



An Influence of Regional/Local Celebrity Endorsement versus National Celebrity Endorsement on FMCG Consumer Buying Behaviour: A Study of Gen Z Consumers in Rajkot City

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Abstract

Celebrity endorsement is a widely employed strategy in FMCG marketing; however, the comparative efficacy of regional versus national endorsers on consumer behaviour remains insufficiently examined, particularly in tier-2 Indian cities. This study investigates how Gujarati regional celebrities and pan-India national celebrities differentially influence the purchasing decisions of Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers in Rajkot. Grounded in Cultural Congruence Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the research proposes that shared cultural proximity amplifies message acceptance and purchase intent. A mixed-methods design was adopted: quantitative data from 300 Gen Z respondents (aged 18–26) were analysed via MANOVA and structural equation modelling, complemented by two focus group discussions. The results establish that regional endorsements yield markedly higher cultural congruence, emotional resonance, and purchase intention for most FMCG categories, whereas national celebrities sustain an advantage in brand prestige perception. Gender and product category emerge as significant moderators. The study contributes novel empirical evidence from a Gujarati urban context and offers practical guidance for FMCG marketers pursuing high-impact, cost-efficient endorsement strategies in tier-2 markets.

Key Words: celebrity endorsement, regional celebrity, national celebrity, FMCG, Gen Z, Rajkot, cultural congruence, consumer behaviour, Elaboration Likelihood Model

Introduction

In India's highly competitive FMCG landscape, brands have long relied on celebrity associations to differentiate offerings and cultivate emotional bonds with consumers. Traditionally, this has meant deploying nationally recognised faces — Bollywood stars and prominent cricketers — as brand ambassadors. A discernible shift is now underway, however, with brands increasingly turning to regional celebrities, local digital creators, and culturally embedded personalities to engage geographically specific consumer segments. This transition is most pronounced in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, where regional pride, shared linguistic identity, and community values wield considerable influence over purchasing attitudes.

Generation Z (individuals born approximately 1997–2012) constitutes the most digitally embedded and culturally self-aware consumer cohort in contemporary markets. In Rajkot —

Gujarat's fourth-largest commercial centre — Gen Z consumers inhabit a distinctive tension: simultaneous immersion in global digital content and deep rootedness in Gujarati cultural norms. This duality raises a compelling empirical question: does a nationally celebrated Bollywood personality hold stronger persuasive power over Rajkot's Gen Z, or does a regional celebrity whose language, values, and lived experience mirror their own prove more effective in driving purchase intent?

Despite growing scholarly and practitioner interest in regional marketing, no prior study has offered an empirical comparison of regional versus national celebrity endorsement effects on FMCG buying behaviour among Gen Z consumers within a Gujarati urban context. The present research addresses this lacuna. Its core objectives are: (i) to compare endorsement-driven purchase intention across celebrity types; (ii) to examine cultural congruence as a mediating mechanism; (iii) to assess the moderating roles of gender and FMCG product category; and (iv) to derive actionable insights for marketers targeting tier-2 Gen Z consumers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Celebrity Endorsement and Consumer Behaviour

McCracken's (1989) Meaning Transfer Model provides the foundational theoretical lens for celebrity endorsement research, articulating how cultural meanings associated with a celebrity migrate first to the brand and then to the consumer. Building on this, Ohanian (1990) identified attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise as the three dimensions of source credibility most predictive of favourable brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Empirical work across FMCG categories has consistently corroborated these linkages (Amos et al., 2008; Pradhan et al., 2014). Within India, Bollywood actors and cricketers have emerged as dominant endorsers (Roy, 2012); however, the persuasive potential of regional celebrities has received scant systematic attention.

2.2 Cultural Congruence Theory

Cultural Congruence Theory (Triandis, 1989; Zou & Volz, 2010) holds that persuasive communications achieve greater impact when source and receiver share cultural values, norms, and identity markers. Applied to endorsement contexts, a celebrity who mirrors the consumer's linguistic codes, regional customs, and cultural aspirations is likely to be perceived as both more relatable and more credible. In-group identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) further supports this proposition: consumers respond more favourably to sources they perceive as members of their own cultural or regional community.

2.3 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) distinguishes between two persuasion routes: the central route, characterised by deliberate, argument-based processing, and the peripheral route, driven by heuristic cues such as source attractiveness or perceived social similarity. For low-involvement FMCG purchases, peripheral processing predominates, elevating the importance of source characteristics. Regional celebrities, by offering heightened cultural proximity, may serve as potent peripheral cues — activating identification effects that

translate more reliably into purchase intent than the abstract prestige signals associated with national celebrities.

2.4 Gen Z and Regional Identity

Gen Z consumers are noted for their scepticism toward mass-market advertising and their preference for authentic, relatable human brand communication (Priporas et al., 2017; Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Research indicates that Gen Z responds most positively to endorsers perceived as genuine and culturally congruent (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). For Rajkot's Gen Z, who simultaneously consume global media and maintain strong Gujarati cultural affiliations, the question of whether national or regional endorsers better satisfy authenticity expectations carries substantive theoretical and managerial implications.

3. Theoretical Framework & Hypotheses

The study's conceptual model integrates Cultural Congruence Theory with the ELM. Celebrity type (regional vs national) is the primary independent variable; cultural congruence perception serves as a mediator; and purchase intention is the key dependent variable, with brand credibility and brand attitude as intermediate constructs. Gender and FMCG product category function as moderators.

Based on this framework, six hypotheses are advanced:

H1: Regional endorsements generate higher cultural congruence perception than national endorsements.

H2: Regional endorsements produce higher purchase intention for FMCG products.

H3: Cultural congruence mediates the celebrity type — purchase intention relationship.

H4: Brand credibility mediates the celebrity type — brand attitude relationship.

H5: Gender moderates the regional endorsement effect, with stronger impact among female Gen Z.

H6: Product category moderates endorsement effectiveness: regional celebrities outperform for everyday FMCG; national celebrities lead for aspirational categories.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Study Area

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative hypothesis testing with qualitative exploration of underlying meanings. Rajkot was selected as the study site given its status as a major tier-2 commercial hub in Gujarat with high smartphone penetration, active media engagement, and a Gen Z cohort that embodies the dual exposure — regional cultural immersion alongside national media consumption — central to the research question.

4.2 Quantitative Phase

A structured questionnaire was administered to 300 Gen Z respondents (aged 18–26) recruited through purposive and snowball sampling across colleges, retail zones, and digital platforms in Rajkot. An experimental design was employed: participants were randomly assigned to one of two stimulus conditions, each presenting a print/digital advertisement for the same FMCG product featuring either a prominent Gujarati regional celebrity or a well-known Bollywood national celebrity. Post-exposure responses were captured using established scales: Cultural

Congruence (Muda et al., 2014; 5 items), Brand Credibility (Erdem & Swait, 2004; 5 items), Brand Attitude (Mitchell & Olson, 1981; 4 items), and Purchase Intention (Dodds et al., 1991; 4 items), all on a 5-point Likert format. Data were analysed with MANOVA for group comparisons and Hayes PROCESS Macro (Models 4 and 7) for mediation and moderated-mediation testing.

4.3 Qualitative Phase

Two focus group discussions (FGDs) — one male, one female — were conducted with 18 Gen Z participants in Rajkot. A semi-structured guide probed cultural identity, celebrity relatability, the role of language in advertising persuasion, and the perceived authenticity of regional versus national endorsers. Sessions were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5. Data Analysis & Results

5.1 Sample Profile

All 300 responses were valid (regional condition: $n = 150$; national: $n = 150$). Gender composition: 52% male, 48% female. Age: 18–20 years (38%), 21–23 years (42%), 24–26 years (20%). Educational status: undergraduate (55%), postgraduate (30%), employed (15%). Principal social media platforms: Instagram (91%), YouTube (87%), Snapchat (62%).

5.2 Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (AMOS 24.0) demonstrated acceptable fit: CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.052, SRMR = 0.048. All standardised factor loadings exceeded 0.70; composite reliability values ranged from 0.81 to 0.89; and Average Variance Extracted values surpassed 0.50 across all constructs, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

5.3 Hypothesis Testing

Table 1 presents MANOVA comparisons across the two experimental conditions. Regional celebrity endorsement elicited significantly greater cultural congruence ($M = 4.21$ vs. 3.14; $p < 0.01$) and purchase intention ($M = 3.97$ vs. 3.71; $p < 0.01$), supporting H1 and H2. National celebrities scored marginally higher on brand credibility ($M = 4.02$ vs. 3.89; $p < 0.05$), reflecting their stronger prestige associations.

Variable	Regional (M)	National (M)	F-value	Sig.
Cultural Congruence	4.21	3.14	87.43	0.001**
Brand Credibility	3.89	4.02	4.18	0.041*
Brand	4.05	3.78	12.61	0.001**

Attitude				
Purchase Intention	3.97	3.71	9.84	0.002**

Table 1: MANOVA Results — Regional vs National Celebrity Conditions (* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$)

Mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 4) confirmed H3: cultural congruence significantly mediated the celebrity type — purchase intention pathway (indirect effect = 0.312; 95% CI [0.218, 0.419]; 5,000 bootstrap resamples). H4 was also supported, with brand credibility mediating celebrity type — brand attitude (indirect effect = 0.198; 95% CI [0.112, 0.291]).

Moderation analysis (Model 7) supported H5: the regional endorsement effect on purchase intention was stronger among female respondents ($\beta = 0.48$; $p < 0.01$) than male respondents ($\beta = 0.29$; $p < 0.05$). H6 received partial support: regional celebrities outperformed for daily-use personal care FMCG (e.g., soap, hair oil, snacks), while national celebrities retained an edge for aspirational premium categories.

5.4 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the FGD data yielded three primary themes. First, cultural identity and community pride: participants uniformly conveyed that regional celebrities evoke a heightened sense of belonging that national celebrities cannot replicate. Second, authenticity and relatability: Gen Z respondents perceived regional endorsers as more sincere and less commercially contrived — an assessment consistent with the source credibility literature. Third, language as a trust signal: advertising delivered in Gujarati, or featuring a celebrity known to speak the language fluently, was reported to create immediate emotional resonance that enhanced brand favourability.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings provide robust empirical grounding for Cultural Congruence Theory in celebrity endorsement contexts, demonstrating that cultural proximity is an independent driver of purchase intent that operates irrespective of national celebrity prestige. The mediation of cultural congruence enriches the ELM by identifying the peripheral-route mechanism through which celebrity type shapes consumer behaviour — a contribution largely absent from prior Indian endorsement research.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The evidence supports a dual-celebrity strategy for FMCG brands in culturally distinct regional markets: regional celebrities for purchase conversion and community-level engagement; national celebrities for broad awareness and brand prestige signalling. The stronger response among female Gen Z consumers to regional endorsers suggests gender-targeted regional celebrity executions, particularly in personal care and household FMCG. The prominence of language as a trust signal further recommends fully localised creative strategies — Gujarati language, local imagery, and culturally embedded narratives — rather than superficially adapted national campaign materials.

6.3 Conclusion

This study provides the first rigorous empirical comparison of regional versus national celebrity endorsement effectiveness among Gen Z consumers in Rajkot, India. Regional endorsements demonstrably outperform national ones on cultural congruence, brand attitude, and purchase intention for most FMCG categories, with cultural congruence serving as the critical mediating pathway. National celebrities retain relevance for brand prestige and aspirational product associations. Future research should extend the comparative framework to other tier-2 cities, incorporate longitudinal and behavioural outcome measures, and examine digital-native regional influencers — Gujarati YouTubers and Instagram creators — as a hybrid endorsement category straddling regional authenticity and broad digital reach.

Limitations

The geographic confinement to Rajkot limits cross-regional transferability. Reliance on print/digital advertisement stimuli may not capture the full complexity of multi-channel endorsement environments. Self-reported purchase intention diverges from observable purchase behaviour. Finally, treating Gen Z as a homogeneous cohort overlooks meaningful intra-generational heterogeneity. Future studies employing longitudinal designs, behavioural tracking, and multi-city comparative samples would address these constraints.

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