

Research Paper

## Parasocial Relationships: A Study of the Effect of Celebrity Endorsement on Consumer Behaviour in India

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### ABSTRACT

The paper examines the impact of parasocial relationships on consumer behaviour, with a specific focus on the Indian context. This takes a global outlook on celebrity endorsements among countries' influence and assesses the rationality of consumer responses to such endorsements. The paper is based on secondary research data collected from various researchers and primary data from a small group of consumers in India through a Google Form. Data analysis was conducted in MS Excel to categorise and interpret demographic variables. This study aimed to examine the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer behavior, focusing on dimensions such as purchase intention, brand loyalty and perceived credibility. Data was collected from 79 participants through an online questionnaire. The analysis of the questionnaire showed that a section of the respondents claimed to feel an emotional bond and a sense of trust with the public figure leading to consumption. In contrast, there was another section of respondents who claimed to be wary of these endorsements, being aware of their transactional nature. They chose to do their own research about the features of a product before buying it. The findings of this study have demonstrated that the celebrity endorsements play a significant role in the consumer behaviour, specifically raising awareness of the brand, influencing purchase decisions and increasing brand credibility. These play distinct roles in shaping consumer responses.

**Keywords:** *Parasocial Relationships, Celebrity Endorsements, Consumer Behaviour, Brand Loyalty*

Celebrities are being treated like role models in today's world. People's living style is changing to the style of the celebrity. This creates a great impact on the buying behavior of the person. Celebrities are not constantly influencing consumer behaviour, however, their impact is quite poignant and pronounced when shaping an individual's perception of a product. To emulate the celebrity, it is often assumed that using the endorsed product by the celebrity or influencer would lead the consumer into living a lifestyle similar to theirs. (Khatri, 2006). Celebrity Endorsements act as a credible means of "money burning". This is because we live in a world of products where the value a consumer obtains from purchasing something comes from what it represents, not just how it functions. This could be for reasons of social standing<sup>2</sup>. People want to wear clothes which are appropriate to their social standing. Specifically, a consumer that observes messages for

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two different firms' products, one product's message containing a celebrity endorsement and the other without, believes the celebrity endorsed product will have more purchases and so be of higher value (Clark and Horstman, 2003).

Khatri (2006) studied that celebrity endorsement is the Promotion strategy to attract the customers. Analyzing the current market reveals the growing need of the marketers to collaborate with different famous personalities to relate to their brands mission and to create unique brand identity. This enhances the visibility of the company's brand or product, resulting in high expenditure for the company to use that strategy. However, nowadays it is used to be a powerful strategic tool to get maximum profit (Khatri, 2006). It also shows that this can carry risk, because there is uncertainty whether the celebrity can come up with the sales generation of the firm. However, it does create publicity and gives popularity to the company and the brand. This can increase the expectation of the customers by aligning the company promises with the credibility of the famous personalities. There are certain perspectives where the real person can work better than the celebrities' endorsement. This is not always successful.

The persuasive power of digital influencers over their followers can be analyzed from the perspective of parasocial interactions. Parasocial interactions are a type of psychological relationship association, structured unilaterally by the fan with media figures or celebrities, which establishes an imaginary feeling of intimacy, as if a real social relationship had existed. Despite having little or no connection with their favorite media figures, viewers nevertheless identify with them and feel connected to them. When they learn more about the influencers, some viewers even develop a genuine bond with media celebrities (Folkvord, 2020). Parasocial interaction occurs unilaterally, non-dialectically and remains close to collaborative development (Hartmann, 2011). Social media interactions create interpersonal relationships and solid emotional connections between celebrities and their followers, even without direct knowledge of one other. Subsequently, most followers think their relationships with influencers are unique and personal, even when they realize this is an illusion (Dibble, Hartmann & Rosaen, 2016).

The growing social media profile has prompted recent studies (e.g., Smith, 2010) investigating how venues such as Twitter and Instagram cultivate customer relationships with celebrities and/or media personalities. According to Chung, S. and Cho, H. (2017), social media sites are a suitable medium for creating parasocial relationships. Parasocial relationships refer to connections enabled by social media platforms between users and media personalities/celebrities (Rubin & Step, 2000). The omnipresence of influencers and celebrities on digital platforms, along with engaging content can positively impact the purchasing intention of a consumer. These individuals, through their visibility and uniqueness, can make their endorsement seem genuine and authentic. Consumer behaviour gets affected when the parasocial interactions occur more frequently and are strengthened over time between fans and celebrities (Dibble, 2015). With this strengthening bond between early adults and their idols we see how this increases the purchasing power (Bond, 2016).

Consumer behaviour has gained much attention in the past due to its popularity among brands. Today, consumers are looking towards social media influencers and celebrity endorsements to fulfill their basic and daily needs. Consumer behavior profoundly impacts every stage of product development and marketing, with varying factors influencing

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different age groups. Most millennials in India are driven by celebrities such as film stars and sports celebrities (Kamel, 2020).

Parasocial relationships encourage consumers to seek advice and purchase recommended commodities, thereby strengthening perceived closeness and trust with the celebrity or influencer. This perceived closeness fosters credibility, significantly impacting their consumer behaviour, from raising brand awareness to driving actual purchases. This is similar to how people rely on their closest friends for important information, suggestions or approval on different behavioural choices.

According to Moayery (2019), self-control makes a person more able to make wiser and more rational decisions, especially in shopping activities. In this case, parasocial relationships, which are dominated by emotional aspects, sometimes make consumers unable to think clearly to make decisions rationally, which results in impulsive purchases.

Communicating green messages to millennials can be well reached through the presence of celebrities in ad campaigns (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016). Panda & Thakkar (2017) stated that the star factor of celebrities represents a fundamental core in ads that leads to its popularity and makes them easily remembered and retrieved as they are displayed or purchased. Celebrities play an influential role in the millennial generation (Chan, 2011). Despite millennials not being easily swayed, they show responsiveness as well as a favourable attitude towards all celebrity-involved ads (Lotonina, 2019). Millennials are more likely to be drastically inspired by the meanings and messages endorsed by their favourite celebrity in an advertisement (Chan, 2011).

This study understands the growing power of parasocial relationships and celebrity endorsements and how they are affecting consumer behaviour in India. It seeks to understand the emotional bond created between a celebrity and their follower, and how this created intimacy increases purchasing intentions. Furthermore, taking sustainability to importance, research also examines the role of sustainable practices in brand promotions. It highlights how brands can bring eco-friendly solutions to their promotions to foster lasting relationships with consumers.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### ***History of parasocial relationships and how they are built***

The term parasocial relationship was coined by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl in 1956, however, they have existed long before the term was created. The official definition for parasocial relationships “are one-sided relationships, where one person extends emotional energy, interest and time, and the other party, the persona, is completely unaware of the other’s existence” (Bennett et al., 2020). This relationship could be associated with the attachment theory which is defined as a long-term relationship or bond “between people, including those between a parent and child and between romantic partners” (Cherry, 2023). Attachment is the key factor in a parasocial relationship. If there is no attachment there is no relationship created. Media today is always evolving and constantly changing with time. Over the years, communication has become more effective because of technology. Zhuang (2018) states that “in order to maximize the effects of this online communication and marketing, researchers tend to investigate the relationship between followers and social media personae”.

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### ***Establishment and effect of celebrity endorsements***

The use of celebrities serves as a foundation to enhance feelings towards a brand product. The mindset towards the commercials is identified as a psychological framework that examines how a person perceives their surroundings and structures their responses to it (Haghirian & Madlberger 2005). Today the mass media are flooded through descriptions along with information concerning superstars, and because of a consequence, celebrities have high repute, distinctive traits, and fascinating descriptions according to the community's opinion (Giles 2000; McCracken 1989).

Celebrities regularly emerge in promotions in connection among customer goods or services. Celebrities through their high reach of audience help differentiate an advertisement of a brand from other forms of marketing pieces and generate high memory rates as well as distinguish brand description, creating trade and income. It is well established that firms allocate a significant portion of their capital towards public figures- utilising the superstars to increase brand awareness (Agrawal and Wagner 1995; Erdogan 1999; Kaikati 1987; Mathur et al. 1997; Gabor et al. 1987).

McCracken (1998) proposes that celebrities are considered like memorial, entertainers or representatives of the business organization. Investigation has established that spokesperson endorsement influences consumers' mind-set and it may change the feelings of customers towards the commercial and products as well. This may help in the improvement of the acquisition plan and, as an outcome, increase in trade.

Rai and Sharma (2013) studied the influence of eight different variables (attractiveness, controversy, credibility, gender, performance, popularity, profession, and territory) on consumer purchase behaviour. The research focused on two objectives: to know the effect of celebrity endorsement on consumer behaviour regarding branded and unbranded products; to examine the attributes that contribute to the success of having a celebrity in a product advertisement.

### ***How parasocial relationships drive consumer behaviour***

Daneshvary and Schwer (2000) worked on the association endorsement and consumer intention to purchase. They found a positive relationship between income with celebrity endorsed products. High-income group people are more likely to buy than less income groups. Women were more inclined to purchase celebrity-endorsed products than men. Education has a negative relationship with celebrity-endorsed products. Less educated people are more influenced to buy than college students.

Smith (2024) investigates the evolution of social media influencers in shaping consumer behaviour. The study highlights that influencers not only serve as product endorsers but also, are regarded as trusted sources of information. The research indicates a significant correlation between influencer credibility and consumer trust which leads to higher purchase intentions. The results reveal that influencer recommendations are often perceived as more relatable and trustworthy for the consumers as compared to traditional advertisements.

Studies indicate that individuals often engage in greater social media contact with the bloggers they follow (Lou, C., and Kim, H.K., 2019). Companies often exploit the parasocial relationship between celebrities and their followers as a tactic to enhance brand credibility and customer buying intentions. These relationships instill a sense of authenticity

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and emotional bond. However, this choice can be limited and made more accurate by selecting a small group of social media influencers and developing a parasocial connection with them. Consequently, the purchase intention is likely to increase as an influencer endorses a certain brand as they encourage their followers to make similar decisions to purchase it.

In comparison to the 2017 study, Taylor examines the role of influencers in shaping consumer behaviour in the fashion industry. The findings indicate that fashion influencers significantly impact brand awareness and purchase decisions through engaging visual content and personal narratives. Taylor emphasizes that influencers who provide honest reviews and showcase their genuine experiences with products are more likely to drive consumer interest and loyalty (Taylor, J., 2017). Research indicates that 92% of consumers trust recommendations from individuals over brands, highlighting the potential of influencer marketing in establishing credibility (Smith and Taylor, 2021).

Holehonnur, et al., (2009) demonstrated that value equity is the consumer's objective to evaluate a product or service which is a key determinant of purchase intention. In the context of celebrity endorsements, when a celebrity endorses a product, it is perceived to offer higher value which significantly enhances the consumer's purchasing intention.

They found that the consumer's objective evaluations, referred to as value equity, primarily determines the desire to act upon the intention to purchase. Supporting these findings, Vogel, et al., (2008) found a significant correlation between relationship equity and purchase intention. They argued that customers develop familiarity with the brand and establish a trust when it is associated with their admired public figures of idols. Similarly, Yuan, et al., (2019); Hennig-Thurau, et al., (2002); Patterson and Smith (2001) found that equity, satisfaction, and celebrity endorsements enhanced consumer intention to buy a product or service.

### ***Sustainability as an aspect of celebrity endorsements***

Parker (2023) explores the relationship between social media influencers and consumer purchasing decisions, emphasizing the role of emotional connection. The study indicates that consumers are more likely to buy products when they feel an emotional bond with the influencer promoting them. This research highlights the importance of building genuine relationships between influencers and their followers to drive purchasing behaviour effectively. With the help of celebrities, consumer attitudes can be changed, purchasing intentions can be enlarged and profit can be extended. However, the company should pick the right celebrity. So, it is very important to grab consumers' attention and interest among those similar advertisements by using a celebrity who has unique characteristics that can truly affect consumers' buying behaviour (J.D.T, 2017).

According to Niinimäki (2011), sustainable fashion must take into account the phases of design, manufacturing, logistics, sales, use and disposal, implementing strategies that increase the time of use of the product, ensuring that it can be modified, and if the raw material can be recycled, sustainable strategies to product development of clothing will be presented and afterwards these will be related to a product methodology.

Previous studies have focused on the influence of parasocial relationships on consumer buying intention. However, limited attention has been given to how celebrity endorsements, especially on digital platforms, mediate this influence. Besides celebrities, the influencers

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and micro influencers, being at a highly influential position in this current age, were also discussed. The gender gap was also taken into account, understanding how males and females differ on the basis of how much they are affected by parasocial relationships. Taking sustainability to an importance and the ethics of celebrity endorsements, we strive to dig deeper into the consumer's perception and insight on it.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### ***Research Objectives***

- To understand the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviours.
- To analyse how parasocial relationships on digital platforms drive the consumer behaviour to make changes in their daily expenditure.
- To ensure the sustainability of the endorsement and to understand the importance of looking out for the future generations
- To understand the responsibility of public figures on using their influential power for good.

For this research, the researchers designed a questionnaire consisting of 4 sections with 20 questions in total. The questionnaire included multiple-choice questions to gather quantitative data, as well as open-ended questions at the end to gain deeper and more detailed insights into consumer interactions. The researchers used means of Google Forms as it provides an easy-to-use web interface for designing and developing web based survey questionnaires. The Google Form provides various options for capturing the data from the multiple answers (Warde & Moreo, 2001).

The eligibility criteria for an individual to fill this form was that they had to be over the age of 16 as they have reached an age where they are capable of making autonomous purchasing decisions, and a citizen of India. 79 people participated as respondents in the survey. The form included questions about demographics, parasocial relationships, consumer behaviour along with sustainability factors.

The survey was promoted through social media platforms to ensure a wider reach and the correspondents were aware of their voluntary nature of their participation. The ethical considerations adhered to including confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study as per their convenience. Participants consented to participate in the research after reading and understanding the instructions. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality with the data being used strictly for academic purposes.

#### ***Limitations***

The respondents might not be fully transparent due to experimenter biases while answering the questions. There was a significant margin of error due to the small sample size which did not accurately represent the perspectives of a larger group. Using google forms hindered the sense of human interaction as the participants were digitally answering the questions and did not have the opportunity to ask for clarifications. Respondents may misinterpret the questions which could hinder their correct analysis of the researchers' study.

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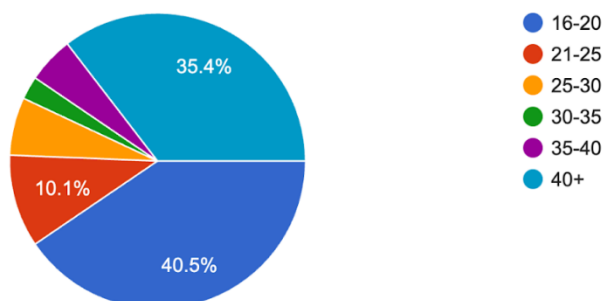
## Data analysis

### Section A- Demographics

Age (in years)

Age (in years)

79 responses

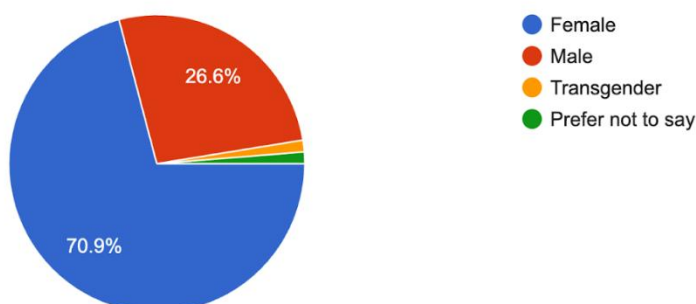


40.5% of the participants lie in the age group of 16-20 years, 35.4% to ages 40 and above, 10.1% ranging from 21-25 years, 6.3% in 25-30, 5.1% ranging between 35-40 years and 2.5% to 30-35 years. According to the data collected, the participants consisted of 70.9% of the female sex, with only 26.6 percent being males and around 2.5 percent in 'Transgender' and 'Prefer not say.'

### Gender Ratio

Gender

79 responses

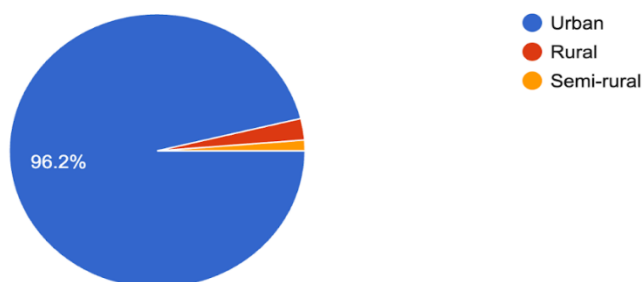


It can be inferred that 70.9% of the respondents are female, while 26.6% of them were male. 1.3% chose 'transgender' and the other 1.3% 'prefer to not say.'

### Region

Region

79 responses



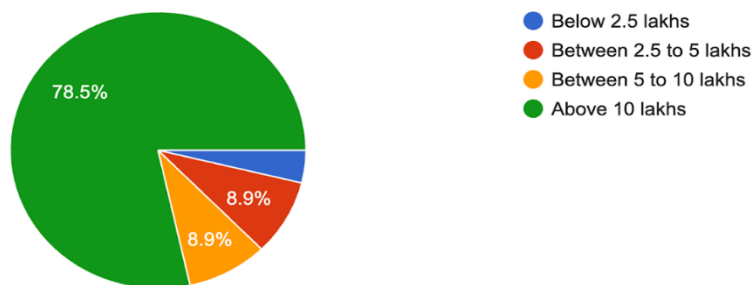
The above chart demonstrates 96.2 percent people belonging to urban areas while 2.5 percent residing in rural and 1.3 percent in semi-rural.

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### *Income Level*

Annual family income

79 responses



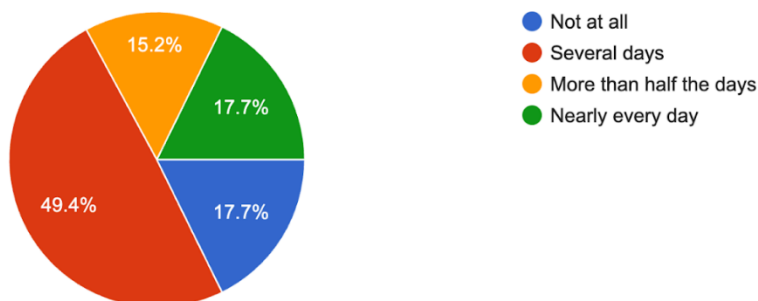
The data collected shows 78.5 percent people have an income of above 10 lakhs, 8.9 percent having between 2.5 to 5 lakhs and between 5 lakhs to 10 lakhs, and the remaining 3.8% belonging to below annual income 2.5 lakhs.

### **Section B- Parasocial Relationships**

#### *Frequency of Following Influencers and Celebrities*

Do you follow social media influencers and celebrities?

79 responses

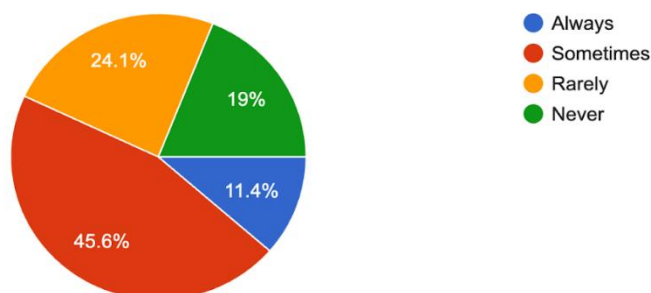


The following pie-chart shows the summary of people who follow celebrities and influencers. 49.4% said they tend to follow celebrities on a several day basis while 17.7 said they follow public figures nearly everyday and not at all. Furthermore, 15.2% of respondents said they follow celebrities more than half the days.

#### *Frequency of Tracking Updates*

Do you follow updates about your favorite influencer or celebrity's personal life?

79 responses



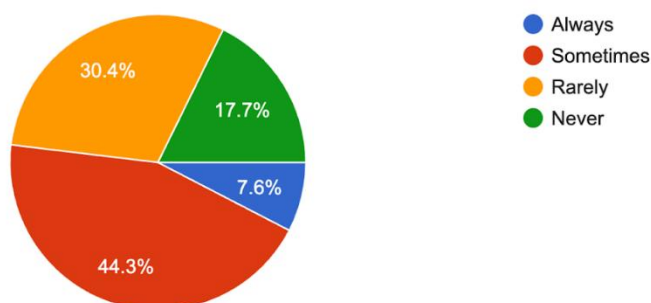
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11.4% out of 79 respondents always follow updates about their favourite celebrity's personal life whereas, 45.6% sometimes do. 24.1% rarely follow their updates and 19% do not follow celebrities at all.

### *Perceived Credibility of the Celebrity*

When you are watching an advertisement including your favourite celebrity or influencer, do you feel a sense of trust and connection?

79 responses

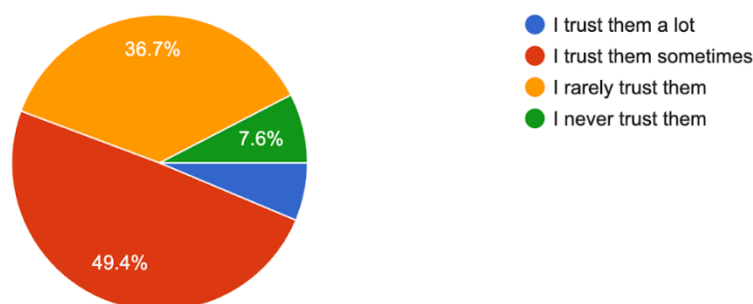


The information conveyed above suggested that 44.3% of consumers sometimes feel connected to a celebrity when viewing advertisements endorsed by them. Whereas, 30.4% rarely feel a connection, 17.7% never feel a sense of trust with their favourite celebrities and 7.6% always trust their favourite public figures.

### *Overall Trust in Celebrity Opinions*

How much do you trust the opinions of celebrities or influencers you follow?

79 responses



49.4% of respondents responded to this question answering that they trust the opinions of celebrities and influencers online sometimes, 36.7% responded they rarely trust them while 7.6% responded they never trust them. 6.3% participants trust them a lot.

### *Experiences with public figures and how their interactions affect their bond with them*

- **Emotional bond and trust:** Respondents often feel a sense of emotional connection and bond with the celebrity they follow. One of the respondents said, “their content offers comfort and inspiration, creating a one-sided bond that feels personal. While it's motivating, I also remind myself it's curated and not truly reciprocal.” It was felt by multiple participants that an endorsement also improved their image of a brand and helped reach a wider audience.
- **Marketing and paid promotions:** Few respondents claimed to feel weary of these parasocial bonds as they are aware of the transactional nature of these relationships

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making it difficult to tell what's authentic and what is strategic partnership between a brand and a public image. They expressed their thoughts on social media acting as a catalyst for influencers to increase their digital presence and amplify their perceived influence.

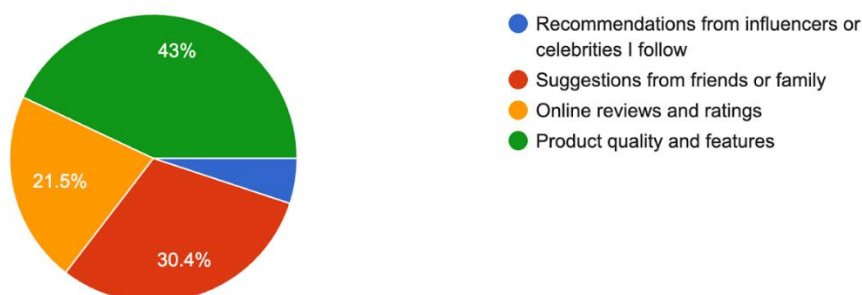
- **Weary but also engaging:** Participants are aware of the transactional value of these relationships and have expressed their feelings of disappointment regarding certain celebrities who will take part in unethical practices for money. However, living in the age of social media, it is impossible to not gain sight of them and respondents claimed completely and do engage in their content occasionally.
- **Pretentious and superficial:** Respondents believe that “endorsements with brands are merely a cash grab and the celebrities linked with them are only there for clout and influence. They work for personal gains’ to acquire a high financial position and gain influential power.”
- **Relatability:** Over time, I realized how curated even “relatable” content is, which made me more critical of influencer culture and the illusion of closeness in parasocial bonds.
- **Emulate their lifestyle:** A public figure endorsing a product or brand made many of the respondents feel inspired to purchase it as it would lead to them emulating the characteristics and the fashion sense of the celebrity. Participants also claimed that these endorsements made them feel motivated to engage in self development and growth. One of respondents claimed that, “Following authors and celebrities online often feels intimate; like they’re part of my world. It’s comforting, inspiring even, but sometimes I forget they don’t know me. Parasocial bonds feel real until reality reminds me it’s one-sided. Still, their presence often feels like quiet companionship.”
- **No parasocial bond made:** Some participants reported that they do not develop a perceived relationship with the celebrities or influencers, and as a result, their opinions and purchasing decisions remain unaffected.

### Section C- Consumer Behaviour

#### Primary Purchase Decision Drivers

What influences you most when deciding to buy a product?

79 responses



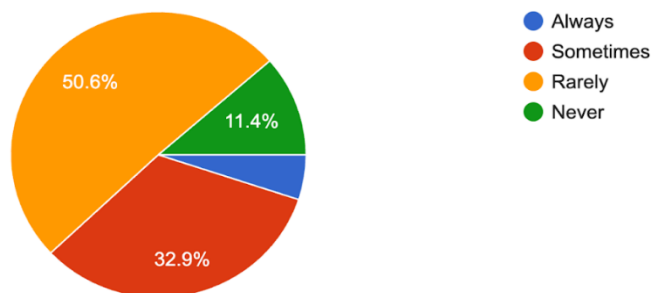
43% responses indicate that they are driven by looking at the product's features and quality, 30.4% of consumers are influenced by suggestions made from friends and family, 21.5% look for online reviews and ratings and 5.1% are recommendations from influencers and celebrities they follow online.

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### *Frequency of Celebrity-Influence Purchases*

How often are your purchases influenced by famous personalities?

79 responses

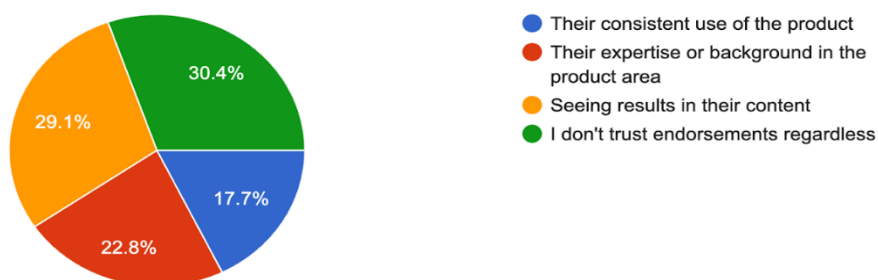


The purpose of this question was to examine the extent to which consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by public figures. The results revealed a notable trend, with 50.6% of respondents indicating that they are 'rarely' influenced. Furthermore, 32.9% responded that their purchases are influenced 'sometimes' by public figures. 11.4% responded they are never affected by influencers in their consumption behaviour, whereas 5.1% are always influenced by famous personalities.

### *Factors Driving Trust in Celebrity-Endorsed Products*

What makes you trust a product recommended by a public figure?

79 responses

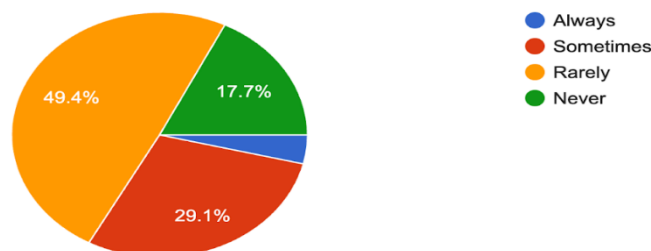


The aim of the question was to investigate what factors contribute to making a product trustworthy when being recommended by a celebrity. The participants' answers to this question provide insight into varied intentions and perceptions when purchasing a product. Specifically, 29.1% responded they like to see the results in the content, 22.8% trusted the expertise of the product. Notably, a majority of 30.4% responded that they don't trust endorsements regardless and 17.7% trust them based on their consistent use of the product.

### *Action on Celebrity Marketing Influence*

How often do you act upon those needs of purchasing something marketed by a celebrity or influencer?

79 responses



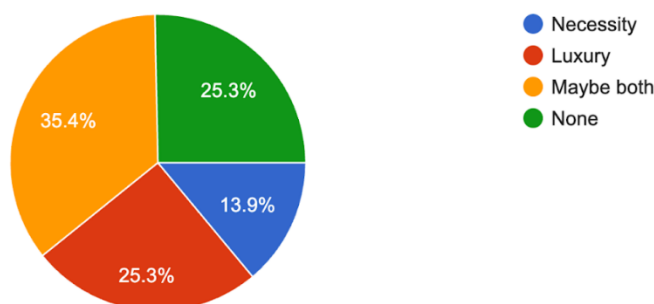
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According to the data collected, it was observed that only 3.8% of consumers always acted upon those needs of purchasing endorsed products. 49.4% of consumers rarely purchase products marketed by influencers or celebrities. 29.1% responded to sometimes making purchases influenced by endorsements while 17.7% respondents are never driven to consumption by celebrity endorsements.

### *Motivations Behind Celebrity-Endorsed Purchases: Necessity Versus Luxury*

When you purchase a product endorsed by a celebrity, do you purchase it out of necessity or luxury purposes?

79 responses



When asked about endorsements getting purchased out of necessity or luxury purposes, 35.4% chose “maybe both”, indicating a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. Meanwhile, 25.3% of the participants admitted to making such decisions for luxury purposes, and 13.9% stated necessity. The remaining 25.3% choose “none” as they do not buy it neither out of necessity nor luxury.

### *Opinions on the influence of celebrities on consumers' buying power*

Consumers who are always affected by celebrity influence

- **Parasocial Relationship as a Driving Force:** Responses to this question suggest that by purchasing products endorsed or used by celebrities, individuals often experience a sense of identification and emotional closeness. This behaviour stems from parasocial relationships wherein consumers believe the endorsements to be authentic as a result of their trust formed with the public figure, leading to consumption which symbolically connects them to their idols.
- **Celebrity Power in Increasing Exposure:** Participants' answer to this question provides insight into how celebrity endorsements might not be a leading force to consumption, but it helps to amplify the reach of a product to reach audiences who may not have discovered it otherwise. Respondents claimed that while they might not regularly make a purchase based on endorsed content, it does help in raising the visibility of the brand. One of the respondents said, “They might bring new brands to light in consideration for pushing items, but not directly influencing the purchase.”
- **Trend-Driven Buying Behaviour:** The result of this item highlights consumers' desire to fit in within a digitally mediated social landscape often shaping consumer behaviour. Respondents claimed to be affected by this desire of following online trends in their purchasing decisions. One respondent expressed, “I try not to be swayed by celebrity endorsements, but I admit that trendy products promoted by them often catch my attention and sometimes influence impulse purchases.”

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Consumers who are not always affected by Celebrity Influence

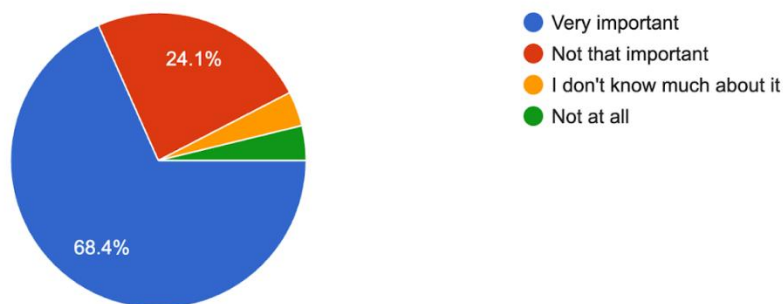
- **Awareness without Action:** Findings from this question suggests that participants have claimed to notice the endorsed content however, they remain unaffected and chose to do their own research on the features and good reviews. As one participant explained, “I usually do additional research before purchasing, so their impact is more about sparking curiosity than directly convincing me to buy something.”
- **Role of Income:** Many respondents believe that they purchase products as per their requirements and financial budget. They tend to value necessities over embellished endorsements.
- **Consumers remain unaffected:** It was revealed that several participants felt cynical towards celebrity endorsements, recognising their transactional nature. Consequently, they choose to make their own decisions based on their research, product quality, features and utility. It was expressed by one participant, “I usually rely more on personal research or recommendations from people I trust. While I might notice a product because of them, it’s never the deciding factor in whether I actually purchase it.”

### Section D- Sustainability

#### *Consumer Perception of Sustainability Importance*

1) How important is sustainability to you?

79 responses

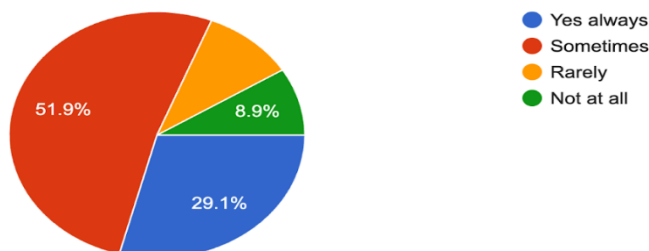


When inquired upon how important sustainability was, a notable majority of participants responded sustainability was very important, specifically 68.4%. A total of 24.1% of respondents reported sustainability was not particularly important to them while 3.8% indicated limited awareness of the concept, and another 3.8% stated sustainability held no importance to them.

#### *Role of Sustainability in Purchase Decision-Making*

2) Do you look at sustainability before you decide to purchase a product?

79 responses



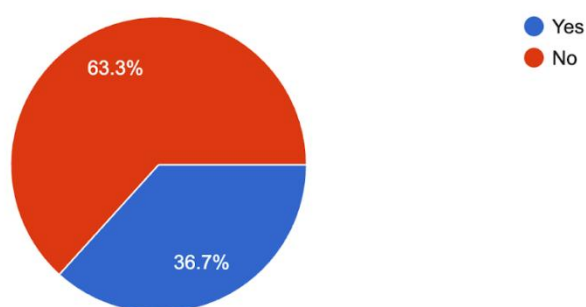
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When participants were asked whether they consider sustainability before purchasing a product, a majority (59.1%) responded 'sometimes,' while 29.1% answered 'yes always.' 8.9% responded 'not at all,' while another 10.1% rarely looked at the sustainability before purchasing.

### *Influence of Endorsements on Overlooking Sustainability*

3) Have you ever bought a product because an influencer or celebrity recommended it despite it being not sustainable?

79 responses

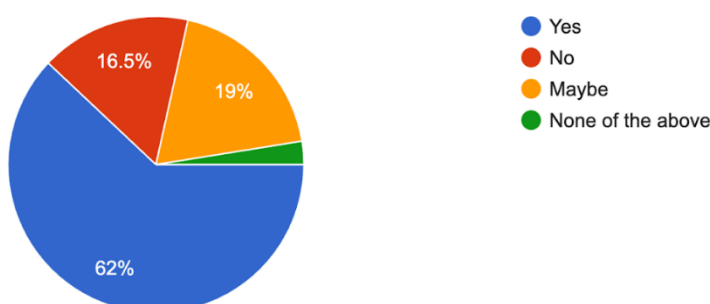


The item collects data showing 63.3% of the respondents never purchased a non-sustainable product endorsed by a celebrity. In contrast, 36.7% reported having made such a purchase.

### *Perceived Responsibility of Celebrities in Promoting Sustainability*

4) Do you think it is the responsibility of the celebrity to promote sustainable products?

79 responses



The responses indicate that 62% of the respondents believe it is the responsibility of the celebrities to promote sustainable and eco-friendly products while endorsing a product or brand. In contrast, 16.5% did not share this view, 19% were uncertain and selected 'maybe' while 2.5% chose 'none of the above.'

### *Ethics of celebrity endorsements*

- **Transparency and Honesty:** A significant pattern emerged in responses where participants expressed their disappointment in celebrity endorsement misleading the consumers. They stated that endorsements were acceptable as long as they promote sustainability and do not cause harm to anyone.
- **Improving Brand Image:** Consumers also believe that it is not the responsibility of the celebrities to promote ethical practices although it is better for the long run of the brand and reaching a wider audience.

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- **No Accountability:** Respondents asserted that celebrity endorsements often lack ethical grounding as they are viewed primarily as avenues for financial gain, paid promotions and profit maximisation. An opinionated respondent expressed, “Most celebrities are driven by money, and public interest often comes second—though many still avoid promoting products seen as harmful, even if they’re legal.”

### DISCUSSION

In today’s celebrity-driven culture, parasocial relationships -- the one-sided relationships the people form with their favourite celebrities are getting strengthened with the rise of social media (Almaida et al., 2021). Social media allows people to have an insight into the everyday lives of celebrities. This leads to a sense of ‘knowing’ the celebrity and having access to details of their personal lives like their relationships, vacations, daily routine, eating habits, and so much more (Uwagba, 2022).

In the field of advertisement, celebrity endorsement is regarded as one of the most effective tools for distinguishing a brand from the market clutter. This approach is widely seen as a successful technique for building brand identity and enhancing its value (Tanta, 2024). Parasocial relationships have acted as a driving force of consumer behaviour, especially in India. Due to these imaginative bonds, individuals often alter their purchasing decisions as they develop a sense of trust and want to emulate their lifestyle, they connect that closeness with the products they endorse. Research has shown that social media influencers significantly impact the sustainable fashion consumption patterns of young individuals, emphasizing the dynamics of influencer–follower relationships and their role in shaping consumer behavior (Tanta, Dinh and Lee, 2024).

The purpose of the study was to look into the increasing impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviour of people in India. The study analyses how celebrity endorsements used by brands have an impact on the consumer behaviour and consumers’ buying intention in India.

The data collected suggested that the majority of respondents 40.5% fall in the category of 16-20 years.

As per the study done by Lou and Kim (2019), the purchase intention is likely to increase as an influencer endorses a certain brand as they encourage their followers to make similar decisions to purchase it.

The data collected showed 96.2% of consumers belonged to urban areas, 2.5% in rural and 1.3% in semi-rural. According to Bahl Sarita (2012), the difference between the consumer behaviour in urban and rural areas is dependent on the educated groups in both the regions. Celebrities have a dominating influence on both the groups. Furthermore, their study also revealed that a majority of rural and urban consumers are aware of the products being endorsed by the celebrities. It was also observed that both the rural and urban consumers have a high level of brand awareness for both durables and FMCG products.

Research states that in order to maximize the effects of this online communication and marketing, researchers tend to investigate the relationship between followers and social media personae (Zhuang, 2018). In the Indian demographic context, respondents are increasingly becoming aware of the transactional nature of parasocial relationships and are

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showing signs of disengagement from public figures, likely due to their oversaturation on digital platforms. Data revealed 17.7% of the respondents engage with social media influencers and celebrities on a near-daily basis.

45.6% of respondents claimed that they ‘sometimes’ follow updates about celebrities and influencers’ lives, while 19% responded ‘never’. This pattern indicates a degree of ambiguity in responses of participants, potentially influenced by social desirability bias.

Emotional bond is the main aspect of all parasocial relationships. The data analysis indicated that 44.3% of respondents ‘sometimes’ felt an emotional trust while watching celebrity endorsed advertisements. This has also been said in a study by Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing (2024), saying that parasocial relationships provide emotional fulfillment through mood management, consolation, and inspiration from admired figures. However, it also highlighted potential drawbacks such as procrastination, escapism from reality, and reduced productivity.

As per the data collected, 49.4% of respondents responded that they trust the opinions of celebrities and influencers online sometimes, 36.7% responded they rarely trust them while 7.6% responded they never trust them. 6.3% participants trust them a lot.

The responses collected by the survey showed that consumers felt a one-sided emotional bond with the celebrities endorsing products. They believed that their content offers comfort and inspiration to them. It was felt by multiple female participants that an endorsement also improved their image of a brand and helped reach a wider audience. Furthermore, more females responded feeling a deeper sense of connection and bond with public figures as compared to men whose responses conveyed that they ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ feel a connection.

With the increasing pervasiveness of social media, parasocial relationships formed between consumers and influencers or celebrities have become a critical factor in shaping consumer behaviour. Research indicates that such parasocial associations can significantly influence consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and purchase intentions. In particular, the way influencers and celebrities represent products or services on social media platforms serves as a compelling form of social proof and emotional appeal. These mediated interactions often foster positive affect, which enhances the perceived authenticity and credibility of endorsements. As a result, consumers are more likely to be persuaded by these endorsements, ultimately impacting their decision-making processes and driving purchase behaviour (Anwar and El-Bassiouny, 2020).

To gain deeper insight into consumers’ experiences with the public figures and their impact on their purchasing intentions, findings revealed that many participants perceived brand endorsements as “merely a cash grab”. They expressed their belief that celebrities engage in partnerships engaging mainly for personal gain rather than genuine brand alignment. They found them pretentious and superficial. However, some participants reported forming an emotional bond and trust with their favourite celebrity, noting that their content shared by these figures provided comfort to them and often served as a source of motivation for personal growth and self-development.

When asked what influenced the respondents most when deciding to purchase a product, 43% responses indicate that they are driven by looking at the product’s features and quality,

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30.4% of consumers are influenced by suggestions made from friends and family, 21.5% look for online reviews and ratings and 5.1% are recommendations from influencers and celebrities they follow online.

According to the data collected 5.1% respondents take recommendations of celebrities and influencers when purchasing a product, highlighting that consumers might question the credibility of a celebrity endorser, especially if the celebrity does not have a clear connection or expertise related to the product. This skepticism can lead to a diminished impact of the endorsement on purchase decisions (Dogra and Sharma, 2019). Cvetkovska (2019) studied that female consumers have significant purchasing power, accounting for 85% of all consumer expenditure and dominating the market for various brands. According to research, 43% of respondents claimed to look at product features and quality over celebrity and influencer opinions or endorsed products.

Holehonnur, et al., (2009) demonstrated that value equity is the consumer's objective to evaluate a product or service which is a key determinant of purchase intention. In the context of celebrity endorsements, when a celebrity endorses a product, it is perceived to offer higher value which significantly enhances the consumer's purchasing intention.

To examine the extent to which consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by public figures, the results revealed a notable trend, with 50.6% of respondents indicating that they are 'rarely' influenced. Furthermore, 32.9% responded that their purchases are influenced 'sometimes' by public figures. 11.4% responded they are never affected by influencers in their consumption behaviour, whereas 5.1% are always influenced by famous personalities. The research done by Smith (2024) indicates a significant correlation between influencer credibility and consumer trust, leading to higher purchase intentions. The findings reveal that consumers often perceive influencer recommendations as more relatable and trustworthy than traditional advertisements.

To further understand the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviour, it was observed that only 3.8% of consumers always acted upon those needs of purchasing endorsed products.

When asked about endorsements getting purchased out of necessity or luxury purposes, 35.4% chose "maybe both", indicating a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. Meanwhile, 25.3% of the participants admitted to making such decisions for luxury purposes, and 13.9% stated necessity. The remaining 25.3% choose "none" as they do not buy it neither out of necessity nor luxury.

Out of 62 respondents whose annual income was above 10 lakhs, 24% purchased the endorsed product by celebrities out of luxury purposes only, whereas, 8% purchased it out of necessity.

A public figure endorsing a product or brand made many of the respondents feel inspired to purchase it as it would lead to them emulating their lifestyle and the fashion sense of the celebrity.

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Higher-income consumers are more likely to be influenced by celebrity endorsements, indicating that income plays a crucial role in shaping consumer responses to such marketing strategies (Gauns, K. et al 2018).

From the responses collected, some of the participants claimed to experience a sense of emotional closeness with the celebrity, believing the endorsement to be authentic, leading to purchases. Many also claimed that endorsements helped increase the brands' exposure. A segment of participants exhibited trend-driven buying behaviour, motivated by their desire to emulate the fashion style of their admired public figure. In contrast, another group of respondents reported engaging in independent research and budget evaluation prior to making a purchase, suggesting that minimal consumers were influenced by these endorsements.

The consideration of sustainable consumption is important especially in today's globalised world. The World Commission on Environment and Development report defined it as, "Our Common Future" as "the use of material products, energy and immaterial services in such a way that it minimizes the impact on the environment, so that human needs can be met not only in the present but also for future generations" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

When participants were asked about the importance of sustainability, 68.4% of participants responded sustainability was very important. In contrast, 24.1% of respondents reported sustainability was not particularly important to them while 3.8% indicated limited awareness of the concept, and another 3.8% stated sustainability held no importance in their decision-making.

Furthermore, when inquired about considering sustainability before making a purchase, 59.1% responded 'sometimes,' while 29.1% answered 'yes always.' 10.1% rarely looked at sustainability before purchasing, while 8.9% admitted they did not consider it at all.

Generation z is often burdened by the presence of an endangered environment and a host of harmful societal issues. As a result, they tend to possess a heightened awareness of the problems related to environmental protection and societal well-being (*J. Mark. Manag.*, 2016)

The data collected highlighted this importance as 62% of participants falling between the ages of 16 to 20 responded that sustainability was an important factor to their consumption.

When asked about purchasing a product endorsed by a celebrity, despite it not being sustainable, data collected showed 63.3% of the respondents never purchased a non-sustainable product endorsed by a celebrity. In contrast, 36.7% reported having made such a purchase.

Solomon et al. (2002) suggest that consumers who admire a celebrity endorser are likely to alter their perception of a brand when exposed to advertisements featuring that celebrity. This phenomenon occurs because the influence of the celebrity is transferred to the brand. For instance, if a celebrity known for engaging in sustainable practices endorses a product, consumers may begin to perceive the brand as sustainable as well.

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However, according to this research, the respondents were not swayed by these endorsements as 63.3% chose to stay true to their environmental beliefs and were not influenced by the celebrity endorsement of an unsustainable product. Furthermore, the responses indicate that 62% of the respondents believe it is the responsibility of the celebrities to promote sustainable and eco-friendly products while endorsing a product or brand. In contrast, 16.5% did not share this view, 19% were uncertain and selected 'maybe' while 2.5% chose 'none of the above.'

According to previous research, urban consumers showed greater environmental concern, impacting their attitudes toward sustainable consumption (Thwaites, Lowe, Monkhouse, and Barnes, 2012). 96% of the respondents belonging to the urban area believed sustainability to be a crucial part of their consumption. Further, they highlight there is a significant difference of attitudes toward sustainability and expressed their disappointment in celebrity endorsement misleading the consumers. The participants stated that endorsements were acceptable as long as they promote sustainability and do not cause harm to the environment. In light of this, it can be concluded that celebrity endorsements have proven to have both positive and negative implications for consumer behaviour.

### **CONCLUSION**

Parasocial relationships - imaginative bonds between a celebrity and a viewer - play a poignant role in the consumption habits of consumers. Brands use these bonds in the form of celebrity endorsements and advertisements for brand identity. In the literature review and the data analysis, it is emphasized that to emulate the celebrity, using the endorsed product by the celebrity would lead the consumer into living a life similar to theirs due to living in a world of products where the value a consumer obtains from purchasing something comes from what it represents, not just how it functions.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents believed that the nature of the endorsements is transactional and for the purpose of personal gain of the celebrities or influencers. Celebrity endorsements are successful due to the emotional bond and trust formed by them as when watching an advertisement, they feel a sense of trust, changing their purchase intentions. This, however, can be misused by the public figures as they can use their celebrity power to promote unsustainable products. Additionally, respondents asserted that celebrity endorsements often lack ethical grounding as they are viewed primarily as avenues for financial gain, paid promotions and profit maximisation.

Trends are also a significant driving force behind consumer behavior, as individuals often experience a desire to conform with perceived social norms. This inclination leads many consumers to make purchasing decisions influenced by popular trends, which are frequently shaped by influencers, peer groups, and digital communities. Such behavior reflects identity-driven consumption, where aligning with trends becomes a means of social belonging and self-expression.

This study establishes the impact of parasocial relationships on consumer behaviour, specially in the Indian context. While the findings underscore the influence of celebrity endorsements on purchase decisions, future research could examine whether such endorsements have a positive or negative impact on the environment, particularly through the lens of sustainability.

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Investigating whether celebrity-driven consumption contributes to unsustainable practices providing a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior and the ethical dimensions of marketing strategies. Additionally, this line of inquiry may reveal potential policy implications, suggesting a need for regulatory frameworks that encourage responsible endorsements and promote sustainable consumption practices.

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