) such that it fits with the target market and company objectives.

Celebrities have remarkable profiles, a substantial degree of public fascination, and many influences in daily media (Tanjung & Hudrasyah, 2019). Celebrity endorsement influences many variables like brand recognition, brand recall, advertising effectiveness, buying intentions, and purchase behavior. Different studies have examined various mechanisms and approaches in determining the effectiveness of celebrities (Singh & Banerjee, 2021). Celebrity endorsement is a helpful method for companies or organizations to reach a wider audience and enhance their awareness of their products (Bhandari & Designing, 2021). Some researchers have explained that celebrity endorsement results in a positive attitude toward the endorsed brand (Spry et al., 2011) and also customer's buying behavior (Anisa & Widjatmoko, 2021; Muslih et al., 2021). However, other researchers have found that celebrity endorsement affects customer's attitude to the brand but not their purchasing behavior (Febrian & Fadly, 2021). Nevertheless, there are no experimental studies about its effect on Celebrity Endorsement Brand Equity (CBBE). Marketers need to know if it has any effect on CBBE and the way in which this procedure works.

Nylund (2020) states that according to Aker's study, CBBE can be characterized as a set of assets, which includes brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality. On the other hand, it means the extra value attached by a brand title to a good/service (Nguyen Viet & Nguyen Anh, 2021), includes massive information about the value that customers ascribe to the brands, and is positively connected to a variety of outcomes, including consumer (e.g., purchase behavior and preference), financial, and product market outcomes.

Following the decree of the Ministry of Guidance, the presence of artistic and sports figures and generally famous endorsers in advertising was forbidden for several years in Iran. With the change and revision that took place in 2014, the presence of celebrity endorsers only in advertising domestic services and products was authorized to use this capacity to help develop the market of the domestic industries. This decision was in line with the policies of the resistance economy meant to improve the conditions for domestically produced goods compared to imported goods; however, due to the lack of enough monitoring, celebrity endorsers are being used for all products, including domestic and international brands. From the perspective of research gaps, despite the mentioned necessity, due to the above-mentioned previous legal obstacles, not many studies have been conducted on this topic in Iran; and the few studies having already been undertaken failed to use appropriate and adequate research methods (including the improper sampling method and the limited number of variables). Therefore, the main question had been determined as "what are the moderating role of brand type and the mediating role of endorser congruence in the connection between endorser credibility and CBBE?"

In the remainder of this work, we first outline a conceptual framework including one primary objective and five secondary objectives. We focus on exploring the moderating role of brand type on the relationship of endorser credibility with endorser congruence and consumer-based-brand equity (primary objective). There are five secondary objectives, including the effect of endorser credibility on endorser congruence, the effect of endorser

credibility on consumer-based-brand equity, the mediating role of endorser congruence in the connection between endorser credibility and CBBE, the moderating role of brand type (strong/weak) in a celebrity endorser relationship with endorser congruence, and its effect on the consumer-based-brand equity.

Based on the findings of previous research in the field of celebrity endorsement, it was found that researchers have not studied the relationship between consumer based-brand equity and endorser credibility from the perspective of the mediating role of endorser's congruency. In addition, the moderating role of strong/weak brands has not been studied in this effect. Most studies have focused on the effects of endorser credibility on brand equity, so the effects of endorser congruency as a mediating variable and the moderating role of strong/weak brands is a research gap. This important issue in improving brand equity will be addressed in the present study. The purpose of the authors of this article is to examine the moderating role of brand type to develop the relevant theory and the mediating role of celebrity congruency incorporate strategies and planning, provide tips for advertising planning, and finally, give in recommendations to improve consumer based-brand equity by using celebrities.

Contributions of this paper are to study the moderating role of brand type to develop the relevant theory and the mediating role of endorser congruence in strategies and planning of companies, guidance for advertisement planning, and finally, some advices for the improvement of CBBE using celebrities.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Celebrity Endorsement*

Celebrity endorsement is a helpful method for companies or organizations to reach a wider audience and enhance their awareness of their products (Bhandari & De, 2021). A celebrity endorser is a person who loves public recognition and is well-known in the community or at least the target audiences of the brand, in which she/he could take full advantage of reputation to come out with a product in the advertisement to attract consumers (Nguyen, 2021). Numerous companies worldwide are investing in famous, attractive, and credible celebrities for brand advertisement (Amos et al., 2008). However, celebrity endorsement can be a two-edged sword, and its attractiveness might encroach negatively upon mood and body image. Hence, it is vital for a company to look for an adequate solution to choose an absolute matching endorser for executing branding (Nguyen, 2021).

A celebrity is usually a person who does not need any introduction (Mustapha et al., 2021). He is well-known because he gets regular attention from the media and people and always remains in the headlines (Anmol & Javeed, 2014). Celebrities are individuals who have attained a lot of reputation in public and have been able to gain a central place in the current culture (Kim et al., 2014). Celebrities are human brands, they are on-stage and off-stage, off-line and on-line, public or private which shows marketing and branding experiments. Their regular activities and principles are private but are played out in public (Laura, 2020). Celebrities can have a big impact on the product they are endorsing because the message can be delivered to a huge amount of followers constantly. With the message that is delivered to the followers, it is created to attract people's attention to the product. The belief that the product is used by those celebrities is then used to influence people to buy it (Jamil & Hassan, 2014).

In today's overflowing product availability, a customer has to decide which brands he/she needs to purchase. In this selection process, a customer tends to evaluate available brands based on personal experience as well as according to the opinion of the public and experts (Herjanto et al., 2020).

There are two main models in the celebrity endorsement context: Source Model and Meaning Transfer Model (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020). The Source Model explains the credibility and attractiveness of celebrities as factors influencing consumers' minds like engagement, motivation, prior attitudes, and product interest. Ohanian developed this model with two paths: 1) the source credibility model, which includes the experience of celebrity endorser and trustworthiness that affect its credibility; and 2) the source attractiveness model, which is not limited to physical attractiveness and includes the similarity, familiarity, and likability of the source (Burnasheva & Suh, 2020).

The second main model is called the Meaning Transfer Model, which implies the transfer of features from the celebrity to the endorsed product and then onto the consumer. The volume of transferred meaning depends on gender, age, personality, class, and lifestyles. The source model explains that the endorsement would be successful as long as the celebrity is trustworthy, attractive, and expert. However, Park and Lin (2020) used the match-up hypothesis and indicated that if marketers want to have effective communication, they must match the product and the celebrity together, which is called 'congruence' in the relevant studies.

There is no doubt that beauty is the first thing that is noticed in the face of people; however, what makes you seem beautiful is different among various cultures and people (Chan & Fan, 2020). Many factors make a person attractive, such as clothes, type of behavior, type of walking, facial features, etc. The human brain is a beauty tracker among all its functions. The charm is what can attract more people. Attraction is not just the size of the body; rather, it encompasses all physical features. For instance, the beauty of the face, hair color, appearance, and body features are all part of a person's attractiveness. Thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes of people in each society can influence the attractiveness of celebrities (Parwati et al., 2021). The endorser's attractiveness contributes to the ease and efficiency of promoting a good or service and attracts the attention of consumers; hence, it is probably easier for attractive models and popular endorsers to gain the credibility needed for a resource.

Expertise means the knowledge that the communicator must have to get support for the claims he or she made in the advertisement. Expertise could be explained by the extent to which the communicator is perceived as a credible source. It is not important that the endorser is really an expert; the key point, however, is that the target market deems the endorser as an expert (Nguyen, 2021). Gilal et al. (2020) also say that the more expert a celebrity is, the more convincing he or she is and the more a customer is encouraged to buy a brand. Compared to an amateur endorser, an expert one is more effective in convincing customers to change their buying behavior and create a positive attitude toward the brand (Hofman-Kohlmeier, 2020).

Reliability (honesty) refers to people's perception of the accuracy of the information. This is a multidimensional concept and a tool for evaluating the source or sender of the information. Reliability refers to the validity of a well-known affirmative statement about a product from a consumer's perspective. If the communicator is highly trustworthy, the message he or she delivers will be considered more convincing and effective in changing attitudes. In addition, perceived honesty is better than perceived expertise to change consumer attitudes (Nazari et al., 2021). Reliability refers to honesty, correctness, and affirmative action from the perspective of the target audience. Gilal et al. (2020) has argued that consumers consider well-known but unreliable verifiers to be the source of suspicious messages, regardless of their other characteristics.

The emotional ties between celebrities and consumers create self-brand connections, and credible celebrities obtain positive features that consumers want to associate with them (Burnasheva & Suh, 2020). This association will be explained more in the following lines.

## 2.2. Endorser Congruence

Congruence refers to the degree of homogeneity between the endorser image and the approved product or brand. The degree of homogeneity between the endorser and the brand depends on the degree of appropriateness between them. If the endorser is proportional or homogeneous to the advertised product, this proportionality increases the level of credibility (Atiqah, 2021).

If celebrities do not have a special and distinct relationship with the products they endorse, using them in advertisements can produce a negative effect (Tian et al., 2021), and if the congruence between the endorser and the product works properly, then the approval of the celebrity can create an emotional bond between the consumer and the endorser. A successful and famous endorser could increase the purchase intention and create brand preferences in direct and indirect routes. If consumers could not link the association between the celebrity spokesperson and the brand endorsed, the message conveyed will get lost among other messages (Alawadhi, 2020). Um (2020) introduced the term 'portfolio-brand fit' to the literature on match-up or congruence of celebrity. He argues that multiple elements in a campaign portfolio should be matched up with a single brand. It could be interpreted as how well the consumer perceives the fitness or match-ups between celebrity endorsers as a whole and their endorsed brands. Since the congruence between celebrity endorsers and brands creates a positive attitude toward the brand, celebrity congruence may form extra benefits for the firms, such as brand loyalty (Ozer et al., 2020).

Um (2020) defined this portfolio as being comprised of three aspects: product type, brand personality, and target audience. The authors of the present paper used Um's (2020) definition to determine congruence.

Based on similarity–attraction theory, congruence has a positive effect on the trustworthiness and credibility of a celebrity (Zogaj, 2021), but the reverse effect has been ignored to some extent. Alguacil and his colleagues (2021) analyzed the mediating role of brand trust in the connection between credibility and congruence, and their study confirms that the credibility of an endorser plays an important role in attracting potential consumers but has no influence on the congruence. Likewise, Gaied and Rached (2017) showed that higher congruence would result in the celebrity to be perceived as more credible. Therefore, the current research addresses the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Endorser credibility has a positive and important impact on endorser congruence.

## 2.3. Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

Consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) is applied when the consumer prefers a brand to others because of association with a brand. In such a case, the consumer will be highly loyal to that particular brand (Kumar & Ramana, 2019). Uford and Duh (2021) defined CBBE as the value which consumers connect with a brand. This value will be reflected in four dimensions, including brand associations, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and perceived quality. Keller defined CBBE as the differential response of consumers to the marketing of a brand formed on their brand knowledge. CBBE could positively affect higher profit, greater revenue, and lower cost (Tasci, 2020). The effect of using celebrity endorsers on CBBE had been discussed in many kinds of research. Rohmawati (2020) and Nylund (2020) showed that celebrity endorser positively affects brand equity.

According to the Source Model, the endorsement would be successful as long as the celebrity is credible (Zogaj, 2021). The success of an advertisement could be measured by different categories like brand recognition, brand recall, advertising effectiveness, buying

intentions, and purchase behavior (Singh & Banerjee, 2021). Currently, researchers focus on its effect on CBBE (Mahmud & Anggraini, 2020; Muslih et al., 2021; Rohmawati, 2020). Supported by all these discussions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2:** Endorser credibility has a positive and important impact on consumer-based-brand equity.

Previous research on congruence explains that the factors influencing the match-up hypothesis include physical expertise, attractiveness, and character of celebrities (Seomoon, 2019). The physical attractiveness and expertise of a celebrity are connected to the congruence between the celebrity and the brand, which further increases the effectiveness of the advertisement. The moderating role of brand type (strong versus weak) in the mentioned relationships is also discussed in the present study, which could be considered as its originality.

Based on different studies, in which a high congruence has been found between a brand and the celebrity who advertises it, it has positive impacts on the effectiveness of that endorser versus an endorser with lower congruence (Gilal et al., 2020). In fact, congruence plays a mediating role between the celebrity endorser and the brand, and it will make the advertising with that person more effective. Consumers believe that athletes are experts in athletic products, so this congruence could increase the so-called expert's positive effect on CBBE (Seomoon, 2019). Schouten et al. (2020) name researchers such as Fink, Cunningham, and Kensicki as scholars who have examined congruence as the moderating factor between attractiveness and expertise with brand equity. Researchers explain that congruence between celebrities and brands considers as a moderator, which could increase or decrease the positive effect of a celebrity on the relevant brand (Gilal et al., 2020).

Based on the math-up hypothesis, the congruence between a product and a celebrity who endorses it will accelerate the persuasion of customers (Blasche et al., 2015). Congruency works as the synergy between brand identity and brand image (Linsner et al., 2021). The perceived congruity positively affects the brand equity of celebrities (Liu et al., 2020). Previous researchers studied the effect of the congruence on brand equity, but CBBE, which is an especial type of brand equity, has not been studied as a separate issue, so the following hypothesis is suggested:

**H3:** Endorser congruence has a positive and important impact on consumer-based-brand equity.

#### *2.4. Brand Type*

There are different types of brand classification, such as functional and symbolic (Zhu et al., 2019). Functional brands are the ones purchased to meet practical needs (Chong et al., 2020), but symbolic brands are usually purchased for value-expressive needs (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020). The authors of the present article relied on originality concept to divide brands into two types: strong and weak. The strength and weaknesses of brands were measured by a pre-test based on the consumer's point of view, which will be explained in the Methodology section.

Based on Mahmud and Anggraini (2020) and Rohmawati (2020), celebrity endorsement has a positive impact on brand equity. By removing the official restrictions on using celebrity endorsement in Iranian advertisements, we need to determine how we could increase CBBE. Therefore, the main purpose of the current study is to determine this process as well as its moderator and mediator variables.

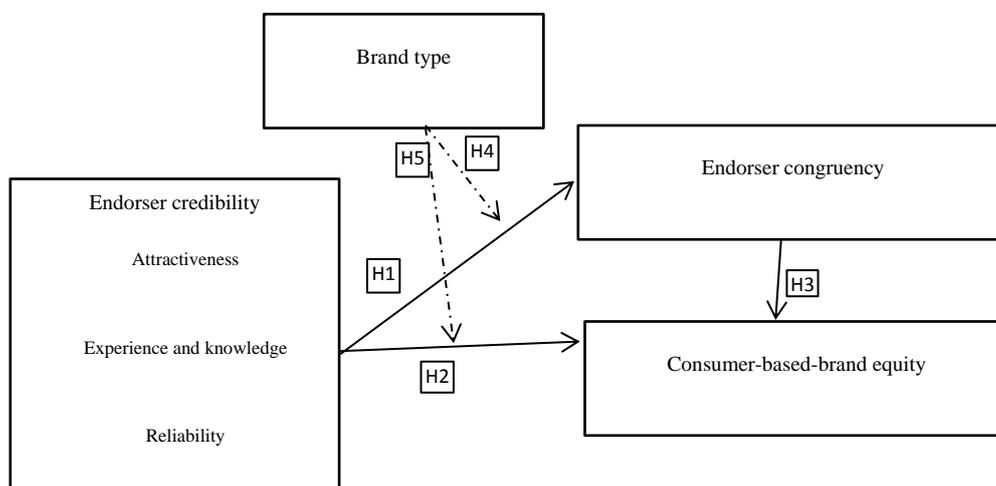
Many researchers focused on the finding of the moderator and mediator variables in the connection between credibility, congruence, and brand equity. Rohmawati (2020) showed that

brand credibility mediates the connection between endorser credibility and brand equity. Muslih and his colleagues (2021) indicated that brand image could not play a mediating role between celebrity endorsers and purchasing decisions. Brand trust as a moderator variable could enhance the influence of celebrity endorsement on brand attitude (Febrian & Fadly, 2021). Endorser type has been studied and divided into many types in previous researches, e.g., Knoll and Matthes (2017), but the brand type and its moderator effect has been ignored. Nevertheless, in the current study, the moderating effect of brand type (strong/weak) in that connection is researched, which could be considered as the originality of this study. Based on the foregoing discussion, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

**H4:** The moderator variable of brand type (strong/weak) in a celebrity endorser relationship has a positive and important impact on endorser congruency.

**H5:** The moderator variable of brand type (strong/weak) has a positive and important impact on the consumer-based-brand equity.

The conceptual model of the research is presented as follows:



**Figure 1.** The Conceptual Model of the Study

### 3. Methods

Regarding the purpose of the study, the current research project was practical and developmental because it aimed at finding a strategy to increase CBBE. The study tried to collect information about variables related to the research structures using the most common data collection tool (i.e., questionnaire) and obtain information about people's views, beliefs, and opinions; therefore, it has a survey design. Finally, since the study sought to investigate and confirm the existence of a connection between endorser credibility and endorser congruency in order to improve CBBE, the research method was correlational. Following the methodology used by Gilal et al. (2020), the endorser credibility with dimensions of attractiveness, expertise-knowledge, and reliability, comprised the research independent variable. Brand type as the moderator variable was determined by a test, which will be explained later. Endorser congruency and CBBE were also determined using the methodology of Um (2020) and Rohmawati (2020), respectively.

To determine the community related to the conceptual model of the study, two brands were needed to be selected from among all brands that had advertisements with celebrity endorsers to make the moderator variable (strong/weak brand type). In this regard, a list of active celebrity endorsers in the advertising industry of Iran was prepared at the time of research. To

this end, an Internet-based questionnaire was developed according to the findings of previous studies (Schouten et al., 2020) and opinions of academics (University of Tehran and University of Isfahan) and professional experts (advertising companies). The participants were presented with a picture of the advertisement with a celebrity endorsement and were asked to rank the effectiveness of that advertisement with a five-point Likert scale (with 1 representing *strongly disagree* and 5 showing *strongly agree*). The endpoint of sampling was data saturation (n=66). Based on the questionnaire findings, Novin Leather Company endorsed by Bahram Radan was at the top of the ranking and so was selected as the strongest brand. On the other hand, Bensar Toothpaste endorsed by Karim Bagheri was at the lowest rank and so was selected as the weakest brand.

In the next stage, the statistical population of the conceptual model of the research, i.e., buyers of megamalls in Tehran, was determined. The sample size was determined based on the ten times rule for minimum sample size estimation (Henseler et al., 2014), which says the sample size shall be 10 at least times of variables in the model or ten times of relationship in the model (whichever is higher). Therefore, the sample size was determined to be  $10 \times 15$  (maximum number of questions) = 150. Because often all the questionnaires cannot be used due to lack of necessary conditions or lack of complete responses, 200 questionnaires were prepared. Out of the total 200 distributed questionnaires, 186 questionnaires (75 completed questionnaires for strong brand type and 111 completed questionnaires for weak brand type) were fully completed by the respondents and were finally used. According to the characteristics of the study population, the simple random sampling method was used to eliminate conscious or unconscious orientation. As Smart PLS software is used to investigate the data collected from a small sample size, the data collected through 186 valid questionnaires was enough. The answers to the questions were set using a 5-point attitude spectrum. By choosing one of the options 1 to 5, the respondent announced his/her disagreement or agreement with the content of the question. In the present study, in examining the relationship between the main variables of the research, it was necessary to inspect the qualitative moderating variable of brand type, which has been used by the group analysis method (Henseler et al., 2014). The reason for this naming is that in this method, the research model is implemented in several stages, and in each stage, using the data related to one of the groups, the results are extracted. Therefore, the strong brand type variable data file, which was 75, and the weak brand variable data file, which was 111, were used in the analysis.

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, in the first stage, the theoretical foundations were studied, a conceptual framework and a preliminary researcher-made questionnaire were developed, and changes were made in the research questions. The questions related to the fame validation index were adapted from several valid questionnaires in the field according to the objectives of the research.

In total, the questionnaire used to test the hypotheses and the theoretical model of the research was consisted of 32 questions and 2 parts. The first part included demographic questions such as gender, age educational levels, and income levels. Table 1 presents the results of the demographic analysis of this questionnaire.

The second part contained the main research questions with a photo of the celebrity advertisement on top of the page, asking the respondents how much they thought the celebrity endorser had the mentioned trait (question 1-18) and how much their subsequently listed emotions had been affected by viewing the celebrity endorser in the advertisement (question 19-32). Academic and business experts, including four professors from the University of Isfahan and two market experts, confirmed the content validity of the questionnaire. The partial least squares (PLS) method is a suitable method to avoid constraints based on covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) due to the insensitivity of the small

sample size, the type of measurement model, and the complexity of the model. To determine the reliability of the model, three criteria of composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, factor loadings, and determination of validity with convergent and divergent validity criteria were used. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table1.** Distribution and Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	85	45.69
Male	101	54.31
<b>Age</b>		
<20	15	8.06
20-29	53	28.49
30-50	70	37.63
>50	48	25.82
<b>Educational level</b>		
High school	12	6.45
Diploma	15	8.06
BSc./B.A.	71	38.17
MSc./M.A.	74	39.78
PhD	14	7.36
<b>Income level (Iranian Rial)</b>		
<20,000,000	55	29.56
20,000,000-50,000,000	67	36.02
>50,000,000	64	34.42

As shown in Table 2, all the indicators related to the main variables of the research are more than 0.4, which indicates the appropriateness of the questions' factor-loading coefficients. When Cronbach's alpha value is above 0.7, it points to acceptable reliability. However, Moss et al. (1998) introduced the value of 0.6 as the limit of Cronbach's alpha coefficient for variables with a small number of questions. The calculated results for each dimension of the research show that the questionnaire has sufficient validity. According to Fornell and Locker (Ozer et al., 2020), the standard condition for composite reliability coefficients is 0.7 or higher, while values of 0.6 indicates a lack of reliability. AVE shows the correlation of a structure with its indices. Fornell and Larker introduced the critical value as 0.5, which was in the range (0.65-0.90) for all variables of the present study. This range is greater than the critical value; therefore, in total, the congruence validity for all variables is obtained. Using Fornell and Larker methods, divergent validity was also examined, the results of which are shown in Table 3.

Divergent validity is acceptable if the numbers in the original diameter are higher than their lower values. Therefore, it can be stated that in the present study, constructs (hidden variables) in the model have more interaction with their indicators than with other structures; in other words, the validity of the model is appropriate.

According to the objectives and hypotheses of the research, varieties of descriptive and inferential statistics methods were used to analyze the data and examine the value of the proposed model. Statistical analysis (descriptive and inferential) was conducted using SPSS 20 software (for frequency tables and descriptive statistics), and SmartPLS was adopted due to the insensitivity of the analysis techniques used in this software to the sample size.

**Table 2.** Factor Loading, Validity, and Reliability Values

Item	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	Sources of questionnaire				
<u>Attractiveness</u>									
1. Appearance	0.92	0.91	0.94	0.85	Gurel Atay (2011) & Khalid (et al. (2018				
2. Beauty of the face	0.94								
3. Body features	0.89								
<u>Experience and knowledge</u>									
4. Experience	0.91	0.93	0.95	0.86	Popa, V. (2016)				
5. Knowledge	0.93								
6. Skill	0.94								
<u>Reliability</u>									
7. Warm relationship with others	0.88	0.93	0.95	0.68	Gurel Atay (2011) & Hani et al. ((2018				
8. Effective personality	0.82								
9. Committed to community values	0.87								
10. Successful in personal life	0.84								
11. Successful in professional life	0.80								
12. Reputation	0.88								
13. Personality stability	0.78								
14. Benevolent motive	0.84								
15. Non-participation in different advertisement	0.64								
<u>Endorser congruence</u>									
16. Congruence between celebrity endorser and product type	0.94					0.94	0.96	0.90	Gurel Atay ((2011
17. Congruence between celebrity endorser and brand personality	0.95								
18. Congruence between celebrity endorser and target market	0.95								
<u>CBBE</u>									
19. Brand awareness (increase the awareness)	0.77					0.95	0.96	0.65	Khalid et al. (2018) & Hani et al. (2018)
20. Brand awareness (recall of product)	0.72								
21. Brand awareness (better recognition)	0.71								
22. Brand association (recognize of fair price)	0.85								
23. Brand association (increase the interest)	0.84								
24. Brand association (satisfied purchase)	0.85								
25. Brand association (technically more reliable)	0.83								
26. Loyalty (increase the loyalty)	0.81								
27. Loyalty (increase the constancy)	0.88								
28. Loyalty (more insist to buy)	0.88								
29. Loyalty (inattentive to other brands)	0.78								
30. Perceived quality (reliability to the claims)	0.88								
31. Perceived quality (believable claims)	0.86								
32. Perceived quality (choosing best product by celebrity endorser)	0.86								

**Table 3.** Differential Validity Matrix by Fornell and Larker Research Model

	Endorser credibility	Endorser congruence	CBBE
Endorser credibility	0.80		
Endorser congruence	0.60	0.95	
CBBE	0.64	0.76	0.81

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The description of the collected data showed that 101 (54%) of the respondents were men, and only 85 (46%) were women. In terms of education, 159 people, equivalent to 85.5% of the total population, had a bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of income, 34% of respondents had an income of more than 50 million Iranian Rials.

The most essential criterion for measuring the relationship between structures in the model is the t-value. If the t-value exceeds 1.96, we might construe the correctness of the relationship between the structures and thus confirm the research hypotheses at a 95% assurance level. According to the information in Table 4, all significant numbers are greater than 1.96, so the relationships are confirmed.

The necessary criterion for measuring the structural model is the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of latent dependent variables. According to Wahab and Giwah (2020),  $R^2$  values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 in the PLS route model are described as weak, moderate, and significant, respectively. These values for endogenous variables are given in Table 4, whose data shows that all the research structures are larger than the average value of 0.33, which indicates a strong fit of the structural model.

Rahman et al. (2021) argue that models with an acceptable structural fit should be able to predict the characteristics of the model's endogenous structures. This means that if the relationships between structures are properly defined in a model, the structures will be able to have a sufficient impact on one other structures' characteristics, and thus, the hypotheses are acceptably confirmed. If the value of  $Q^2$  for an endogenous structure is zero or less than zero, we can infer that the relationship between that endogenous structure and the other structures of the model is not well clarified, and therefore, the model needs some correction.

**Table 4.** Values Related to Criteria  $R^2$  and  $Q^2$

Endogenous variables	T-values	$R^2$	$Q^2$	
			Redundancy with cross-validity (F2)	Subscription with cross validity (H2)
Attractiveness	23.96	0.58	0.43	0.84
Experience and knowledge	25.53	0.56	0.48	0.86
Reliability	38.35	0.80	0.54	0.68
Endorser credibility	-	-	-	0.52
Endorser congruence	90.53	0.36	0.32	0.88
CBBE	29.70	0.63	0.39	0.62

The positive  $Q^2$  values of all variables indicated the high strength of the model's strong predictive power over the research structures, and the fit of the structural model was reconfirmed.

The GOF index in PLS can act as the overall fit indices of the model and can be used to check the validity or quality of the model in general. This index is between zero and one, and the values are close to an indicator of the appropriate quality of the model. The following formula is calculated to be used.

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{Communalities} \cdot R^2} \quad (1)$$

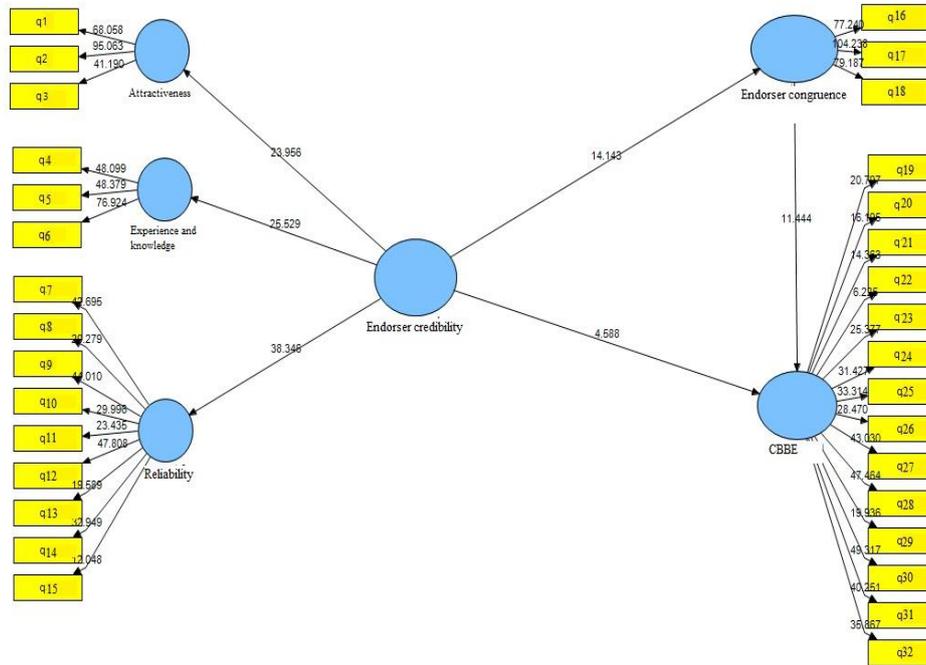
In the present study, GOF was 0.68. This indicates the optimal fit of the model when compared to the three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36 as GOF weak, medium, and strong values.

#### 4.1. Analysis Procedures

The significance coefficients of the model paths indicate whether the research hypotheses are significant or not. To calculate these coefficients, the self-governing command is used; the results for each of the research paths are specified in Table 5. The t-values for all paths among the research variables are more than 1.96, which indicates that their effect on one another is significant. The output of the research model is also shown in Figure 1.

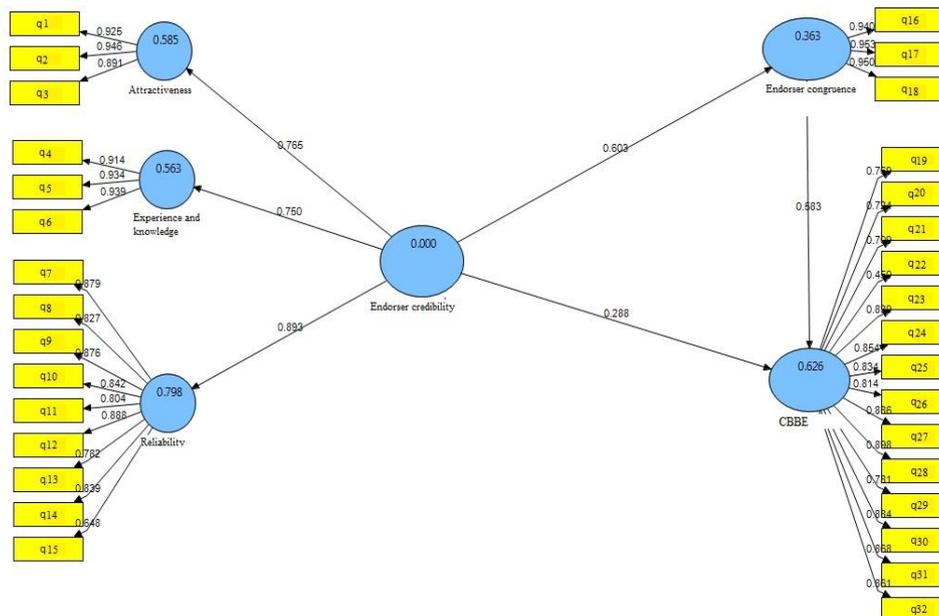
**Table 5.** The Study of Significance Coefficient Z at 95% Confidence Interval

Standard error	P-value	t	Pathname
0.044	0.000	14.14	Congruence ← Endorser credibility
0.043	0.000	4.59	CBBE ← Endorser credibility
0.051	0.000	11.44	CBBE ← Congruence



**Figure 2.** Results of the Structural Model

The significance coefficient of Z was significant among all paths, and their significance was confirmed. Then, it was time to look at how much the dependent variable was explained by the independent variable. Therefore, using the PLS algorithm command, the research model was drawn with standardized coefficients.



**Figure 3.** Results of the Structural Model – Beta Standard Coefficients

The standardized coefficient of the path between endorser credibility and endorser congruence (0.60) indicates that the endorser credibility variable explains 60% of the variations of the endorser congruence variable, while 29% of the variable changes affect CBBE. The path coefficient between the congruence ratio and the CBBE (0.58) shows that the variation of the CBBE variable of 62% is determined by the congruence ratio.

### Mediator Variable Evaluation Results

In the Sobel test, a Z-value is obtained through the following formula. If this value is greater than 1.96, it can be confirmed at the 95% confidence interval that the mediating effect of a variable is significant.

$$Z \text{ -value} = \frac{a * b}{\sqrt{(b^2 * s_a^2) + (a^2 * s_b^2) + (s_a^2 * s_b^2)}} \quad (2)$$

Formula assumptions:

a: The path coefficient between the mediator and the independent variable

b: The path coefficient between the mediator and the dependent variable

sa: The standard error for the route between the mediator and the independent variable

Sb: The standard error for the route between the dependent variable and the mediator

The value of Z in the relationship between endorser credibility-endorser congruence-CBBE is 8.78 and is greater than the value of 1.96, so it can be stated that at 95% confidence interval, the effect of the mediator variable of endorser congruence ratio on the relationship between endorser credibility and CBBE is meaningful and positive. In addition, endorser credibility has a total effect of 64% on the CBBE, of which 29% is direct, and 35% is indirect through the mediating variable of endorser congruence.

### Moderator Variable Evaluation Results

To examine the relationship between the main variables of the present research, it was necessary to examine the qualitative moderator variable of brand type, which was done via the group analysis method (Henseler et al., 2014). Hence, a strong brand type variable data file of 75 was executed. The following figures show the results of the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping commands for the strong brand type.

Table 6 summarizes the results of the research variables for the strong brand type data that are needed to set into the group analysis formula

The same steps were performed for the weak brand type, and the results are presented in Table 7 for 111 data points.

Table 7 summarizes the results of the research variables for the weak brand data that were needed to set into the group analysis formula.

**Table 6.** Results of the Strong Brand Type Moderator Variable

Pathname	Loadings	t	Standard error
Endorser credibility on endorser congruence for strong brand type data	0.75	5.84	0.10
Endorser credibility on CBBE for strong brand type data	0.39	3.66	0.07

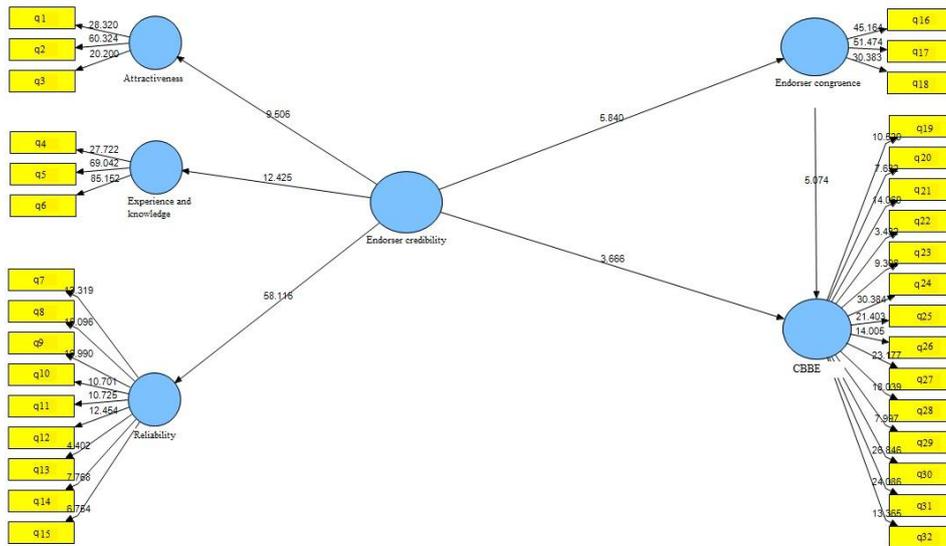


Figure 4. Results of the Structural Model – Strong Brand Type

Table 7. Results of the Weak Brand Type Moderator Variable

Pathname	Loadings	t	Standard error
Endorser credibility on endorser congruence for weak brand type data	0.62	12.57	0.05
Endorser credibility on CBBE for weak brand type data	0.23	2.789	0.05

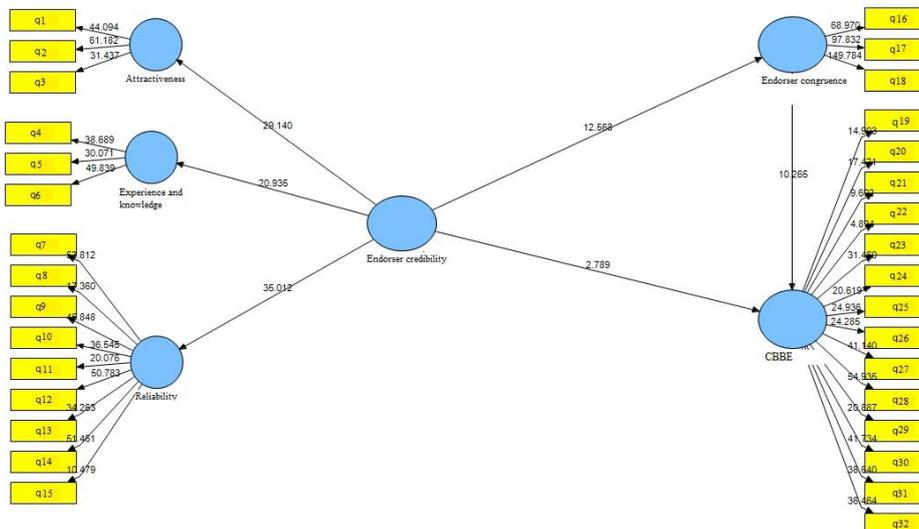


Figure 5. Results of the Structural Model – Weak Brand Type

Now, having the values obtained from the implementation of the models, it was possible to calculate the significant value of the moderator effect of the variable of the brand type in the relationship between the paths of endorser credibility variables, i.e., congruence and endorser credibility-CBBE, using group analysis formula (Henseler et al., 2014). The t-value was obtained from the following equation:

$$T = \frac{R1 - R2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{(n1-1)^2}{n1} * s1^2\right) + \left(\frac{(n2-1)^2}{n2} * s2^2\right)}} \quad (3)$$

Formula assumptions:

R1: Coefficient loading factor in route between endorser credibility and endorser congruence for strong brand type.

R2: Coefficient loading factor in route between endorser credibility and endorser congruence for weak brand type.

n1: Statistical community of strong brand type

n2: Statistical community of weak brand type

S1: Standard error value for the route between endorser credibility and endorser congruence for strong brand type data.

S2: Standard error value for the route between endorser credibility and endorser congruence for weak brand type data.

The value of a significant number for the effect of the brand type moderator on the path between the endorser credibility variable and endorser congruence variable was 0.52. Since the obtained t-value was less than 1.96, it could be concluded that at the 95% confidence interval, the brand type variable did not moderate in this regard. In other words, in the statistical sample of this study, the effect of endorser credibility on endorser congruence in terms of brand type was not different, meaning that both weak and strong brand types had positive and significant effects on the relationship between these variables.

Then the same steps were evaluated for the endorser credibility path and CBBE. In this case, the t-value was 1.820, which was less than 1.96, so it could be concluded that at the 95% confidence interval, the brand type (strong or weak) does not moderate the relationship between endorser credibility and CBBE.

**Table 8.** Investigation of the Main Hypotheses of the Research

Research hypotheses	Path coefficient	t	Test result
Endorser credibility has a positive and important impact on endorser congruence.	0.60	14.14	Confirmed
Endorser credibility has a positive and important impact on CBBE.	0.92	4.95	Confirmed
Endorser congruence has a positive and important impact on CBBE.	0.58	11.44	Confirmed
The moderator variable of brand type in the endorser credibility relationship has a positive and important impact on endorser congruence.	-	0.35	Rejected
The moderator variable of brand type in the endorser credibility relationship has a positive and important impact on CBBE.	-	1.82	Rejected

## 5. Implications and Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between endorser credibility and CBBE with the mediating role of endorser congruence and brand type moderation.

As regards the findings of the research on the first hypothesis, the relationship between endorser credibility and the congruence ratio showed that this structure has a direct, significant, and positive effect on the congruence ratio. In line with this research, the theory of conformity between the endorser and the brand proposed by Gilal et al. (2020) asserted that in cases where

there is a good relationship between the endorser and the advertised brand, product, and target market, the effectiveness of using celebrities is increased dramatically. Alguacil et al. (2021) argued that the credibility of an endorser only enhances its power of attracting potential consumers but has no influence on the congruence. Likewise, other researchers such as Gaid and Rached (2017), Cuomo et al. (2019), and Rohmawati (2020) showed that higher congruence would result in the perception of the celebrity as more credible.

Findings on the second hypothesis constitute one of the most important theories in the field of celebrity endorsers as the theory of credibility or reliability of the source or the celebrity endorser. The face beauty of an endorser is the most important factor in determining the attractiveness of a celebrity endorser, which is in line with the research of Yongdan et al. (2019). Between the knowledge and experience variables, the skill of an endorser has the most positive effect on celebrity credibility, which has been confirmed by Andita et al. (2021), too. Between the reliability items, warm relationship with others and reputation of an endorser have the most positive influence on celebrity credibility, which has been confirmed by Jensen (2021), too. Gilal et al. (2020) showed that credibility is a determining factor in choosing an endorser, and Esmailpour et al. (2017) considered it as the most important feature of an endorser. Consistently with the present study, the positive effect of endorser credibility on CBBE has been confirmed in various studies, including Haji Ahmad et al. (2019), Mahmud and Anggraini (2020), Rohmawati (2020), and Muslih et al. (2021). Nevertheless, Bramantya and Jatra (2016) and Vegita Eka (2017) stated that brand equity is unaffected by celebrity endorsement.

Regarding the findings on the third hypothesis, it was found that congruence has a direct, positive, and significant effect on CBBE. Different studies have shown that congruence increases affect transfer, transmitting positive valuations from celebrity to the brand (Blasche et al., 2015; Spry et al., 2011). Results of the current study are in line with the findings of Linsner et al. (2021) who showed that the perceived congruity positively affects the brand equity of celebrities. However, confirming its effect on CBBE (as a special type of brand equity) could be considered as the originality of the present study. As per Table 2, the three items of congruence (celebrity endorser, product type/celebrity endorser, and brand personality/celebrity endorser and target market) are on the same level of importance, and the marketers shall take into consideration all of these variables in order to choose an effective celebrity endorser. These findings are in line with the research of Linsner et al. (2021).

The findings of the study on the fourth hypothesis indicated that although the brand type forms a positive and significant relationship between the endorser credibility path and its congruency, the value of a significant number for the moderating effect of the brand type on the path between the celebrity endorser variable and its congruence is equal to 0.518. Since the *t*-value is less than 1.96, it can be concluded that at the 95% confidence interval, the variable of brand type does not moderate this relationship.

Many researchers have studied different moderators in the context of celebrity endorsement – e.g., brand credibility (Rohmawati, 2020), brand trust (Febrian & Fadly, 2021) – but the consideration of brand type and the identification of its role in the celebrity endorsement context are considered as the originality of the current study.

The results of the analysis of this path can be considered as another research innovation of the present study.

Based on the findings on the fifth hypothesis, the brand type could not moderate the relationship between endorser credibility and CBBE. A study in Australia in 2009 (as cited in Spry et al., 2011) showed that there is no difference between the brand type in the relationship between a celebrity endorser and CBBE, which was confirmed by the findings of the fifth hypothesis of this study, too.

## Managerial Implications

Marketing managers could use the findings of this analysis effectively. According to the results of the current study, the rankings of the sub-factors of credibility are the celebrity's attractiveness, experience, knowledge, and reliability. Nonetheless, their impact coefficients are in a range and very close to one another. Unfortunately, according to the authors' practical studies, marketers have only focused on the attractiveness of a celebrity, and we generally see people in advertisements who only have facial attractiveness without being trusted by the people or having experience and knowledge. They may not have the necessary background knowledge and experience about the product being advertised, so it is recommended to all activists in this industry to consider these three factors together in order to assess the reputation of a celebrity. A celebrity endorser should be regarded as reliable due to their appearance, experience, and reliability. Because endorser credibility has a direct effect on the endorser congruence, we can say that credibility could create congruency. The two should not be considered as two separate variables, and congruency as a mediating variable could increase the effect of credibility. Therefore, if the celebrity endorser has been chosen just based on credibility and without considering congruency, it may cause no result for the marketers and managers.

Based on the results of the current research, an increase in the endorser credibility will directly and indirectly, through endorser congruence, affect CBBE. This, in turn, means an increase in all the four dimensions of CBBE, including brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Therefore, the celebrity endorser needs to be selected based on his or her expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness.

A brand is an important asset for a company, and CBBE shall be considered as a strategic point. The current study finds that celebrity endorsement is a beneficial method for increasing CBBE indirectly through enhancing the endorser congruence, and it offers recommendations for finding an effective endorser. The results suggest that endorser credibility and its congruence or match-up stimulate CBBE. The direct effect of the congruence on CBBE shows that it always should be considered as a key point, and the endorser needs to be congruent with the type of product, brand personality, and market audience.

It also shows that the strength or weakness of a brand has no impact on the effectiveness of using a celebrity in an advertisement. In both types of brands, namely, strong or weak, endorser credibility will have a positive impact on CBBE. According to the authors' practical studies, many marketers think that a celebrity endorser should be used just for strong brands or introducing a brand in the market; however, the present study showed that this type of marketing could be effective for weak brands, too. This finding provides some guidance for weak firms seeking tools or strategies for developing their CBBE. They should choose a celebrity according to the mentioned variables like credibility and congruence and increase their brand equity. Therefore, it seems that we need more research on the nature of Iranian culture and its effects on the effectiveness of using celebrities.

Since the gender segregation of the respondents showed that men tend to pay more attention to physical attractiveness than women, marketers are advised to focus more on physical attractiveness when it comes to marketing men's products.

As the present study shows, the loyalty of people with an average income level between 20 and 50 million Iranian Rials to a brand is more influenced by the celebrity endorser. Hence, it is recommended that owners of companies and factories use celebrity endorsers for products targeted at middle-income people as potential buyers.

Hence, marketers, despite having a weak or a strong brand, should choose their celebrity endorser based on his or her credibility and congruence together. The congruence will

enhance the effect of endorser credibility on CBBE. The advertisement using celebrity endorsement will be more effective for potential men customers with middle-range income.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

There are a few limitations in this research that need to be mentioned and considered by the researchers. First, we considered just one moderating variable, and other potential variables could be considered by other researchers such as type of the good/service, domestic/international brands, or Iranian/non Iranian celebrities. Moreover, we examined the effect of credibility and congruency on CBBE. Other researchers could address the other aspects like emotional attachment between celebrities and customers. Due to the importance of accuracy in completing the questionnaire and its direct effect on the research results, as well as considering the effect of time and place on the results of research, it is suggested that future researchers replicate similar studies in different places, at different times of the year, and with the help of participants from various socio-cultural backgrounds.

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