

## **Understanding celebrity trust and its effects on other credibility and image constructs: a qualitative approach**

### **Abstract**

By using signalling theory, this study has examined the concept of celebrity trust in terms of both the cognitive and affective dimensions, and to examine its effects on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image. A qualitative approach was used, with 11 interviews and 4 mini focus groups with academics, marketers, advertisers and consumers conducted in and around London. Data from the interviews and focus groups was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings suggest that celebrity trust is based on a celebrity's optimistic characteristics and/or goodwill towards consumers. They also suggest that celebrity trust has positive effects on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image. There is very little evidence available in the literature on this topic, especially based on the qualitative study. Therefore, aim of this study is to minimise the gap, understand trust within the context of celebrity endorsement and examine its effects based on a qualitative research method.

**Keywords:** Celebrity trust; cognitive and affective dimensions; advertising credibility; advertising image; brand credibility; brand image; corporate credibility; corporate image

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## Introduction

The origins of celebrity endorsement go all the way back to the late 19th century, but since the 1980s, the use of celebrities in advertising has become the norm (Charbonneau and Garland, 2009; Jain and Roy, 2016; Yoo *et al.*, 2018). Today, celebrities like athletes, film stars and other popular personalities appear in advertisements and leverage their profiles by bringing their symbolic and cultural meanings to the endorsed brands (Charbonneau and Garland, 2009).

According to industry sources, around 25% of all advertisements use a celebrity endorser (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016). This figure is approximately three times higher in countries like China, India and Japan (Pornpitakapan, 2003; Choi and Rifon, 2007; Pramjeeth and Majaye-Khupe, 2016; Yoo *et al.*, 2018). Practitioners invest a significant portion of their advertising budget in celebrities to increase brand awareness. Almost, 10% of firms' investments was spent on celebrity endorsement in 2016 in U.S. (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016). Tiger Woods was paid an estimated \$60 million a year in endorsements from firms such as American Express, Nike and Rolex; Michael Jordan earned \$100 million in the course of his National Basketball Association (NBA) career; Reebok signed a \$40 million deal with Venus Williams; Adidas spent \$160 million on advertisements with David Beckham; and Pepsi attributed a 2% increase in global market share to the Spice Girls' endorsement (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016). It is evident that these celebrities, in return, have a positive impact on stock values. A striking example was seen in 1995, when Michael Jordan announced his return to the NBA and stock portfolios of the firms he endorsed showed dramatic increases (Lear *et al.*, 2009). On average, the influence of celebrity endorsers' announcements on stock portfolios is suggested to be marginally positive, with +0.44% excess return on the day of announcement only (Pornpitakapan, 2003; Ding *et al.*, 2011).

These success rates have encouraged several researchers to analyse the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers (Hambrick and Mahoney, 2011; Pramjeeth and Majaye-Khupe, 2016; Yoo *et*

*al.*, 2018). They have found that a successful celebrity endorsement campaign requires the celebrity to be among the top performers in his/her field, and, most importantly, to have the ability to instill trust among consumers (Ohanian, 1990; Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2004; Kim *et al.*, 2014). Celebrity trust has been an area of interest in the literature. Using a similar construct to trust, that of celebrity trustworthiness, researchers have explored the relationship between celebrity trustworthiness and other constructs. Early research on celebrity trustworthiness explored its effects on attitude towards advertising (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2000), attitude towards brand (Silvera and Austad, 2004) and purchase intention (Lafferty *et al.*, 2002), while later studies focused on the effects on brand credibility (Spry *et al.*, 2011; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018), brand equity (Dwivedi and Johnson, 2013), corporate credibility (Kim *et al.*, 2014), corporate image (Ghotbivayghan *et al.*, 2015) and self-brand connection (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015).

However, despite these numerous studies (Dwivedi and Johnson, 2013; Ghotbivayghan *et al.*, 2015; Cuomo *et al.*, 2019), there is very little evidence available on the importance of celebrity trust. As noted above, the similar construct of celebrity trustworthiness has been an area of interest for various scholars, but the two constructs are different, with distinct meanings and characteristics (Soh *et al.*, 2009; Alarcon *et al.*, 2018). Trustworthiness is defined as the believability, honesty and integrity of a source (Erdogan, 2001). It is based on the characteristics or reputation of a celebrity and holds only a cognitive dimension (Chai *et al.*, 2015; Yu *et al.*, 2015). Trust, meanwhile, is defined as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor (Leonidou *et al.*, 2013). It is based on trusting beliefs, trusting behaviour, willingness, expectation and risk. Trusting beliefs consists of both the cognitive and affective dimensions. The cognitive dimension is based on a partner's competency, responsibility,

reliability and dependability, while the affective dimension is based on emotional feelings between partners (Morrow *et al.*, 2004; Chai *et al.*, 2015; Li and Hsu, 2018). The importance of the affective dimension increases when trust is studied in a business-to-consumer context (Dadzie *et al.*, 2018). As there are fewer contractual safeguards than in business-to-business markets, a leap of faith becomes a “must” requirement (Johnson and Grayson, 2005; Terres *et al.*, 2015; Li and Hsu, 2018; Franklin and Marshall, 2019). This leap of faith becomes essential when consumers have to make high-consequence decisions, which are characterized by high uncertainty of losses (Terres *et al.*, 2015; Dadzie *et al.*, 2018; Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2018; Franklin and Marshall, 2019). The importance of the affective as well as the cognitive dimension makes it necessary to study celebrity trust on the basis of both (Terres and Santos, 2013; Chai *et al.*, 2015; Franklin and Marshall, 2019).

Another gap, which this study has minimized is of studying celebrity trust as a unique construct. Few researchers have used similar constructs to celebrity trust, such as brand trust, advertising trust, etc. (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2003; Soh *et al.*, 2009; Xie *et al.*, 2019), however, trust in different contexts is unable to study and measure the general tendency of individuals to trust others, and cannot be generalised (Rempel *et al.*, 1985). It is a state of mind, which is closely related to situational factors, such as trustee’s perceived honesty and personality, and/or on trustor’s confidence on the trustee (Johnson-George and Swap, 1982; Soh *et al.*, 2009; Xie *et al.*, 2019). It is restricted to the conditions of limited intimacy and does not accurately determine an individual’s trust under different circumstances and conditions (Johnson-George and Swap, 1982; Bauer and Freitag, 2017). Hence, to minimise this gap, celebrity trust based on its uniqueness has been studied in this context.

The objective of this study is therefore to explore celebrity trust in terms of both the cognitive and affective dimensions, and furthermore to examine the effects of celebrity trust on advertising credibility, brand credibility, corporate credibility and corporate image. Although past researchers (Spry *et al.*, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018) have examined the effects of celebrity trustworthiness on similar constructs, such as attitudes to brand and corporation, there is very little research examining the effects on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image.

This study has used signaling theory to examine the effects of celebrity trust on other constructs. The purpose of using this theory is to confirm whether a trusted source would enhance credibility and image of the connected sources (Erdem *et al.*, 2002; Jeng, 2016). Previous literature using signalling theory has suggested that trust embodies the cumulative effects of a source's past and present marketing strategies and activities (Erdem *et al.*, 2002; Jeng, 2016; Karanges *et al.*, 2018; Pecot *et al.*, 2018). The signal from a trustworthy source affects consumers' choices, reduces uncertainties and bring it into consumers' consideration set (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Pecot *et al.*, 2018). A trustworthy source can also influence consumers' perceptions regarding the credibility of other connected sources and can significantly enhance their image (Spry *et al.*, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Pecot *et al.*, 2018).

Like other sources, celebrities may also serve as a signal of brands' and firms' commitment (Nelson, 1974; Baek and King, 2011). They enable the brands and firms to overcome the asymmetric nature of the information that might flow between customers and themselves (Ghorban, 2012; Davies and Slater, 2015; Pecot *et al.*, 2018). They decrease associated risks, enhance willingness and streamline the decision-making process for customers

(Ghorban, 2012; Davies and Slater, 2015; Pecot *et al.*, 2018). Expenditure made through celebrity endorsers changes consumers' beliefs and creates positive attitudes towards connected sources such as brands and corporations (Wang and Yang, 2010; Baek and King, 2011; Pecot *et al.*, 2018; Cuomo *et al.*, 2019). Specifically, the transfer of trusted signals from the celebrity endorser to the brand and corporation makes consumers perceive them as high in credibility and image (Erdem *et al.*, 2002; Baek and King, 2011; Jeng, 2016). Although previous researchers have demonstrated their interest in the attitudes and behaviours that a trusted celebrity brings towards advertisements, brands and firms (Lafferty *et al.*, 2002; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Cuomo *et al.*, 2019), there is very little evidence available on the effects of celebrity trust on the credibility and image of advertisements, brands and corporations.

Based on the objectives set out above, this study covers two main research questions: (i) What is celebrity trust; and (ii) What effects does celebrity trust have on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image. To answer these questions, qualitative research has been conducted. The method is suitable for this research, since, the focus of the study is to understand and examine the topic from participants' perspectives, rather than measuring or testing theories (Pantano and Priporas, 2016). For this purpose, 11 interviews and four mini focus groups were conducted. The interviews were conducted with academics, marketers and advertisers, while the focus groups were conducted with consumers. The results suggest that celebrity trust can be based on the cognitive and/or affective dimensions, depending on the situation. They also indicate that celebrity trust has a positive effect on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image. However, they suggest that its effects on corporate

credibility and corporate image are stronger when the brand and corporation have similar names than when they have different names.

The rest of this paper is laid out as follows: first, literature on similar definitions of celebrity trust is given, then the research design and methods are explained, followed by the presentation of the findings and discussion, and finally by the study's limitations and contributions.

### **Literature review**

The literature review is based on two sections: in the first section, researchers have defined similar constructs to celebrity trust, i.e. trust and celebrity trustworthiness, while, in the second section, previous studies on the topic are explained. Both sections reveal the importance of studying celebrity trust and its effects on advertising image, advertising credibility, brand image, brand credibility, corporate image and corporate credibility.

### **Defining celebrity trust**

Firstly, the researchers have gone through the explanations on trust and celebrity trustworthiness. The purpose of these explanations is to suggest the difference of both constructs from celebrity trust and also suggest the importance of studying trust within the context of celebrity endorsement. These explanations are in the core of this study.

Starting from trust, it has been defined "as a confidence in the trusted party's benevolence, competence, faith, integrity, mutual emotional investments, reliability, and willingness to rely on" (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It has been studied in the context of psychology (Rotter, 1967), sociology (Lewis and Weigert, 1985), social psychology (McAllister, 1995) and business (Terres *et al.*, 2015). In each of these contexts, researchers gave their own definitions based on the conceptual and operational context in which trust was being studied.

Psychologists (Rotter, 1967; Omodei and McLennan, 2000) have defined trust as a psychological event occurring within an individual. Although there are various schools of thought, the definition given by Rotter (1967) has assumed particular importance. He defined trust as a general expectancy held by an individual or group that the behaviour or words of the other individuals could be relied upon. He argued that people learnt things from their previous interactions, and had different experiences of other people's fulfilment of their promises, and that this affected their expectations of trust in others. To some extent, such expectations of the promises of other social agents are maintained and generalized from one social agent to other.

In contrast, sociologists (Luhman, 1979; Lewis and Weigert, 1985) have defined trust as a social good, essential for all levels of social relationships. It occurs in a social system in which members perform according to it and are secure in the expected outcomes, as constituted by the presence of each other. Luhmann (1979) described trust as a tool for the reduction of complexities in society, noting that, as modern society was full of complexities and unpredictable events, trust helped to reduce these complexities to manageable proportions. An outstanding account of trust in sociology is also given by Lewis and Weigert (1985). They classified trust on the basis of its multi-faceted characteristics, i.e. the cognitive and affective dimensions, where the cognitive dimension is based on processes that discriminate between people and organizations that are trustworthy, competent and dependable, while the affective dimension is based on emotional bonds among all those who participate in any relationship. According to Lewis and Weigert (1985), trust is a mix of both dimensions, and removing one or the other leaves little more than a coldblooded prediction or rationally calculated risk.

Another approach used to investigate trust is in the field of social psychology. Social psychologists have criticized the concept of a generalised trust put forward by researchers in

psychology and sociology (e.g. Rotter, 1967). They suggest that trust (McAllister, 1995) is a situational and target-specific construct, which varies according to the specific nature and situation in which individuals or groups are involved. Trust in one individual cannot be generalized in another, since these individuals represent different kinds of status, relationships and occupations, such as trust in an individual to feed a cat may not be the same as trust shown in a similar individual to repair a car, similarly, trusting an individual to repair a car in the absence of ability or credibility would be naive and potentially dangerous (Johnson-George and Swap, 1982; Rempel *et al.*, 1985; Evans and Reville, 2008; Soh *et al.*, 2009; Xie *et al.*, 2019). Hence, it should be studied based on the context (Evans and Reville, 2008; Xie *et al.*, 2019).

Further, researchers have also suggested that trust is a discursive attribute which changes over time (Willig, 1997). After a certain period of time, trust between individuals is transferred from a narrow stage to a much wider stage. In other words, it goes beyond a straightforward acceptance level to the faith level, where relations are based on emotions between/among partners. This explanation of trust suggests that it is equally based on both the cognitive and affective dimensions, and takes on board the concept of trust given by the eminent sociologists Lewis and Weigert (1985).

Alongside the concept of trust in social psychology, researchers in the business context (Johnson and Grayson, 2005; Dowell *et al.*, 2015) have also studied trust within dyadic relationships. This has received a considerable attention in the business-to-business (B2B) context, with some recognition also found in the business-to-consumer (B2C) context. In both these contexts, researchers have followed the similar concept on trust by the social psychologists (Johnson and Grayson, 2005; Chai *et al.*, 2015; Franklin and Marshall, 2019). They studied trust in areas such as industrial marketing, buyer-seller relationships, supply chain partnerships,

consumer marketing, retailing, etc. Researchers in these fields have confirmed the importance of trust and suggest that it reduces competition, conflicts, opportunistic behaviour, uncertainty and costs, while increasing cooperation, commitment, satisfaction, long-term orientation, performance, loyalty, etc. (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Wu *et al.*, 2010; Shi and Liao, 2015; Oliveira *et al.*, 2017).

Previous studies (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Johnson and Grayson, 2005; Rubio *et al.*, 2016) in the contexts of social psychology and business have offered numerous definitions of trust. Most of these definitions are similar and have been inherited from previous researchers, either in similar or different contexts. Rempel *et al.* (1985) explained trust as a generalized expectation related to the subjective probability that an individual has assigned to the occurrence of some set of future events. Mayer *et al.* (1995) saw it as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. Morgan and Hunt (1994), in the business context, described it as a confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity (Filieri *et al.*, 2015). Rousseau *et al.* (1998), Bozic (2017) and Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen (2017) defined it as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviours of another. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) saw it as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of a firm to perform its stated function. Johnson and Grayson (2005) and Chai *et al.* (2015) took Lewis and Weigert's (1985) explanation of trust on board and defined it on the basis of three dimensions: (i) cognitive, defined as confidence or willingness to rely on a service provider's competence and reliability; (ii) affective, defined as confidence in a partner on the basis of feelings generated by the level of care and concern the partner demonstrates; and (iii) behavioural, a mutual outcome of both the affective and cognitive dimensions. A number of

studies in recent years have taken these definitions in account and regarded trust as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that another party, and that the first party will not exploit the vulnerability of the other (Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011; Oliviera *et al.*, 2017; Carfora *et al.*, 2019).

Overall, these definitions suggest four main concepts. Firstly, they propose that trust is based on beliefs like ability, benevolence, integrity and goodwill, which are based on both the cognitive and affective dimensions (Pivato *et al.*, 2008). Secondly, they suggest that trust is a psychological state represented by a willingness and intention to act on the basis of beliefs (Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011). Thirdly, they suggest that feelings of confidence and expectations are formed on the basis of the other partner's characteristics, leading to the belief that s/he will fulfil demands and will not take advantage (Lymperopoulos *et al.*, 2010; Park *et al.*, 2017). Finally, they propose that trust involves consumers' willingness to accept risk, uncertainty and/or vulnerability, based on the likelihood of partner gains involved in an unpredictable and uncertain relationship (Mayer *et al.*, 1995; Tan *et al.*, 2009).

Alongside trust, celebrity trustworthiness is the second construct used in this study, which is similar but conceptually different to celebrity trust. Research on celebrity trustworthiness flows from a landmark study by Hovland and Weiss (1951), who analysed the factors leading to the credibility of the source and suggested that two factors, expertise and trustworthiness, highlighted the concept of source credibility (Ohanian, 1990). Hovland and Weiss (1951) defined trustworthiness as the level of assurance in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions that s/he believes are the most suitable. They stated that a message from a trustworthy source was more believable and acceptable than one from other sources, and could positively

influence the beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behaviours of recipients (Erdogan, 2001). Their model on source trustworthiness was later adopted by other researchers (i.e. Ohanian, 1990; Spry *et al.*, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Nisar *et al.*, 2016; Singh and Banerjee, 2018) within the context of the celebrity endorsement topic, and was used as a celebrity trustworthiness model.

Previous researchers (Erdogan, 1999, 2001) have used celebrity trustworthiness model in their studies and defined it in a few ways. Ohanian (1990) defined it as the listener's level of assurance in, and level of acceptance of, the speaker and the message. Erdogan (1999, 2001) explained it as the believability, honesty and integrity of an endorser as perceived by the audience. La Ferle and Choi (2005) saw it as the audience's faith in the communicator's capability to provide accurate information in a non-biased and honest way. A few researchers (Kim *et al.*, 2014; Tijo and Johnney, 2016; Singh and Banerjee, 2018) have defined celebrity trustworthiness as the level to which the audience believes that the celebrity is capable of expressing a sense of believability, honesty and integrity through the advertising.

Above explanations on trust and celebrity trustworthiness give rise to study trust within the context of celebrity endorsement. The two main reasons found from the above explanations are: (i) social psychologists and business researchers (Rempel *et al.*, 1985; Chai *et al.*, 2015; Franklin and Marshall, 2019) suggest that trust cannot be generalised and as a reason should be studied within the specific context and (ii) celebrity trustworthiness as explained earlier is based on cognitive dimension and does not take affective dimension in consideration. These both reasons have become a reason to carry out a research on understanding trust within the context of celebrity endorsement.

**Previous studies on the topic:**

The basis of this section is to suggest the importance of studying effects of celebrity trust on advertising image, advertising credibility, brand credibility, brand image, corporate image and corporate credibility based on signaling theory and qualitative research method.

As suggested earlier, celebrity trustworthiness is defined as the degree of confidence in celebrity's intent to communicate the assertion s/he considers most valid (Erdogan, 2001; Dwivedi and Johnson, 2016). It refers to the honesty, integrity and believability of the celebrity endorser (Erdogan, 2001). It is the most efficient method to give consumers confident and believe about the product and brand and increase their attitude and purchasing behaviour towards them (Gilal *et al.*, 2020).

Advertisers take advantage on the value of trustworthiness by choosing celebrity endorsers, who are recognized as believable, dependable and honest (Erdogan, 2001; Wang *et al.*, 2017). Good faith of celebrity endorsers can bring positivity to consumers and as a result, consumers may form emotional bonds or relationships with celebrities and their endorsed brands and corporations (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2016). On the other-hand, untrustworthy celebrity endorsers are seen as questionable message sources and can bring bad influences on consumers and their perceptions (Suki, 2014).

Initial literature review demonstrated that celebrity trustworthiness effects on attitude towards advertising, attitude towards brand and purchase intention were examined (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2000; Lafferty *et al.*, 2002). Later researchers examined more advanced topics, such as their focus was on examining the effectiveness of celebrity trustworthiness on advertising effectiveness, corporate credibility, corporate reputation, corporate loyalty, self-brand connection, brand credibility, brand trust, brand equity and relatedness need satisfaction (Dwivedi and Johnson, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Mansour and Diab, 2014; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015;

Yoo *et al.*, 2018; Cuomo *et al.*, 2019; Gilal *et al.*, 2020). Results showed that celebrity trustworthiness had a positive effect on each of the above construct (Kim *et al.*, 2014; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015; Yoo *et al.*, 2018; Gilal *et al.*, 2020).

Although, these studies are based on the effects of celebrity trustworthiness, but there is a little knowledge on examining the effects based on celebrity trust, taking in consideration that both celebrity trust and celebrity trustworthiness are two different constructs with different meanings and characteristics. Next, there is a little knowledge on examining the effects of celebrity trust on advertising image, advertising credibility, brand image, brand credibility, corporate image and corporate credibility based on signaling theory. Also, previous researchers have usually used quantitative research method to study similar topics (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2016; Yoo *et al.*, 2018; Gilal *et al.*, 2020), but there is a little knowledge on studying the topic based on qualitative research method. Based on these gaps, as noted earlier, the objectives of this study are: (i) to study celebrity trust based on cognitive and affective dimensions, and (ii) to examine the effects of celebrity trust on advertising image, advertising credibility, brand image, brand credibility, corporate image and corporate credibility based on signaling theory.

## **Methodology**

Given the nature of the research, qualitative research methods were used to gain a thorough understanding of what celebrity trust stands for and how it affects other constructs, by allowing participants to express their own thoughts on the topic (Yurdakul-Sahin and Atik, 2013). To conduct this research, 11 interviews and 4 mini focus groups with 5 or 6 participants (Priporas and Kamenidou, 2014; Finsterwalder *et al.*, 2017) in each group were conducted (see Tables 1 and 2). These numbers were considered adequate since previous studies (De Ruyter and Scholl, 1998; Priporas *et al.*, 2012; Finsterwalder *et al.*, 2017) have indicated the use of small

samples is acceptable for data collection. According to Hellstrom (2008), there are no rules for sample size, but rather samples must be based on the aptitude of the representatives to provide insightful information, because their perspectives are indicative of those of a larger group (Priporas *et al.*, 2012, 2017; Foroudi *et al.*, 2016; Palazzo *et al.*, 2018; Hussain *et al.*, 2020). The selection of academics, advertisers, consumers and marketers for this study was an important step, as they represented the expertise and knowledge of both policymakers and those who watch celebrity endorsers and are influenced by the advertisements, brands and corporations they promote. The participants were recruited using a non-probability sampling technique, i.e. homogenous purposive sampling technique, whereby they were selected not randomly but systematically and deliberately on the basis of their characteristics or traits, in order to achieve relative homogeneity of the sample (Maxwell, 2012; Adam *et al.*, 2018).

A semi-structured discussion guide with open-ended questions based on the literature review and with the help of other researchers in this context was created. The main focus of the semi-structured interview guide was to increase reliability, keep the discussion focused on celebrity trust and its effects on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image consistent, and elicit appropriate responses (Adam *et al.*, 2018). Each interview and focus group commenced with a detail information on the topic, ethical issues and importance of conducting this research. This was followed by sub-questions on the topics. The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded to limit bias and increase the accuracy of the data. In conjunction with these steps, handwritten notes were also taken. The recordings were later transcribed before being entered into NVivo 9.2 (Finsterwalder *et al.*, 2017).

Each interview and focus group ranged in length between 40 and 80 minutes, and all were conducted within easy reach of the participants. They were conducted between October 2017 and January 2018. Prior to the interviews and focus groups, the participants were contacted via email, telephone or letter. They were given a short introduction to the purpose of the study. When the interviews and focus groups were conducted, the participants were again informed of the purpose of the research, the confidentiality of the data, the use of the audio recorder, and how this study could benefit from understanding the topic from their perspectives. They were told that their honest opinions were required. They were also informed that if at any stage they no longer wished to be part of the study, they could leave without any excuse. The interviews and focus groups were held at places and times that were convenient to the participants. Small incentives such as souvenirs and in some places refreshments were provided in order to increase participation.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted face-to-face. In interviews, participants were directly asked questions on the topic, while in focus groups, participants were asked to discuss the topic within the groups. Interviews were conducted with academics, marketers and advertisers, whereas, focus groups were conducted with consumers. The use of multiple methods of data collection was found beneficial in order to lower the pitfall of bias, enhance the credibility of the findings, understand the topic from multiple perspectives and to increase the robustness (Foroudi *et al.*, 2017; Roy and Sanyal, 2017; Hussain *et al.*, 2020). Participants in interviews and focus groups were recruited within a single UK urban city, i.e. London. Their ages, genders, ethnicities, education level and occupations, etc. varied, so participants could represent various elements in the societies (Foroudi *et al.*, 2017; Hussain *et al.*, 2020).

Interviews were mainly used so detail answers on the topic from each individual could be received, while, focus groups were mainly used, because of two main reasons: first, they function as a convenient method to interview several people at the same time and second, they are useful in situations, where a need to group interaction from participants is required (Herington *et al.*, 2005). Each focus group ranged from 5 to 6 participants. Use of small groups are beneficial as everyone within the group can express his/her experience in a more sufficient way (Krueger, 1994). One of the researchers took on the role of moderator to ensure that participants in all groups were able to voice their opinions without control of the group by a single individual (Herington *et al.*, 2005). This had reduced the drawback of using focus groups (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2002). Both, interviews and focus groups were conducted until the theoretical saturation was achieved (Braun and Clark, 2006).

**Table 1: Interviews**

| Interviewee number  | Occupation | Age | Gender |
|---|------------|-----|--------|
| 1   | Marketer   | 36  | Male   |
| 2   | Academic   | 33  | Male   |
| 3   | Academic   | 36  | Female |
| 4   | Marketer   | 29  | Female |
| 5   | Academic   | 45  | Female |
| 6   | Academic   | 47  | Male   |
| 7   | Marketer   | 36  | Female |
| 8   | Marketer   | 26  | Female |
| 9   | Advertiser | 31  | Female |
| 10  | Advertiser | 24  | Female |
| 11  | Marketer   | 24  | Male   |
| Topics discussed  |            |     |        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussion on the definition of celebrity trust</li> <li>- Discussion on the dimensions of celebrity trust</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of dimensions</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on advertising credibility</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on advertising image</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on brand credibility</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on brand image</li> </ul> |            |     |        |

- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on corporate credibility
- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on corporate image

**Table 2: Focus groups**

| Focus group number  | Number of participants | Age range | Gender |
|---|------------------------|-----------|--------|
| 1   | 5                      | 20-45     | Mixed  |
| 2   | 6                      | 23-41     | Mixed  |
| 3   | 6                      | 19-47     | Mixed  |
| 4   | 6                      | 18-34     | Mixed  |
| Topics discussed  |                        |           |        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussion on the definition of celebrity trust</li> <li>- Discussion on the dimensions of celebrity trust</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of dimensions</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on advertising credibility</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on advertising image</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on brand credibility</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on brand image</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on corporate credibility</li> <li>- Discussion on the effects of celebrity trust on corporate image</li> </ul> |                        |           |        |

The thematic analysis method was chosen to analyse the data since it provides basic and flexible skills that can be helpful for conducting many forms of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006). In this research, theoretical thematic analysis was used where the themes had been derived from the researcher’s own theoretical interest in the area. This form of analysis provided less a rich account of the overall data and a thorough analysis of the aspects of interest to the researcher. This type of qualitative research is also described as critical realism, which defines the ways people make meanings of their understanding and, in turn, the ways the wider social context imposes on those meanings, while focusing on the material and other limits of reality (Braun and Clark, 2006). In other words, critical realism presupposes an objective reality, which lies independently of our beliefs and whose discovery is one reason for knowledge acquisition

(Oliver, 2011). Furthermore, it holds that all descriptions of that reality are mediated through the filters of language, meaning-making and social context (Oliver, 2011).

#### Findings and discussion

The findings of this research are mostly consistent with the previous literature on trust, and suggest that celebrity trust is based on the cognitive and/or affective dimension(s). These findings emphasize the positive effect a trusted celebrity has on similar constructs to advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2000; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2018). In addition, the findings also stress that the effect of celebrity trust will be different for each of these constructs, based on different circumstances.

#### *Definition of celebrity trust*

The exploratory findings suggest that trust in a celebrity endorser provides reassurance to consumers that the brand really works. Participants in this study showed interest in buying brands associated with trusted celebrities, and further stated that if firms wanted to promote their products through celebrity endorsers, they had to choose celebrities who were highly trustworthy and could impart care and concern for consumers through the advertisements. The participants also considered that if a firm hired a celebrity endorser who was not trustworthy and did not show care and concern for consumers, that celebrity endorser could potentially damage or destroy the reputation of the firm. The participants described celebrity trust based on the following elements: the celebrity's characteristics, the celebrity's trustworthiness, the celebrity's care, someone consumers could have confidence in, someone consumers could believe in, someone consumers could relate to, or someone consumers could make a connection with. These elements are similar to the definitions found by previous researchers in social psychology (Tan *et*

al., 2009) and business (Kim *et al.*, 2014; Chai *et al.*, 2015; Nisar *et al.*, 2016), who also explained trust on the basis of elements like belief in the partner's benevolence, competent, concern, confidence, credibility, expectation, honesty, integrity, reliability, reliance and willingness. According to the participants:

*“If you are asking me theoretically, then yes – if the company wants to promote the product through a celebrity, they need to know that the celebrity actually believes in the product and wants the best for whoever is selling it. I don't know to what degree it is active, but I think it is the fundamental thing – that if you are going to invest in celebrity endorsement, you want that person to portray both elements of it.”*  
(Interviewee 6)

*“In the context of celebrity endorsement, when I see a celebrity endorsing a product, I believe that they have used that product and that they believe that product is worth it, it promises that it does, so it's almost like celebrity endorsement is the reassurance of the celebrity, putting that stamp on the brand, informing us that, ‘Yeah I have used it and it works’.”* (Interviewee 9)

*“I think celebrity trust is [them trying] to represent on behalf of others and [trying] to send us a message, in which [...] we are the recipients. We can take it in a good way or in a bad way – it depends if we trust them, the way they try to portray the image.”*  
(Participant 2, Focus Group 3)

### *Dimensions of celebrity trust*

The results of the analysis suggest that the participants had different beliefs regarding the dimensions of celebrity trust. Their views can be divided into three main categories: (i) celebrity trust based on the affective dimension; (ii) celebrity trust based on the cognitive dimension; and (iii) celebrity trust based equally on both the affective and cognitive dimensions.

Some participants believed that trust in a celebrity endorser was based on the cognitive dimension. According to these participants, consumers make their decisions based on the characteristics of the celebrity endorser. If consumers think that the celebrity endorser is honest and highly credible, then they show trust towards that endorser.

Alongside the participants who saw the cognitive dimension as an important element of

celebrity trust, others believed that celebrity trust was based on the affective dimension. According to these participants, consumers have emotional attachments towards celebrities, and find a connection with celebrity endorsers that is based on the care and concern they receive from them. If consumers do not find any kind of care and concern, they might not trust the celebrity and might not buy their endorsed brands.

The third category of participants saw celebrity trust as an equal outcome of both the cognitive and affective dimensions. According to these participants, the relative importance of the dimensions depends on the product. For example, when consumers purchase fashion brands, they make more use of the affective dimension, and when they purchase expensive cars or antiques etc., they make more use of the cognitive dimension. Other factors include whom the firm is targeting, their age and their lifestyle. For example, in the case of younger generations, the affective dimension is used more, whereas people in later stages of life make more use of the cognitive dimension.

These exploratory findings are consistent with the previous literature, where trust has been studied and defined on the basis of the same three categories. For example, researchers like Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Casalo *et al.* (2007) placed importance on the cognitive dimension; Johnson and Grayson (2005), Kantsperger and Kunz (2010), Terres *et al.* (2015) and Li and Hsu (2018) highlighted the affective dimension; and Canning and Hanmer-Lloyd (2007), Kim and Park (2013), Dadzie *et al.* (2018) and Scotts (2018) stressed the importance of both the cognitive and affective dimensions in explaining trust. Comments from the participants in the present study demonstrated how they placed the dimensions into these three categories:

- i) Category 1 – celebrity trust based on the cognitive dimension:

*“As I mentioned first of all, characteristics or the cognitive dimension play a greater role than the affective dimension.” (Interviewee 8)*

*“I think the characteristics more. First they should have characteristics and then I start looking at what they are doing.” (Participant 1, Focus Group 1)*

ii) Category 2 – celebrity trust based on the affective dimension:

*“For me, it is not as important as affective trust, because all the technological aspects are there. You trust Apple because of technological things, when you compare them to Samsung [...] but affective is something you cannot describe, it is [based] more on feelings. Because the cognitive trust you can see, how it is being built [...], you can read about it, people recognize the product, people recognize the quality, people recognize the brand.” (Interviewee 3)*

*“I think affective trust for me, when it comes to the celebrity, is that they are truly genuinely caring for the brand and believing in it, and seeing the community of the brand lovers and appreciating it and feeling it that there is some kind of culture.” (Interviewee 4)*

iii) Category 3 – celebrity trust based on both the cognitive and affective dimensions:

*“I think [the cognitive and affective dimensions] work hand in hand. They should work hand in hand. If you are reliable, you have a good name, you want to keep that good name, therefore, you have to show me you still care.” (Interview 9)*

*“The person suggesting a product to me or something like that, I think that both parts are important.” (Interviewee 1)*

### ***The cognitive and affective dimensions of celebrity trust***

#### ***Celebrity trust: Cognitive dimension***

Participants described the cognitive dimension in terms of a belief that the celebrity is trustworthy, reliable, kind and honest, and has a high reputation in society. The cognitive dimension is therefore defined on the basis of the characteristics of the celebrity, which helps in making decisions regarding the product/brand. Information regarding the characteristics of the celebrity endorser is built over the years, and includes the previous actions of the celebrity regarding his/her career and in some case, his/her personal life too. The cognitive dimension refers to the endorser’s rational aspects, and explains how reliable, credible, honest and trustworthy the celebrity is. These definitions are consistent with the previous explanations given

by researchers on the cognitive dimension of trust within different contexts, and show consistency with their explanations (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Morrow *et al.*, 2004; Scotts, 2018). Some participants expressed the following views:

*“Cognitive trust, when it comes to the celebrities, is knowing that once they take the money that they would be honest in representing the brand, and I think from consumers’ perspective you just don’t wanna see them taking negative interpretations of the brand with them, that’s it. Having the confidence that they will represent the brand well.” (Interviewee 4)*

*“It refers to rational aspects, it refers to knowledge – what do I think, what kind of belief do I have in my mind regarding the celebrity or regarding some organization? So it refers to that.” (Interviewee 7)*

### ***Celebrity trust: Affective dimension***

As with the definition of the cognitive dimension, consistency was found between the previous definitions of the affective dimension in other contexts (Johnson and Grayson, 2005; Terres and Santos, 2013; Terres *et al.*, 2015; Dadzie *et al.*, 2018; Li and Hsu, 2018; Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2018) and in the context of celebrity trust. The participants defined the affective dimension in terms of consumers’ feelings, generated on the basis of the level of care and concern that a celebrity endorser shows towards them. Unlike the cognitive dimension, which is based on a celebrity endorser’s characteristics, the affective dimension is based on emotions, which make consumers feel close to the endorser and create a relationship beyond loyalty. These emotions also lead consumers to buy their favourite celebrity’s endorsed products/brands. Experts and consumers defined the affective dimension in the following ways:

*“The affective dimension of trust, this is when you are connecting or your engagement with the things, that is more [based] on feelings, or more on something you cannot describe.” (Interviewee 3)*

*“It is beyond loyalty, because the things that can build relationships that connect you, that is only from the affective [side], because from the cognitive [side] you can see if it functions well, if it gives you the things you want. But when you talk about affective, even if that person or that thing does not give you something in return, you still like it, even if he is bad or whatever. For me [...] I love Federer so much – even if he does not win, I still like him.” (Interviewee 3)*

*Effects of celebrity trust on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image*

From the participants' views, it is clear that a trusted celebrity as a communication tool has a major impact on the credibility and image of the advertising, brand and corporation. Participants stated that firms normally hired a highly trusted and socially responsible celebrity endorser, so they could prove to consumers that, like the celebrity, their advertisements, brand and corporation were equally credible. In cases where a celebrity endorser had previously had a bad reputation or was facing some sort of allegation, a firm could equally face losing the credibility of its advertising, brand and corporation.

The findings suggest that firms need to be mindful when hiring celebrities, and choose those who possess high levels of trust and are strongly connected with the values of the advertisements, brand and corporation. If the celebrity endorser has values that are different from those of the firm, he or she could also harm the credibility of the firm's advertising, brand and overall image. These findings confirm the work done on related topics by previous researchers, who have found that the credibility of a celebrity can have an effect on different constructs of advertising, brand and corporation (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2004; Muda *et al.*, 2011; Wang *et al.*, 2013; Erdogmus and Esen, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2020). Interview and focus group participants gave similar perspectives on this:

- i) Celebrity trust's effects on advertising credibility -

*“It works. For example, I am a photographer and in photography [...]. Some people choose Canon, some people choose Nokia, these two big brands. So for example, when I saw my big favourite photographers using Canon, I said to myself, ‘Go away and get Canon, Canon is the best one.’ So I think it works and does affect advertising credibility.” (Participant 3, Focus Group 4)*

ii) Celebrity trust’s effects on advertising image -

*“Yes of course, the point of hiring a celebrity is to boost an ad. An ad will put all the picture together, so, definitely, yes, it has a high impact on advertising image.” (Participant 2, Focus Group 1)*

iii) Celebrity trust’s effects on brand credibility -

*“Oh yes, it’s important because when they choose to endorse the brand, they kind of become the brand, and if they become the brand then any action they take, it represents the brand. That’s why we see that sometimes when crisis management of certain celebrities, their endorsement drops the next day, so it’s not value if the celebrity is not doing good with the brand. So yes, trust when it comes to celebrity endorsement or in general, it is very important.” (Interviewee 4)*

*“[Say there’s] a big athlete and you put him like with Nike, you trust the athlete, because he is the recognized athlete, you know that Nike is a really nice brand, but this is a plus, you use a famous person to advertise, so you say Nike would be good, more than anyone and is credible.” (Participant 4, Focus group 3)*

iv) Celebrity trust’s effects on brand image -

*“Yeh, yeh for sure, because the image of the celebrity is related to the image of the brand.” (Interviewee 7)*

*“They feed each other, don’t they? I don’t think that I can ever think of a celebrity and its advert and disassociate from the actual corporation or the brand or the image. I can’t do that, because it’s top down as I said before, so all these components definitely affect it.” (Interviewee 9)*

v) Celebrity trust’s effects on corporate credibility -

*“Yeah, because that celebrity is representing the firm, then it should be liked. For example, what he said: the famous athlete is representing Nike, we know Nike as a sport thingy, but then the celebrity itself adds to the whole credibility of Nike.” (Participant 3, Focus Group 3)*

vi) Celebrity trust’s effects on corporate image -

*“Yes sure, as they consider [the effect of] celebrity trust on brand credibility, organizational credibility and advertising credibility, the same applies to concern for the organization image as well.” (Interviewee 10)*

Moreover, the findings suggest that consumers place more importance on celebrity trust’s effects on corporate credibility and corporate image when the corporation and brand have similar names than when the corporation and brand have dissimilar names. These results suggest that the impacts are positive and higher when consumers are familiar with the corporation and know which brand is associated with which corporation. In instances where they don’t know which brand is associated with which corporation, an issue could arise associating brands with the corporation, and measuring the effects of celebrity trust on corporate credibility and corporate image could prove to be impossible. These findings are consistent with some of the earlier studies, on relevant topics, carried out by researchers in a similar area. By using different brand and corporation related constructs, previous researchers (e.g. Keller and Aaker, 1997; Milberg *et al.*, 1997; Berens *et al.*, 2005) have concluded that brands with similar names to corporations have a greater influence than brands that have completely different names from corporations.

Interviewees stated:

*“Again, it can have an impact, but some of us don’t know that the corporation is producing that brand. I work in this industry, you work in this industry, so we both know a little bit, but the person outside doesn’t know, doesn’t really know the image of UniLever. So why would it have an effect if you don’t know that much about the story behind the brand? If you do know about the brand then it’s different.” (Interviewee 9)*

*“As I said before, I really feel that these things are associated, [but] not all the time. If I am seeing from a consumer point and not thinking of the brand, sometimes there is no immediate connection between the brand and the company.” (Interviewee 1)*

Most of the findings of this study suggest that celebrity endorsers have a positive effect on the credibility of the advertising, brand and corporation. These findings are consistent with

some of the findings found from relevant constructs (e.g. Dhotre and Bhola, 2010; Ding *et al.*, 2011; Erdogmus and Esen, 2018; Singh and Banerjee, 2018), which have confirmed that investments made through a credible celebrity endorser are a source of positive effects on stock prices and increased market share. Despite these results, there is also a stream of findings from this study suggesting that celebrity endorsers would not have any major effect on businesses, who have been stable within the market for decades. The findings suggest that the strategy is more useful for smaller firms than larger ones. As large firms are mostly mature and well-established in the market, they do not realistically require celebrity endorsement as a promotional strategy. The strategy is more relevant to smaller firms, since they are less well-known and need a form of promotional technique to rise to get noticed. The views of the experts who took part in this study include:

*“I think it depends on how strong or weak the firm is. If you have a small company and you have a well-known celebrity who comes out and endorses you, it will have a very positive effect on your brand. Their trust will positively affect your brand. On the other hand, if you are a very large, well-established company and you pick up a celebrity with very little trust, it doesn't really affect you.” (Interviewee 6)*

*“Again, it can be high influence, but again, it depends upon the context, on the circumstances, and there can be so many factors like life-cycle stage, what the organization is, or if some organization is very much audible itself. Think about Coca-Cola that has got [...] a long history, so that brand itself is credible. Let's talk about Apple. So for that brand and these types of organizations, perhaps usage of celebrity, relying on these celebrities, is not too important.” (Interviewee 7)*

### **Theoretical and managerial implications**

The findings of this research have both theoretical and managerial implications. The theoretical contributions include adding new insights into the topic and filling gaps in the literature. Firstly, this research has explored the topic using qualitative research methods. Most previous researchers (e.g. Bush *et al.*, 2004; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015; Erdogmus and Esen, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2020) have used quantitative research to examine the importance of

celebrity endorsement. There is very little evidence available from studies that have used qualitative research methods to explore the topic (e.g. Yurdakul-Sahin and Atik, 2013; Jain and Roy, 2016). Using qualitative research method has provided an insight and understanding of the problem from participants' point of view, which, unlike quantitative method's representation of social reality as an external , has investigated people in their natural environment and examined their perspective, i.e. what they see as important and significant (Bryman and Bell, 2008; Priporas *et al.*, 2012).

Secondly, this research has minimized a gap in the literature by studying celebrity trust on both its dimensions. Unlike the previous studies on celebrity endorsement (e.g. Erdogan, 2001; Tijo and Johney, 2016), this research has explored celebrity trust on the basis of both the cognitive and affective dimensions. The findings suggest that celebrity trust is based on both the cognitive dimension and/or the affective dimension. These findings are consistent with those of other relevant studies (e.g. Johnson and Grayson, 2005; Terres *et al.*, 2015; Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2018), which clearly proposed that trust was either based on the cognitive dimension, the affective dimension, or both. This study therefore marks a further step forward in the context of the celebrity endorsement literature.

Furthermore, this research has minimized a gap in the literature by studying celebrity trust's effects on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image. The results show that celebrity trust has a positive effect on all the constructs involved in this study. These results are consistent with most of the findings found by previous researchers (Dwivedi and Johnson, 2013; Nisar *et al.*, 2016; Erdogmus and Esen, 2018; Chin *et al.*, 2019), who have used similar constructs to credibility and

image constructs in their studies. However, they haven't focused on celebrity trust rather their focus have been on celebrity credibility, which as suggested earlier is a different construct.

Another gap, which this study has minimized is of studying celebrity trust as a unique construct. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, interpersonal trust is unable to measure the general tendency of individuals to trust others (Rempel *et al.*, 1985). Trust in one person cannot be generalised to other, due to situational Hence, to minimise this gap, celebrity trust based on its uniqueness has been studied in this context.

In addition, most earlier studies (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015; Dadzie *et al.*, 2018; Erdogmus and Esen, 2018; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018) examined these relationships using quantitative research methods. There was little evidence available examining these relationships using qualitative methods. This is the first study of its kind to establish the effects of celebrity trust on advertising credibility, brand credibility, corporate credibility, advertising image, brand image and corporate image, using a different research method.

Finally, this study has also confirmed the theoretical model, i.e. signaling theory. The results confirm that a trusted celebrity has an effect on constructs similar to advertising credibility, brand credibility, corporate credibility, advertising image, brand image and corporate image. This study takes a step further by confirming some of the previous researchers' recommendations (Erdem *et al.*, 2002; Karanges *et al.*, 2018), who have suggested that a trusted source can also enhance the credibility and image of the connected sources. This is the first study to confirm these findings, although, previous researchers (Erdem *et al.*, 2002; Jeng, 2016; Karanges *et al.*, 2018; Pecot *et al.*, 2018) have examined the effects on attitudinal and behavioural constructs, but there is a limited evidence in the literature on the effects of celebrity

trust on advertising credibility, brand credibility, corporate credibility, advertising image, brand image and corporate image.

This study also has implications for managers, advertisers and policymakers who wish to understand the topic of celebrity trust and its effects on other constructs (i.e. advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image). First and foremost, this study could help managers in understanding the topic of celebrity trust in more detail. It suggests that celebrity trust differs from celebrity trustworthiness and is based on both the cognitive and affective dimensions, each of which has a different effect. For example, as noted from the qualitative studies, the cognitive dimension of celebrity trust can be of higher importance when consumers have to make higher-consequence decisions, for example, when they are buying expensive cars, watches, etc. In these situations, a highly expert celebrity would be a good match. On the other hand, when decisions are of a low level and are more attached to the emotions, using a film star or other “showbiz” celebrity would be a good choice. These methods are sufficient to create a higher level of trust among consumers through celebrity endorsers.

This study also helps managers and advertisers to understand the effects of celebrity trust on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image. Its findings suggest that celebrity trust has an active role in enhancing credibility and image of advertising, brand and corporate. A highly trusted celebrity could be fruitful and could result in achieving higher success than a celebrity with low levels of trust, and can have a positive effect on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image.

## **Conclusions**

This study has explored celebrity trust on the basis of both the cognitive and affective dimensions, and its effects on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility, and corporate image. Its findings provide several new insights. Firstly, the results suggest that celebrity trust is an outcome of both the cognitive dimension and/or the affective dimension. This is in line with the findings of previous researchers (McAllister, 1995; Newell *et al.*, 2016; Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut, 2018; Li and Hsu, 2018), who have suggested that trust is based on the cognitive dimension, the affective dimension, or both. However, previous studies in the celebrity endorsement context have used a similar construct, i.e. celebrity trustworthiness, which is based only on the cognitive dimension. This study therefore contributes to the extension and strengthening of the understanding of celebrity trust in terms of both the cognitive and affective dimensions.

Moreover, the outcomes of this study suggest that a highly trusted celebrity would have a positive effect on advertising credibility, advertising image, brand credibility, brand image, corporate credibility and corporate image, while a celebrity with a low level of trust would have a negative effect on other constructs. These findings are again consistent with previous studies (Spry *et al.*, 2011; Dwivedi and Johnson, 2013; Ghotbivayghan *et al.*, 2015; Erdogmus and Esen, 2018; Wang and Scheinbaum, 2018) who have confirmed the effects by examining the effects of celebrity trustworthiness on relevant constructs to credibility and image.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the effects of celebrity trust are different for the brand and corporation when they have different names, and consumers cannot easily identify the parent company. The results also suggest that celebrity trust would not have a huge effect on established companies due to their size. Very large companies do not require any kind of additional promotional activity such as a trusted celebrity. There is little evidence of these

findings in the previous literature. This study stands out in the current literature by providing new evidence.

### **Limitations and suggestions for future research**

This study has some limitations that could lead to future research opportunities. Firstly, it is a qualitative study, and thus conducting an empirical study using quantitative methods on the effects of celebrity trust on credibility and image constructs can increase the generalizability and validity would be a useful idea. Secondly, a future study could examine the effects of each dimension of trust separately, i.e. it could examine the effects of the cognitive and affective dimensions separately on the other constructs involved in this study, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Thirdly, a future study could examine the effects of boundary conditions, i.e. the effects of various celebrity types (sports, showbusiness, etc.) on the other constructs used in this study, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Similarly, a future study could examine the effects of celebrity trust levels (i.e. highly trusted celebrities and those with low levels of trust) on the other constructs used in this study, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Next, a future study could examine the effects of celebrity trust on other attitudinal and behavioural constructs, which could also be done by using both quantitative and qualitative methods (Lafferty *et al.*, 2002; Goldsmith *et al.*, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2018). Finally, as this study was conducted in the United Kingdom, and celebrity endorsers are a global phenomenon, there is a possibility that the phenomenon of celebrity trust is culture-laden and could have distinct meanings in other cultures. Thus, a future study could investigate whether celebrity trust holds similar or different meanings in developing nations, especially in countries like India, China etc. where celebrities are highly acceptable and frequently used (Dhotre and Bhola, 2010; Jain and Roy, 2016).

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