



Article

Impact of Sports Celebrity Endorsements on Brand Trust and Purchase Intentions among Gen Z Consumers in Odisha

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the impact of sports celebrity endorsement attribute factors such as credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness on brand trust and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in Odisha. The data was collected among 384 valid respondents using a structured questionnaire method. By employing Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) this study revealed significant relationships between sports celebrity credibility and brand trust ($\beta = 0.614$, CR = 8.316, $p < 0.001$), sports celebrity attractiveness and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.686$, CR = 8.895, $p < 0.001$), sports celebrity expertise and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.689$, CR = 9.572, $p < 0.001$), and sports celebrity trustworthiness and brand trust ($\beta = 0.697$, CR = 9.491, $p < 0.001$). Brand trust partially mediates the relationship between celebrity endorsement attributes and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$). These findings highlight that both direct and indirect mechanisms through trust are critical for influencing Gen Z purchase behavior via sports celebrity endorsements.

Keywords: Sports Celebrity Endorsements, Brand trust, Purchase intentions, Gen Z consumers, Odisha, Sports celebrity attractiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Over time, the focus of marketing has gradually shifted in a meaningful way. Earlier, the main objective was simply to give customers reasons to purchase a product or try something new. However, since the early 2000s, marketing has evolved beyond just selling brands now aim to create conversations and encourage consumers to engage and talk about them. This shift reflects a broader transformation in how brands communicate, moving from a traditional one-way approach to a more interactive, two-way dialogue with customers. As a result, communication strategies have become more dynamic and customer-centric, supported by an integrated marketing approach that uses a wide variety of channels to reach and connect with audiences more effectively (Mammadbayov et al., 2021).

In today's world, celebrities are often seen as role models, influencing not just opinions but also people's lifestyles and choices. Many individuals tend to adopt habits, preferences, and even purchasing decisions based on what their favourite celebrity endorses or uses. This strong influence significantly shapes consumer buying behaviour, as people are naturally drawn to products associated with admired personalities. While celebrity endorsements may not impact every individual in the same way, they generally play a major role in shaping perceptions and preferences toward a brand. Over the past 150 years, advertising has evolved from traditional approaches to more modern, dynamic strategies, with celebrity endorsement emerging as one of the most effective tools for marketers today (Sankar & M, 2020). It helps brands connect emotionally with consumers, attract attention, and build a unique identity in a competitive

market. Consumer buying behaviour itself involves a series of actions, both online and offline, such as searching for information, engaging with social media, comparing alternatives, making purchase decisions, and eventually using and disposing of the product. Although using celebrities can be expensive for companies, it has become a powerful marketing strategy that often leads to increased brand recognition, customer engagement, and ultimately higher profits. The rise of social media, along with the rapid growth of the internet, has significantly transformed how consumers make purchasing decisions. Today, people have easy access to vast amounts of information, allowing them to quickly compare products, explore alternatives, and evaluate prices before making a choice. In this evolving landscape, celebrity endorsement has become a common and powerful marketing strategy, widely used across the globe accounting for around 25% of advertisements in the Odisha (Moreira et al., 2023). Among different types of endorsers, sports celebrities hold a unique position because of their established credibility and strong reputation in their respective fields. Their influence makes them highly effective in enhancing brand recognition and recall among consumers. While earlier studies have explored the general impact of celebrity endorsements, limited research has specifically examined how sports celebrities on social media influence purchase intentions. Since modern purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by information gathered during the pre-purchase stage especially online it is essential for companies to understand how consumers search for and process information (Aw & Labrecque, 2020). Sports celebrities act as influential figures and role models, whose lifestyles, achievements, and personalities attract followers who often aspire to be like them. As brand ambassadors, they represent an aspirational group that consumers admire, making them particularly effective in influencing preferences and purchase intentions. Although younger audiences are more susceptible to such influences, they are also increasingly aware of marketing tactics, making them both responsive and selective in their decision-making (Raza, 2021).

Generation Z, born roughly between 1995 and 2012, represents a highly influential group of consumers who have grown up entirely in the digital age. They are naturally drawn to engaging content, especially in areas like fashion, travel, and movies, which resonate strongly with their interests and lifestyle aspirations. Known for being intelligent, creative, and technologically skilled, Gen Z consumers are deeply connected to the online world and spend a significant amount of time interacting with digital platforms (Consumers et al., 2025). What sets them apart from previous generations is their strong preference for authenticity and transparency. Unlike traditional audiences, they are often sceptical of obvious or aggressive advertising tactics. Instead, they tend to trust peer reviews, user-generated content, and

influencer recommendations that feel more genuine and relatable. For marketers, this means that building trust and creating authentic connections is far more important than relying on conventional promotional strategies.

The remaining sections of the paper are organized as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of existing work on this study. Section 3 elaborates on the research methodology. Section 4 details the data analysis and discussion also presented. In the end, Section 5 provides a conclusion.

2. Literature review

(Voráček & Bernardová, 2021) focused on comparing how athletes and bloggers influence the purchasing preferences of Generation Z consumers. To gain a deeper understanding, the research used two complementary methods. The first was a questionnaire survey conducted with 508 respondents, providing a broad view of consumer opinions. The second method involved a focus group discussion with 32 participants, divided into two groups, to explore insights in more detail. The findings revealed that athletes have a stronger impact on the behavioral intentions of Gen Z consumers compared to bloggers across all areas examined. Overall, the results clearly highlighted that athlete endorsements are more effective, as reflected in the noticeable differences in responses between the two groups of participants.

(Nayak et al., 2020) examined the impact of celebrity endorsement on consumer buying behaviour in the Bhadrak district of Odisha, focusing on key attributes such as the celebrity's reputation, reliability, attractiveness, class, and qualifications. Data were collected from 165 respondents across different areas of the district, and various statistical techniques, including correlation, regression analysis, descriptive statistics, and charts, were used to analyze the results. The findings indicated that celebrity endorsements have a significant influence on consumers' purchasing decisions, with film celebrities having a particularly strong impact compared to other types of endorsers.

(Marketing et al., 2024) explored how influencer credibility, attractiveness, and online customer reviews shape the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers. Data were collected from 216 Gen Z respondents using a convenience sampling method, ensuring that participants were familiar with at least one beauty influencer and aware of the featured collaboration. The analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS 26. The findings revealed that influencer credibility, attractiveness, and positive online reviews significantly enhance consumer attitudes toward beauty brands, leading to stronger eWOM, higher brand awareness, increased trust, and greater purchase intentions. Overall, the study offers valuable insights for beauty brands aiming to effectively connect with Gen Z consumers and build long-term brand loyalty through influencer

marketing strategies.

(Bagus et al., 2024) examined how influencer marketing affects the purchase intentions of Gen Z consumers. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected online from 150 Gen Z participants and analyzed through descriptive statistics, reliability tests, correlation, and regression analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. The findings highlighted that factors such as influencer credibility, product–influencer fit, perceived expertise, and trustworthiness play a significant role in shaping purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers. The study also suggested that marketers should focus on collaborating with influencers who create genuine and relatable content to strengthen consumer engagement and brand loyalty

(Zahriati & Auliya, 2024) investigated how celebrity endorsement and social influence shape the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers on the TikTok social commerce platform. It focuses on key celebrity attributes such as attractiveness, familiarity, and trustworthiness,

along with the role of real-time and interactive content in influencing buying behaviour. The research with 230 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Based on data from 230 respondents in Indonesia and analyzed using PLS, the results show that celebrity endorsement significantly increases purchase intention, with perceived product quality acting as a mediator. The study suggests that brands should partner with trustworthy and relatable celebrities and use engaging, real-time content to effectively attract Gen Z consumers.

(Gorawar, 2025) explored how celebrity endorsements influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in a competitive, brand-driven market. It highlighted that while celebrities are widely used to attract attention and build credibility, their effectiveness depends on factors such as credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and how well they align with the brand. Based on data collected from 284 respondents and analyzed using statistical techniques, the findings reveal that celebrity brand alignment is the most important factor in driving brand impact, supporting the idea that endorsements work best when the celebrity’s image matches the brand’s identity. Overall, the research suggests that marketers should focus on selecting celebrities who genuinely fit the brand rather than relying solely on popularity, while also considering audience differences. Despite some limitations, the study provides valuable insights for designing effective and targeted endorsement strategies in urban markets.

(Chakraborty et al., 2020) demonstrated that celebrity endorsement is a widely used marketing strategy where brands collaborate with well-known personalities to promote their products or services. The main objective behind this approach is to reach a larger audience by leveraging the popularity and influence of celebrities. This strategy not only helps in building strong brand

equity but also makes advertisements more memorable and distinguishes the brand from its competitors. The present study focuses on examining the impact of celebrity endorsement on consumers’ purchase intentions, specifically in the context of beauty soaps in India. It also explores how such endorsements shape advertising effectiveness and influence viewers as well as society at large. To achieve these objectives, the study uses both primary and secondary data, which are analyzed through Multiple Regression Analysis using SPSS-23 software to develop a reliable research model.

2.1. Hypothesis Development

- **Sports celebrity credibility has effect on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.**

(El-shihy, 2026) explored how the personality traits of sports celebrities such as likability, expertise, credibility, and physical attractiveness affect millennials’ purchase decisions across different social media platforms, including Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. Unlike earlier research that treated all platforms similarly, this study takes a cross-platform approach to understand whether the impact of these traits’ changes depending on the platform. Using a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 228 respondents through surveys and supported by in-depth interviews with 12 participants to gain deeper insights into consumer behavior. The findings revealed that perceived product quality played a partial mediating role between celebrity traits and purchase intention. Overall, the study highlighted the need for marketers to adopt platform-specific strategies and carefully choose endorsers based on the unique dynamics of each platform to maximize their impact.

(El-Shihy, 2024) examined how the personality traits of sports celebrities such as likability, expertise, credibility, and physical attractiveness affect customers’ purchase intentions on social media, with a particular focus on the role of perceived product quality. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 228 millennials in Egypt through an online survey and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings reveal that these celebrity traits not only positively influence purchase intentions but also significantly shape how consumers perceive the quality of a product, which in turn strengthens their intention to buy. The study also confirms that perceived product quality acts as an important mediator in this relationship. Overall, the research provides valuable insights for marketers, emphasizing the importance of choosing the right sports celebrities to enhance consumer perceptions and drive purchasing decisions through social media platforms.

H1: Sports celebrity credibility has a significant positive effect on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha is considered.

• **Sports celebrity attractiveness has effect on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.**

(Ffect et al., 2022) focused on understanding how consumer buying behavior is influenced by various factors, particularly the role of celebrity endorsements. It highlighted that the presence of celebrities in advertisements is an effective way to attract customers, especially young consumers. The research specifically examines how the physical attractiveness of celebrities impacts the purchase intentions of youth. Data were collected from 410 young individuals in Iran, aged between 17 and 30 years, through questionnaires distributed on social media platforms. Statistical tools such as the Chi-square test and correlation analysis were used to examine relationships between variables. The findings revealed that the effect of celebrity attractiveness does not significantly differ between male and female consumers, but overall, physical attractiveness has a positive and significant influence on young consumers' intention to purchase.

(Khan et al., 2024) highlighted that while companies frequently use celebrity endorsements to boost sales, they often overlook the importance of choosing the right endorser. Simply selecting a popular celebrity without ensuring a good fit with the brand can reduce the effectiveness of the campaign. The research focused on identifying the key factors of celebrity endorsement that influence consumer purchase intention. Data were collected from 560 respondents through both online and offline questionnaires, and analyzed using SmartPLS. The findings revealed that the match between the product or brand and the celebrity is the most critical factor, as it directly influences other aspects such as the credibility of the endorser and the transfer of meaning to the brand, which ultimately shape consumers' purchase intentions.

H2: Sports celebrity attractiveness has a significant positive effect on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha is considered.

• **Sports celebrity expertise has effect on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.**

(Felbert & Breuer, 2020) aimed to understand how different types of endorsers influence consumers' purchase intentions, especially in response to growing questions about the effectiveness of sports celebrity endorsements. Data were collected from 240 respondents through an online experiment, and the relationships were analyzed using advanced mediation techniques. The findings showed that endorsers positively impact purchase intentions by shaping how consumers perceive both the advertisement and the brand. Among the different types of endorsers studied, sports celebrities were found to be the most effective in influencing purchase intentions, while company managers and peer consumers had a positive but comparatively weaker impact. Overall, it highlighted that endorsements play a crucial role in marketing

strategies and provides practical insights for marketers on selecting the most effective type of endorser to enhance advertising outcomes.

H3: Sports celebrity expertise has a significant positive effect on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha is considered.

• **Sports celebrity trustworthiness has effect on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.**

This study, based on signalling theory, examines how trust in celebrities influences advertising credibility, brand credibility, and corporate credibility. It also explored whether these relationships vary across demographic factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Using data collected from 625 respondents, this study found that celebrity trust has a strong positive impact on both advertising and brand credibility. Interestingly, these effects were influenced by consumers' ethnicity, while age and gender do not show any significant moderating role. Overall, the research highlighted the importance of building trust through celebrity endorsements, as it can enhance how consumers perceive both the brand and its communications, offering valuable insights for marketers and researchers (Hussain et al., 2020).

(Hussain et al., 2020) focused on understanding how celebrity endorsements influence brand passion and brand loyalty, particularly in the context of clothing brands. Using various statistical techniques such as descriptive analysis, correlation, regression, reliability tests, and structural equation modeling, the research analyzed the relationships between key variables. The findings revealed that characteristics of celebrity endorsers such as likeability, expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness played a significant role in shaping consumers' emotional connection with a brand, referred to as brand passion. The study also highlighted that brand passion acts as a mediator, especially between attributes like likeability and attractiveness of celebrities and the development of brand loyalty.

H4: Sports celebrity trustworthiness has a significant positive effect on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha is considered.

• **Brand trust mediates between sports celebrity endorsement attributes and purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.**

(Unggul et al., 2021) aimed to re-examine the relationship between celebrity endorsements, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and consumer purchase intentions, with a particular focus on the mediating role of trust. Conducted in Indonesia, it is one of the first studies to explore these relationships together. Data were collected from 100 Instagram users through online

questionnaires and analyzed using PLS-SEM. The findings revealed that both celebrity endorsement and e-WOM have a positive impact on consumer confidence and purchase intentions, mainly by building trust. Overall, the study emphasized the importance of trust and highlights how influencers and online interactions can create positive buzz around products, ultimately boosting sales.

(Mushtaq et al., 2024) examined the growing importance of celebrity endorsements in the global marketing landscape and how they influence consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 100 respondents through a questionnaire to understand how people perceive celebrities and their traits, and how these perceptions affect their buying behavior. The findings revealed that advertisements featuring celebrities are generally more attractive and engaging compared to those without them. Moreover, celebrity endorsements have a strong impact on consumer purchase decisions, with the popularity of the celebrity playing a key role in influencing choices. Overall, the results provided useful insights for marketers on how celebrity endorsements can be effectively used to attract consumers and enhance sales.

H5 (Mediation): Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between sports celebrity endorsement attributes and purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha is considered.

1.1 Research gap

Although a considerable amount of research has been conducted on celebrity and influencer endorsements, there are still important gaps that need further exploration. Most previous studies have focused on general celebrity or influencer marketing, with limited attention given specifically to sports celebrities and their distinct impact on Generation Z consumers, especially in regional contexts like Odisha. While earlier research

has examined factors such as credibility, attractiveness, and brand alignment, it has not fully explored how these factors work together to influence both brand trust and purchase intentions among Gen Z. Moreover, a majority of studies are centered on urban or international markets, leaving a gap in understanding consumer behavior in semi-urban and rural areas. Another limitation is the lack of comprehensive models that simultaneously analyze brand trust and purchase intention in the context of sports celebrity endorsements. Addressing these gaps, the present study aims to offer a more focused and context-specific understanding of how sports celebrity endorsements influence Gen Z consumers in Odisha.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study will employ a quantitative research design to evaluate the relationship between sports celebrity endorsement attributes and consumer purchase intention. A descriptive and analytical method will be used to understand and evaluate the influence of attributes such as sports celebrity attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, brand attitude, social media influence, and brand trust on consumer purchase intention. Primary research will be conducted using a structured questionnaire with a Likert scale to collect data from Gen Z consumers in the state of Odisha. The sampling method used will be convenience sampling with a sample size of 400 respondents. To analyze the collected data, statistical tools such as Structural Equation Modeling will be used to evaluate relationships and mediation effects between the attributes. The reliability and validity of the study will be established using tools such as Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. The research will provide an empirical evaluation of the influence of sports celebrity endorsements on consumer behavior in a digitally connected world.

3.2 Conceptual framework

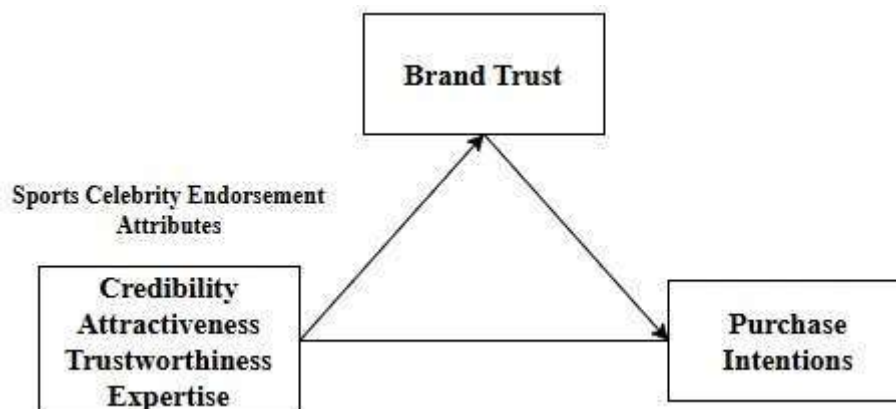


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

3.3 Research Objectives

- To examine the influence of sports celebrity attractiveness on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.
- To assess the impact of sports celebrity trustworthiness on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.
- To analyse the role of sports celebrity expertise in shaping brand trust and purchase intentions among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.
- To evaluate the mediating role of brand trust between sports celebrity endorsement attributes and purchase intentions.

3.4 Research Hypothesis

- **H1:** Sports celebrity credibility has a significant positive effect on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.
- **H2:** Sports celebrity attractiveness has a significant positive effect on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.
- **H3:** Sports celebrity expertise has a significant positive effect on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.
- **H4:** Sports celebrity trustworthiness has a significant positive effect on brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.
- **H5:** Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between sports celebrity endorsement attributes and purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha.

3.5 Sample selection and Data collection

The data has been collected through a structured questionnaire, and a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions has been incorporated to understand the perceptions of consumers regarding sports celebrity endorsement attributes, brand trust, and purchase intention, and a 5-point scale has been used for collecting data. The total numbers of responses received for this study were 384, and they belong to Generation Z consumers from the state of Odisha, ensuring a balanced demographic profile in terms of age, gender, education level, location, and income level. The respondents for this study were from 18 to 27 years old, and they were either undergraduates or postgraduates, and they were from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, ensuring a representative sample for this study.

3.6 Measures

Data has been gathered with the help of a structured questionnaire. Questionnaire has been prepared using 5 Likert-scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree) and 4 Likert scale, where respondents will be asked to share their opinions regarding various research questions under study. Questionnaire has a set of both open ended and closed ended questions. Questions have been carefully crafted so as to gather meaningful information with respect to identified research variables. The details of the variables and the corresponding measurement items used for the analysis are presented below.

Table 1 Measures

S. No.	Variables
1	Sport Celebrity Credibility
2	Brand Trust
3	Sport Celebrity Attractiveness
4	Purchase intention
5	Sport Celebrity Trustworthines
6	Sports Celebrity Expertise

- **Brand trust:** In today's highly competitive global market, building and maintaining long-term relationships with customers has become essential for a brand's success, making brand trust a key area of focus for both researchers and practitioners. Trust can be understood as a consumer's willingness to rely on a brand or company with confidence, believing that it will deliver on its promises. In the context of branding, it reflects the extent to which consumers feel assured that a brand can consistently perform its stated functions. Brand trust is considered a multidimensional concept and plays a crucial role in shaping brand credibility and overall brand equity. It is also fundamental in developing customer loyalty, as consumers are more likely to stay committed to brands they trust. Overall, trust is seen as one of the most powerful tools in relationship marketing, helping companies build strong, lasting connections with their customers (Surapto, 2020). This variable included 5 items for this study.

- **Purchase intention:** Purchase intention is an important concept in marketing, as it helps managers evaluate the potential success of new strategies, such as introducing a new distribution channel. By understanding consumers' willingness to buy, businesses can decide whether a concept is worth further development and identify the most suitable target markets and customer segments. Purchase intention occurs at the pre-purchase stage and reflects the motivational factors that influence consumer behavior. To accurately predict how consumers will act, it is essential to understand their attitudes, perceptions, and internal thought processes, as these elements ultimately shape their intention to make a purchase (Gil-saura et al., 2020). This variable included 5 items for this study.

- **Sports Celebrity Credibility:** Sports celebrity credibility refers to how consumers perceive an athlete in terms of trustworthiness, expertise, and

attractiveness, which together determine how believable and persuasive their endorsements are. When a sports celebrity is seen as reliable, knowledgeable, and appealing, their influence becomes stronger, making consumers more likely to trust the message and feel encouraged to consider or purchase the endorsed product (El-shihy & El-shihy, 2024). This variable included 4 items for this study.

- **Sports Celebrity Attractiveness:** Sports celebrity attractiveness refers to the overall appeal of an athlete that draws consumers' attention and makes them more influential as endorsers. It goes beyond just physical appearance and includes factors such as fitness, grooming, personal style, charisma, confidence, and a relatable personality. When a sports celebrity is perceived as likable and confident, it enhances their public image and makes them more appealing to audiences. In marketing, this concept is supported by the Source Attractiveness Model, which explains that attractive endorsers are more persuasive because they capture attention, create positive feelings, and positively shape consumers' attitudes toward the brand or product (Ribeiro & Correia, 2024). This variable included 4 items for this study.

- **Sports Celebrity Trustworthiness:** Sports celebrity trustworthiness refers to how consumers perceive an athlete as honest, reliable, sincere, and dependable when endorsing a product or brand. It is an important aspect of Source Credibility Theory, which suggests that people are more likely to believe and accept messages from endorsers they consider genuine and truthful. When a sports celebrity is seen as trustworthy, consumers tend to view the endorsement as authentic rather than purely promotional, which strengthens brand credibility and builds trust. This, in turn, creates more positive attitudes toward the brand and increases the likelihood of purchase. Trustworthy sports celebrities are especially influential among younger audiences like Gen Z, who place a high value on authenticity and transparency in marketing messages (Dwivedi et al., 2021). This variable included 4 items for this study.

- **Sports Celebrity Expertise:** Sports celebrity expertise refers to how consumers perceive an athlete's knowledge, skills, experience, and overall competence, especially in relation to the product they endorse. It is a key component of Source Credibility Theory, where expertise reflects the extent to which the celebrity is viewed as qualified and well-informed. When consumers believe that a sports celebrity has genuine knowledge or experience relevant to a product, they are more likely to trust the endorsement and consider the information reliable. This higher level of perceived expertise strengthens persuasion,

builds trust, and ultimately increases consumers' intention to purchase the endorsed product (Sokolova & Kefi, 2022). This variables included 4 items for this study.

4. Results

4.1 Overview of Results

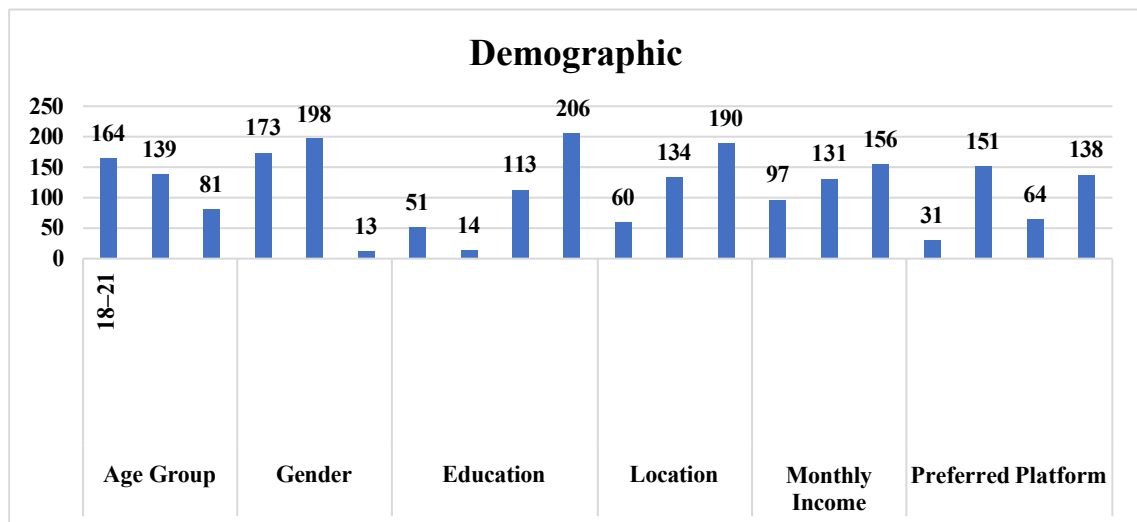
This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the empirical results obtained from the study on the effect of sports celebrity endorsements on brand trust and purchase intention among Gen Z consumers in Odisha. The data was collected from 384 valid respondents using a structured questionnaire. The analysis was done using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the help of IBM AMOS 24.0, along with mediation analysis done using Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4). The analysis is presented in six sections, namely, the demographic profile of the respondents, descriptive statistics, analysis of the measurement model in terms of reliability and validity, analysis of the discriminant validity, analysis of the model fit, and finally, the structural model hypothesis testing along with mediation analysis.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The characteristics of the 384 respondents are shown in Table 1. The largest age group was respondents aged from 18 to 21 years (42.7%, $n = 164$), which was aligned with the core Generation Z consumers as the focus of this research. Specifically, the 22–24 age group represented 36.2% ($n = 139$) of the respondents, while those aged 25–27 made up 21.1% ($n = 81$). Most of the respondents were male (51.6%, $n = 198$), women accounted for 45.1% ($n = 173$), and 3.4% ($n = 13$) of participants did not want to disclose their gender identity. Educationally most participants were Undergraduates (53.6%, $n = 206$) followed by Postgraduates (29.4%, $n = 113$), this was in accordance with the educational background anticipated of sway target Gen Z from Odisha. As far as living area is concerned, 49.5% ($n = 190$) were from urban, 34.9% ($n = 134$) from semi-urban and 15.6% ($n = 60$) from rural areas indicating a sample with good representation from Odishan rural and urban areas. The monthly family income was divided into three categories: ₹25,000–50,000 was the most frequent (40.6%, $n = 156$), then below ₹25,000 (34.1%, $n = 131$) and above ₹50,000 (25.3%, $n = 97$). Social media is important to note: Instagram was the leading platform (39.3%, $n = 151$) just ahead of YouTube (35.9%, $n = 138$), confirming Gen Z consumers' visual-first, video-centric media consumption habits. Twitter/X represented 16.7% ($n = 64$) and Facebook 8.1% ($n = 31$).

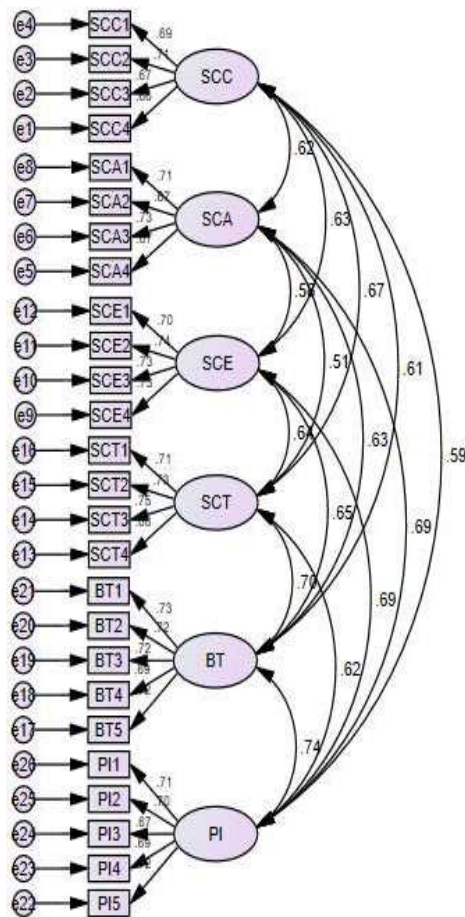
Table 2 Demographic Profile (n=384)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	18–21	164	42.7
	22–24	139	36.2
	25–27	81	21.1
Gender	Female	173	45.1
	Male	198	51.6
	Prefer not to say	13	3.4
Education	Diploma	51	13.3
	Other	14	3.6
	Postgraduate	113	29.4
Location	Undergraduate	206	53.6
	Rural	60	15.6
	Semi-Urban	134	34.9
Monthly Income	Urban	190	49.5
	Above ₹50,000	97	25.3
	Below ₹25,000	131	34.1
Preferred Platform	₹25,000–50,000	156	40.6
	Facebook	31	8.1
	Instagram	151	39.3
	Twitter/X	64	16.7
	YouTube	138	35.9



4.3 Measurement (CFA) – Model

In this section, the testing results for the reliability and validity of the six constructs are summarized in Table 2. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach’s Alpha and all the constructs met the acceptable value of 0.70 which was suggested by Hair et al. Alpha ranged from 0.776 (SCC) to 0.840 (BT) ensuring that the internal consistency of the measurement model was sufficient to good. The Composite Reliability (CR) values were between 0.788 (SCC) and 0.843 (BT), which were all above the cut-off of 0.70 suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which supports the consistency of the internal of each of the latent variables. Convergent validity was determined by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Based on the results, all constructs had AVE values higher than 0.5 (i.e. 0.682 for SCC and 0.725 for SCE). SCE attained the maximum AVE (0.725), meaning that the expertise items have the largest amount of shared variance within all the latent constructs, whereas SCC and PI lie in the lowest part of the acceptance range. Standardised factor loads for all items of the latent constructs were between 0.675 and 0.748, indicating that all items used in this study are well above the recommended value of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2010), and also confirm the convergent validity of the items at item-level. Reliability of the Brand Trust mediator factor was excellent ($\alpha = 0.840$; CR = 0.843; AVE = 0.716), further validating its measurement for the mediation analysis.



Note: Sports Celebrity Credibility (SCC), Sports Celebrity Attractiveness (SCA), Sports Celebrity Expertise (SCE), Sports Celebrity Trustworthiness (SCT), Brand Trust (BT) & Purchase Intention (PI)

Table 3 Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Loadings	Cron-Alpha	AVE	CR
Sports Celebrity Credibility (SCC)	0.685 - 0.709	0.776	0.682	0.788
Sports Celebrity Attractiveness (SCA)	0.675 - 0.735	0.791	0.698	0.796
Sports Celebrity Expertise (SCE)	0.697 - 0.744	0.816	0.725	0.808
Sports Celebrity Trustworthiness (SCT)	0.680 - 0.748	0.809	0.717	0.805
Brand Trust (BT)	0.690 - 0.732	0.84	0.716	0.843
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.675 - 0.725	0.827	0.698	0.836

Note: Sports Celebrity Credibility (SCC), Sports Celebrity Attractiveness (SCA), Sports Celebrity Expertise (SCE), Sports Celebrity Trustworthiness (SCT), Brand Trust (BT) & Purchase Intention (PI)

Table 3 reports the discriminant validity matrix according to Fornell Larcker criterion. The diagonal is the square root of AVE, and the diagonal values are higher than the corresponding rows and columns of the inter-construct correlations. The square root of AVE values ranged from 0.826 (SCC) to 0.851 (SCE), which were greater than the maximum inter-construct correlations in each row. The highest inter-construct correlation was found between Brand Trust and Purchase Intention ($r = 0.613$), and then the Brand Trust–Sports Celebrity Trustworthiness relation ($r = 0.574$), both are theoretically expected as stated in the right of structural pathways in this study. All other inter-construct correlations were between 0.403 and 0.568, suggesting that the constructs are empirically distinct and indicating adequate discriminant validity throughout the measurement model.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity (Fornell Larcker criterion)

	SCC	SCA	SCE	SCT	BT	PI
SCC	0.826					
SCA	.491**	0.835				
SCE	.501**	.469**	0.851			
SCT	.532**	.403**	.513**	0.847		
BT	.495**	.511**	.540**	.574**	0.846	
PI	.471**	.556**	.568**	.505**	.613**	0.835

Note: Sports Celebrity Credibility (SCC), Sports Celebrity Attractiveness (SCA), Sports Celebrity Expertise (SCE), Sports Celebrity Trustworthiness (SCT), Brand Trust (BT) & Purchase Intention (PI)

Table 4 shows the goodness-of-fit indices of the CFA measurement model. The CMIN/DF value of 1.049, below the recommended value of 3.0 (Kline, 2011), evidenced a good fit and indicated a parsimonious model with good fit. The Root Mean Square Residual (RMR = 0.01) is much lower than the cutoff value of 0.05, indicating that little residual variance is not explained by the model. The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI = 0.946), a Normed Fit Index (NFI = 0.931), a Relative Fit Index (RFI = 0.921) were all above the usual 0.90 cutoff (Hu and Bentler, 1999), collectively indicating that the structural model fit the observed data well. These fit indices establish adequate empirical grounds to estimate the structural paths and examine the hypotheses.

Table 5 Model Fit Summary

CMIN/DF	RMR	GFI	NFI	RFI
1.049	0.01	0.946	0.931	0.921

4.4 Hypothesis Implementation

The structural model was evaluated through maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 24.0. Table 5 shows the standardised path coefficients (β), critical ratios (CR), and p-values for each direct path (H1–H4) hypothesised. Three subscales of the Professional Quality of Life scale were employed, all the 4 hypotheses were supported at the $p < 0.001$ significance level, with critical ratio values ranging from 8.316 to 9.572, each far exceeding the minimal threshold of 1.96 ($p < 0.05$).

Table 6 Hypothesis Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Relationship Path	Co-efficient	CR	P-Value	Decision
H1	Sports Celebrity Credibility ---> Brand Trust	0.614	8.316	P<0.001	Supported
H2	Sports Celebrity Attractiveness ---> Purchase	0.686	8.895	P<0.001	Supported
H3	Sports Celebrity Expertise ---> Purchase	0.689	9.572	P<0.001	Supported
H4	Sports Celebrity Trustworthiness ---> Brand	0.697	9.491	P<0.001	Supported

H1: Sports Celebrity Credibility → Brand Trust ($\beta = 0.614$, CR = 8.316, $p < 0.001$)

Hypothesis H1 predicted that the sports celebrity's credibility would have a significant positive impact on the brand trust of Gen Z consumers in Odisha. The support for this hypothesis is complete in the structural model ($\beta = 0.614$, CR = 8.316, $p < 0.001$). The moderate to high path coefficient means that Gen Z consumers value the credibility of an endorsing sports celebrity, that is, being considered a trustworthy, knowledgeable, and sincere provider of product information, as their trust towards the promoted brand significantly increases. This result is conceptually in line with Ohanian's (1990) Model of Source Credibility, which suggests that the perceived credibility of the communicator positively influences the effectiveness of communication and hence the consumer's favorable evaluation towards the communicated brand. In the context of Odisha where sport stars (especially cricketers, hockey players, plus players from local games of sport) enjoy huge fan following and social aspiration among young consumers, to the extent that it acts as "primary cognitive anchor that validates the brand", credibility is a

must. The critical ratio (CR) value of 8.316 further confirms that the relationship between credibility and trust is significant a strong and the finding was similar for endorser credibility as a predictor of brand attitude and trust of consumers.

H2: Sports Celebrity Attractiveness → Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.686$, CR = 8.895, $p < 0.001$)

H2 stated that the perceived beauty or attractiveness of sports celebrities has a positive effect on the purchase intention of Gen Z users in Odisha. The result provides full support for H2 ($\beta = 0.686$, CR = 8.895, $p < 0.001$). The large path coefficient indicates that physical attractiveness, aspirational lifestyle, and visual appeal of sports celebrities have a strong direct and positive influence on the purchase motivation of Gen Z consumers towards the products they endorse. This result is based on McGuire's (1985) Source Attractiveness Model, which posits that the receivers of a message have a more positive attitude toward the communicator and are more likely to be adopted by the communicators who are physically and socially attractive. In Odisha where Gen Z consists of a large population who follow celebrity culture on visually intense, algorithmic platforms Like Instagram and Youtube, attractiveness acts as a powerful peripheral cue which triggers purchase motivation without demanding much cognitive effort, supporting the low elaboration path of the Theory of Elaboration This finding is consistent with that of Bogomolova et al. This finding is consistent with the results of Sato et al. (2015) and Dugalic and Lazarevic (2017) who found physical attractiveness of athlete endorsers as a significant determinant of purchasing behavioural intents especially for younger consumers.

H3: Sports Celebrity Expertise → Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.689$, CR = 9.572, $p < 0.001$)

Hypothesis H3 stated that sports celebrity expertise positively influences the purchase intention of Gen Z consumers in Odisha. This hypothesis is supported with the highest critical ratio among all direct-effect paths in the model ($\beta = 0.689$, CR = 9.572, $p < 0.001$) establishing expertise as the most statistically powerful determinant of purchase intention. It could be concluded that a consumer of Gen z in Odisha is being driven to buy the product most, when they find the endorsing sport celebrity good knowledge provider in that sport, technically proficient in their sport as well as having the ability to endorse the related product category. Expertise is how a communicator is perceived as a source of truthful statements (Erdogan, 1999), and the current findings reconfirm the importance of this construct in the endorsement- intent relationship in an Indian context among Gen Z. The superior influence of expertise over attractiveness in predicting purchase intention ($\beta = 0.689$ vs. $\beta = 0.686$) Although marginal, it indicates that aspirational aesthetics are not the sole driving force behind Odisha's Generation Z consumers; they also make evaluative judgments regarding the credibility and ability of the endorser. This is especially true for product categories like sports nutrition, fitness equipment, athletic wear, and performance accessories, where endorser-product fit and domain expertise are the most prominent. The finding aligns with *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living* (2025) where the expertise-driven endorsement was the strongest predictor of purchasing intentions through digital channels among the younger consumers.

H4: Sports Celebrity Trustworthiness → Brand Trust ($\beta = 0.697$, CR = 9.491, $p < 0.001$)

H4 predicted that the sports celebrity trustworthiness would positively influence the brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha. The hypothesized relationship was supported, and the path coefficient was the largest among direct-effect hypotheses $\beta = 0.697$, CR = 9.491, $p < 0.001$, which indicated that trustworthiness was the strongest predictor of brand trust in the structural model. This means that Gen Z consumers in Odisha, consider a sports celebrity to be honest real to duty expectations honest in their endorsement and realistic in terms of only promoting products which do not conceive of their image, and such perception of honesty and integrity they hold is immediately imparted to the endorsed brand and also enhances brand trust. This result is consistent with the seminal communication and persuasion model, which indicated that trustworthiness was the strongest/component predictor of source credibility in leading to attitude change. The conceptual superiority of trustworthiness over credibility in the prediction of brand trust ($\beta = 0.697$ vs. $\beta = 0.614$) is an important theoretical result. It indicates that although the generalized credibility is forming the basis of the brand trust, it is only the trustworthiness that is the perceived honesty and integrity of the endorser feeds back on the brand credibility that is holding more of the weight. In an era of digital media marked by celebrity endorsement fatigue, a culture of undisclosed paid partnerships, and growing skepticism from Gen Z towards inauthentic celebrity marketing, trustworthiness is the defining characteristic that allows brands to translate celebrity association into authentic brand trust.

Table 7 Mediation Results

Mediation Effect	Path	Effect	p	Result
	Sports Celebrity Endorsement Attributes → Brand Trust	0.86	P<0.001	Significant
(Direct Effect)	Sports Celebrity Endorsement Attributes → Purchase Intention	0.58	P<0.001	Significant
	Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	0.28	P<0.001	Significant
(Indirect Effect)	CA → BT → PI	0.24	P<0.001	Partial

Mediation

Direct Effect

The direct effect of sports celebrity endorsement attributes on brand trust was the strongest in the model ($\beta = 0.86$, $p < 0.001$), showing that credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness strongly improve brand trust among Gen Z consumers in Odisha. The direct effect of endorsement attributes on purchase intention also remained significant ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), even after including brand trust, indicating that endorsement attributes directly influence buying intention. In addition, brand trust had a significant positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that higher trust in the brand leads to stronger consumer intention to purchase.

Indirect Effect

The indirect effect of sports celebrity endorsement attributes on purchase intention through brand trust was found to be significant with $\beta = 0.24$ and $p < 0.001$. Moreover, the bootstrap confidence interval does not contain zero, thus supporting the indirect effect. Therefore, the mediation role of brand trust is supported. Since both the direct effect and indirect effect are significant, the mediation is partial. Therefore, sports celebrity attributes influence purchase intention both directly and indirectly. Hence, H5 is supported.

4.5 Discussion

Overall, the findings of the three studies have emphasized the significant and multiple roles played by sports celebrity endorsements in influencing consumer behavior, especially in terms of influencing consumer perceptions about the brand. The study done by (Moreira et al., 2023) has shown that sports celebrity endorsements play an important role in increasing the brand image, brand trust, word of mouth, and brand attitude, which have both direct and indirect effects on influencing the consumer purchase intention. Moreover, the study done by (Zhou et al., 2020) has shown that celebrity endorsements make the advertisement more attractive and influence consumer purchase behavior, and the popularity of the celebrity is one of the significant determinants for influencing consumer buying behavior. In this regard, the present study on Gen Z consumers in Odisha reinforces the importance of the role of sports celebrities as influencers, given their high credibility, popularity, and expertise, as they are found to influence consumer perceptions, generate emotional connections, and build brand trust, thereby creating purchase intention. Moreover, the rise of social media is also found to enhance the power of celebrity influence, as it helps create a sense of relatability between the consumer and the celebrity. Overall, the above discussion indicates that celebrity endorsement is an important marketing strategy, but its success depends on factors such as credibility, brand fit, and the ability to create brand trust, especially among Gen Z consumers.

5. Conclusion

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of sports celebrity endorsement attributes on brand trust and purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in Odisha, along with the analysis of the mediating effect of brand trust. The findings of the study provide strong empirical support to all the objectives stated above and also validate the conceptual framework of the study. Firstly, the study found that sports celebrity endorsement attributes, namely credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness, have significant impact on consumer behavior. Of these attributes, trustworthiness and credibility were found to be important factors in building brand trust, thus fulfilling the objective of the study to identify factors influencing brand trust. Secondly, attractiveness and expertise were found to have strong direct effects on purchase intention, thus fulfilling the objective of the study on the impact of sports celebrity endorsement attributes on purchase intention. Thirdly, the study confirmed the significant positive relationship between brand trust and purchase intention, thus validating the notion that consumers are likely to purchase the product if they have high brand trust. The most important part is that the mediation analysis confirmed that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between sports celebrity endorsement attributes and purchase intention. This, in essence, confirms the notion that celebrity endorsements have an effect on purchase intention through direct and indirect mechanisms, thus validating the main objective of the analysis, which was to examine the mediation effect. In conclusion, the study validates the notion that sports

celebrity endorsements are very effective in persuading Gen Z consumers through two mechanisms, namely, direct persuasion and indirect persuasion through the formation of brand trust. The most important part is that the study confirms the need to ensure that the sports celebrity is credible and trustworthy, thus validating the conceptual model and the need to have a deeper understanding of consumer behavior, especially in the context of celebrity endorsements in Odisha.

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