

## **Influence of Idealized Fashion Models on Purchasing Behavior**

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This paper examines how consumers' perceptions of similarity, familiarity, and belief toward idealized models (celebrities) shown in advertisements influences their purchase intentions. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the theory of social comparison and the theory of attraction. Two hundred and twenty women participated in the survey. The Perceived Similarity Scale of Festinger (1954) and Cash (2008) modified by Perrier (2008) was used in this study. The rest of the measures Perceived Likeability Scale, Belief about Idealized Model Scale, and Purchase Intention Scale were developed by Perrier (2008). A positive relationship between perceived similarity and purchase intention was found. Likeability was also a significant predictor of purchase intention; whereas nonsignificant relationship was found between belief about idealized model and purchase intention. Respondents' inference on their similarity and likeness to the idealized models perhaps was based on attitude and dresses rather than physical attributes. Additionally, exposure to idealized ultra-thin images of models and celebrities adversely affected self-perception and body image as a consequence consumer's positive attitude toward unnecessary products increases. Implications for marketers were derived from the results.

*Keywords:* Idealized fashion models, purchasing behavior, purchase intention

For decades, marketers have been portraying idealized models (celebrities) in print and electronic media for marketing their products

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despite its ill effects on consumers (Veldhuis, Konijn, & Seidell, 2014). Idealized models are the images of pretty and ultra-thin models including celebrity endorsers, such as cricketers and film stars, which are internalized by consumers (Halliwell, 2013; Rai & Sharma, 2013). In this paper, the terms idealized models and celebrity endorsers are used interchangeably.

Consumers not only internalize and form positive attitudes toward these idealized models, but also towards the endorsed products (Ashikali & Dittmar, 2012). Consequently, these favorable attitudes lead to purchase intentions (Agarwal, Kumar, & Kumar, 2013). In view of the overexposure of the idealized models in media, consumers are internalizing and considering them as the benchmark of physical attractiveness and beauty (Said & Todorov, 2011). These unrealistic beauty standards are not only difficult to achieve, they represent a very small segment of population (Veldhuis et al., 2014). As a consequence, the incidences of danger to physical and psychological health have increased significantly (Said & Todorov, 2011). On the other hand, the internalization of these idealized models also helps consumers improve their body image (Yu, 2014).

Earlier studies on the effect of media on body image have contradicting results. In some studies, it has been found that exposure to these models generates positive feelings in women (Van Vonderen & Kinnally, 2012), while other studies show that there is no relationship between exposure to ultra-thin models and body image (Harrison & Hefner, 2014; Stice, 1998). Most of the earlier studies have generally focused on the exposure to media and its effects on body image, internalization, and self-esteem (Van Vonderen & Kinnally, 2012). Studies have also measured the effect of ultra-thin and attractive models on purchase intentions (Agarwal et al., 2013; Perrier, 2008). Additionally, the literature also supports the overall effect of celebrity endorsement on brand image, purchase intention, and impulsive buying. Nevertheless, in few studies, the effect of the celebrity endorsement sub-factors on purchase intention has been explored, separately. To fill this gap, the aim of this study is to develop a conceptual framework based on the theory of attraction (Byrne, 1971), theory of social comparison (Festinger, 1954), and the concept of credibility (Kelley, 1973) for understanding how these idealized models effect consumer purchasing behavior. Specifically, the effects of perceived similarity, belief, and likeability on consumers' purchase intentions will be measured in this study.

Nowadays, celebrity endorsement and attractive models have become an important marketing tool world-over (Rengejargan & Sathya, 2014). In view of its significance, some recent work has been

integrated for identifying the gaps in the existing literature. In one category, the literature showed the impact of attractive, ultra-thin models on body image, self-esteem, and internalization (Bahl, Pandey, & Sharma, 2012; Rengejargan & Sathya, 2014). In another broad category, celebrity endorsement was studied. The literature related to the later category revealed that exposure to celebrity-endorsed advertisement improves brand recall and contributes to the development of a positive attitude towards such advertisements (Ghani & Kakakhel, 2011); this relationship was validated by Ahmed, Mir, and Farooq (2012). They also found that creditability and the attractiveness of the endorser are strong predictors of buying intention. Trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise of celebrity endorsers are significant in forming a positive attitude towards purchase intention (Naz & Siddiqui, 2012). The effect of well-known celebrity had positively affected consumer attitude towards advertisement and products (Agarwal et al., 2013).

The relationship between celebrity endorsement and purchase intention is not consistent for all product categories. For example, it has been empirically demonstrated that celebrity endorsement had a nominal relationship in the soft drink category and no relationship with some other product categories. However, celebrity endorsements help to improve product positioning (Rengejargan & Sathya, 2014). Studies have also been conducted to explore the relationship of celebrity endorsement and its effect on brand image, impulsive buying, and consumer buying behavior. For example, celebrity endorsement and impulsive buying behavior have a significant positive relationship (Jawaid, Rajput, & Naqvi, 2013). Moreover, celebrity endorsement on an overall basis has an effect on consumer buying behavior, while, controversial endorsement is a stronger predictor of consumer behavior followed by creditability; popularity is the weakest predictor (Rai & Sharma, 2013). The effect of the endorser's credibility on attitude toward the advertisement and brand image have also been validated in other studies (Jawaid et al., 2013). Some researchers have also explored the effects of different celebrity traits on consumer satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction is highest for celebrity image followed by dynamism and least for celebrity association. Additionally, monthly household income and celebrity endorsement have no relationship (Rengejargan & Sathya, 2014). A higher level of consistency between an endorser's self-image and brand recognition has a higher level of acceptability, especially, if consumers idealized the endorsers (Rai & Sharma, 2013).

Celebrity endorsement strategies have been extensively employed in sports related categories. Indian consumers adore sports celebrity.

By purchasing and acquiring the endorsed products, they tend to associate themselves with the idealized models. In view of this perception, the bulk of Indian advertisements are endorsed by cricketers and Bollywood stars (Kasana & Chaudhary, 2014). A study of Malaysian teenagers also concluded that a positive relationship between the perceived role model and purchasing behavior exists. Additionally, it has been found in the study that the athlete role model is the strongest predictor of purchasing behavior followed by entertainer, father, and mother (Yew & Zain, 2013). In another study carried out in Lithuania, researchers concluded that the effectiveness of sports celebrity increased with the increased consistency between sports celebrity and product image. Additionally, it was recommended that the sports celebrity strategy should be used for enhancing brand image (Banytė, Stonkienė, & Piligrimienė, 2011).

It can be inferred that in most of the studies on celebrity endorsement, the overall impact of celebrity endorsement on brand image, attitude towards advertisements, impulsiveness, purchase intention, and the effects of multiple endorsements have been studied. None of these studies has separately measured the effect of celebrity endorsement factors solely on purchase intention. Moreover, these studies were not adequately driven from theory. In view of this gap, a conceptual framework has been developed based on the theory of attraction (Byrne, 1971), a source creditably (Kelley, 1973), and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) for measuring the effect of likeability, belief, and similarity on the purchase intention.

Studies have empirically demonstrated that society and culture give significant importance to object and individual's physical attractiveness and beauty (Perrier, 2008; Ronay & von Hippel, 2010). Beauty and attractiveness affect all dimensions of human activity in all age groups. Physical attractiveness is embedded with two questions; that is, to whom physical attractiveness matters and how it could be enhanced (Swami & Tovée, 2005). Physically attractive persons are found to be more successful in life and are perceived to have more desirable personalities (Perrier, 2008; Ronay & von Hippel, 2010). Consumers feel that idealized models are highly attractive, but interaction with them reduces their level of attractiveness (Swami & Tovée, 2005). Cultures and societies consider women as attractive objects when compared to men, since, these attributes are more relevant to women. Media, therefore, has traditionally portrayed women as decorative and sexual objects (Harrison & Hefner, 2014). Hence, the media has utilized ultra-thin attractive models in advertisements. Exposure to these idealized models adversely affects consumers' (especially women) body images (Halliwell, 2013). As a

result, the gap between the idealized image and reality has increased tremendously. Marketers are capitalizing on this gap by linking their products and models with women's unfilled fantasies (Harrison & Hefner, 2014). Thus, using idealized images in advertisements has now become a common strategy for marketing products and influencing purchasing intention. In order to understand the effect of attractive models on purchase intention, a conceptual framework is developed (see Figure 1) that is based on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), theory of attraction (Byrne, 1971), and the source creditability (Kelley, 1973).

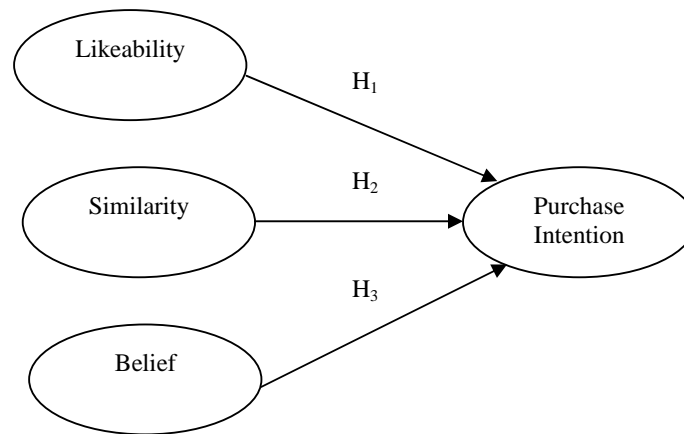


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

### Predictors of Purchase Intention

The link of the three predictors with outcome variable along with the derived hypotheses is discussed in the following sections.

**Likeability of models.** Continuous exposure to idealized images increases individuals' likeability for the models, which positively influences their attitudes toward the models and purchase intention (Van Vonderen & Kinnally, 2012). Others are of the opinion that, although, the model images help in generating marketing and related promotional activities, they do not influence brand re-organization and purchase intention (Nguyen, 2012; Van Vonderen & Kinnally, 2012). Thus, it is assumed that likeability of models has a positive effect on purchase intention (H1).

**Perceived similarity of ideal model.** People are generally attracted to those models that are similar to them. A strong relationship between consumers' perceived similarity and attitude towards the models has been found (Sharma & Kumar, 2013). Similarity of attitude is considered to be the strongest predictor of attraction and positive attitude followed by similarity in dress and similarity in physical appearance (Sharma & Kumar, 2013; Van Vonderen & Kinnally, 2012). Perceived similarity with others is one of the major sources of likeness and association (Rai & Sharma, 2013). Moreover, this perceived similarity with the models also influences purchase intention. Therefore, it is hypothesized that perceived similarity has a positive effect on purchase intention (H2).

**Belief about idealized model.** Various studies have found that physical attractiveness has a relationship with success and intelligence (Manjusha & Segar, 2013). Thus, most people have a tendency to form beliefs and attitudes toward models based on their physical attributes (e.g., body shape, face, hair, and clothing) (Malik & Guptha, 2014), which has a significant relationship with purchase intention (Malik & Guptha, 2014; Manjusha & Segar, 2013). Hence, hypothesis so developed is that belief about the idealized model has a positive impact on purchase intention (H3).

## Method

### Sample

Two hundred thirty women were approached and 220 responded, with response rate of 96% and all the participants participated on voluntary basis. The sample size was higher than the minimum sample size suggested by some for studies based on structural equation modeling (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). All participants were women and their age ranged from 19 to 37 years ( $M = 22.25$ ,  $SD = 2.78$ ). In terms of marital status, 90 (45%) were single and 110 (55%) were married. In terms of profession, 40 (20%) were students; 90 (45%) were employed; and 70 (35%) were housewives. In terms of education, 50 (25%) had education up to secondary school certificate (SSC); 70 (35%) had a higher education certificate (HSC); 60 (30%) had bachelor's degrees; and the rest 20 (10%) had at least master's degree.

### Measures

**Perceived Similarity Scale.** The feeling of similarity to others serves as reference for self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). A

questionnaire on perceived similarity used in this study was developed by Perrier (2008). This scale was based on eight items in which four items measuring similarity to the model regarding dress, overall lifestyle, body shape, and attractiveness have been acquired from Festinger (1954) scale. Remaining four items were taken from the scale developed by Cash (2008) and included hair style, body shape, weight, and waist size. The respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale of 1 (*very high disagreement*) to 7 (*very high agreement*). The average of all the eight items reflects perceived similarity. The reliability of this ranged from .92 to .94 and has been tested in previous studies (Perrier, 2008).

**Perceived Likeability Scale.** In this study, the Perceived Likeability Scale (Perrier, 2008) consisted of four items. These items have been tested in a pretest and were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale of 1 (*very high disagreement*) to 7 (*very high agreement*). The average mean score of all the four items reflect perceived likeability. The reliability of this scale was .94 (Perrier, 2008).

**Belief about Idealized Model Scale.** A Belief-About-Model Scale (Perrier, 2008) was used in this study, which was modified by Perrier (2008) according to the measure developed by Petroschius and Crocker (1989). The original scale (Perrier, 2008) was based on a point order set of options that was converted to 7-point Likert scale in the present study. The respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale of 1 (*very high disagreement*) to 7 (*very high agreement*). The average mean score of all the four items reflect beliefs about the idealized model. The reliability of this scale was .75 (Perrier, 2008).

**Purchase Intention Scale.** The questionnaire on purchase intention used in this study was developed by Perrier (2008). This scale was also previously tested by Kozar and Damhorst (2008). The reported internal consistency was .93. The respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale of 1 (*very high disagreement*) to 7 (*very high agreement*). The average mean score of all the four items reflect purchase intention. The reliability of this scale was .94 (Perrier, 2008).

## Procedure

The self-administered questionnaires were given to pre-selected enumerators who collected the data at different shopping malls in Karachi at different times. Prior to administering the questionnaires, the enumerators were required to attend a training sessions for understanding the purpose of the study. In the same session, the queries of the enumerators were addressed. Additionally, the

respondents were informed that their confidentiality would be maintained. All the respondents were also assured that filling the questionnaires was on voluntary basis and they could discontinue responding any time they feel like.

## Results

A multistage procedure recommended for structural equation modeling (*SEM*) was used in this study (Hair Jr., Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). This is inclusive of exploratory factor analysis, outliers detecting, normality of data, reliability of data, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), validity of data, and testing overall *SEM* model (Hair Jr. et al., 2010). *SEM* analyses is carried out in two stages (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). Initially each construct including purchase intention, perceived similarity, likeability, belief, and the whole model were subjected to CFA. The criteria at the CFA stage used for improving the fitness of the model was standardized regression weights (at least .40 for all the latent variables), standardized residual covariance (which should be less than 2.58), and modification index which should be lesser than 10 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1988).

### Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties

The instruments used for this paper had established validities and reliabilities, but the same were re-ascertained in the context of Pakistan. The summarized descriptive statistics, reliabilities based on Cronbach alpha, and construct validity based on inter-scale correlations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlation Matrix for Study Variables (N = 220)*

Variables	$\alpha$	$M(SD)$	Skew	Kurt	1	2	3	4
1. Like	.89	4.69(1.38)	-.64	.29		-		
2. Sim	.79	4.73(1.08)	-.68	.68	.60*			
3. Bel	.90	4.51(1.20)	-.46	.14	.70*	.74*		
4. PI	.85	4.29(1.31)	-.53	-.15	.69*	.70*	.76*	

*Note.* Skew = Skewness; Kurt = Kurtosis; Like = Likeability; Sim = Similarity; Bel = Belief; PI = Purchase Intention.

\* $p < .01$ .

The normality of the data was tested by converting all the 220 cases to standardized Z-score. The results show that all the cases are



within the prescribed limit of  $\pm 1.5$  (see Hair Jr. et al., 2010). Similarly, the reliability of the above constructs is at least .69, hence, quite satisfactory. Mean for Purchase Intention is the lowest and of Similarity is the highest.

Since, the goodness-of-fit indexes met the required criteria and factor loadings of all the indicator variables were greater than .40, the data has convergent validity (Shammout, 2007). Additionally, convergent validity was also ascertained through correlation analysis (Hair Jr. et al., 2010) by taking the correlations of all the constructs on one-to-one basis. Correlation of each pair should be less than .85 (Shammout, 2007). The summarized results are presented in Table 1. All the relationships among the study variables are significant. Results show that likeability, similarity, belief, and purchase intention are significantly positively associated with each other.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In CFA, the factors and items (indicators) are tested based on theory; therefore, it is also an accepted test for measuring theories (Hair Jr. et al., 2010). The summarized CFA results of the four constructs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

#### *Confirmatory Factor Analysis (N = 220)*

Variables	$\chi^2$	df	p	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
Likeability	1.52	2	.00	.76	.99	1.00	.99	.00
Similarity	24.73	5	.00	4.94	.81	.84	.92	.04
Belief	47.78	15	.00	3.19	.91	.96	.96	.07
Purchase Intention	13.94	2	.00	6.97	.88	.97	.97	.07

*Note.* GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted of Good Fit Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.  $\chi^2$  should be low.  $\chi^2/df < 5.0$ . GFI > .90. AGFI > .90. CFI > .90.

Factor loading for each observed variable is at least .40, and standardized residual are below  $\pm 2.58$ , hence, meeting the minimum requirements (Hair Jr. et al., 2010). All the fit indices are also within or close to the prescribed limits (see Table 2). In view of the satisfactory results of CFA, we moved to the next stage, which was testing the overall model through *SEM*, which is discussed in subsequent section.

### Overall Model

The overall SEM model is comprised of three exogenous models including likeability, similarity, and belief and one endogenous model i.e., purchase intention. The CFA results of the overall final model are depicted in Figure 2

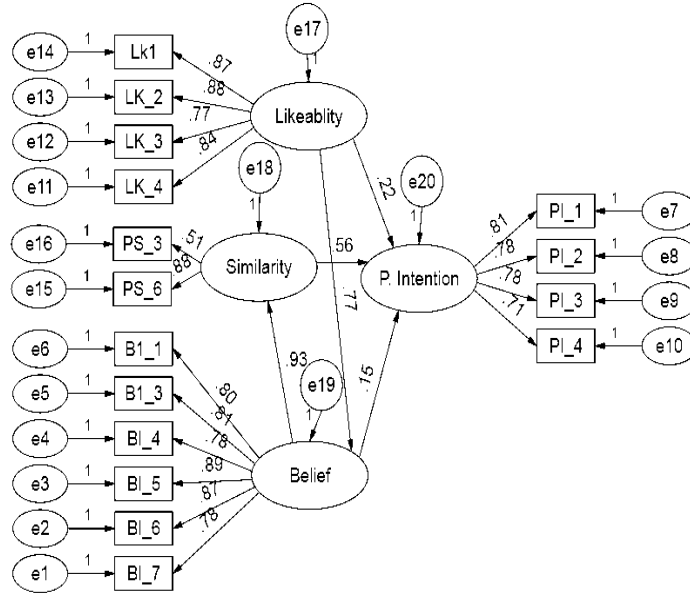


Figure 2. The latent model on purchase intention

Figure 2 for the overall model shows that factor loading for each observed variable is at least .40, hence, meets the minimum requirement of factor loading of .40. Moreover, standardized residuals were below  $\pm 2.58$  (Hair Jr. et al., 2010). Goodness-of-fit indexes are within the prescribed limits, which are discussed in the following paragraph.

The chi-square value (absolute fit indices) was significant ( $\chi^2 = 167.461$ ,  $df = 100$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The CMIN/df (Relative  $\chi^2/df$ ) was  $1.65 < 5$ . The RMSEA =  $.05 < .08$ , which meets both the absolute of goodness-of-fit and badness-of-fit criteria. The RFI =  $.92 > .90$ ; IFI =  $.96 > .90$ ; and AGFI =  $.96 > .90$  meet the incremental fit index criteria. In sum, the CFA results indicate that the overall exogenous model is a good fit.

### Findings of Hypothesized Relationships

The SEM model discussed above shows that of the three hypotheses, two were supported and one was not supported. The relationship between similarity and purchase intention was supported (SRW = .57, CR = 4.68,  $p < .00$ ). The relationship between likeability and purchase intention was also supported (SRW = .25, CR = 3.02,  $p < .05$ ); the  $p$ -values are lesser than .05, and critical ratios are greater than 1.96 in both the cases. The relationship between belief and purchase intention was not supported (SRW = .25, CR = 1.37,  $p > .05$ ), as the  $p$ -value is greater than .05 and critical ratio is less than 1.96.

### Discussion

Earlier studies have focused on the impact of idealized fashion models on body images and a few have measured their effect on purchasing intention. Thus, based on the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), theory of attraction (Byrne, 1971), and source credibility (Kelley, 1973) a conceptual framework has been developed and empirically tested for understanding how attitudes of the local population toward purchase intention is affected due to the excessive portraying of ultra-thin fashion models. Specifically, this study examined the relationship between purchase intention and belief toward the models, similarity of the models, and likeness of the models.

Some interesting findings that were not earlier envisaged emerged in this study. For example, significant empirical evidence exists to infer that the belief toward the model has strong linkage with the perceived similarity of the models (Edlund & Sagarin, 2014). Moreover, a strong linkage between likeability and belief about the idealized model was also found. Of the three hypotheses, two were substantiated and one failed to be substantiated. These will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

According to the findings of this study, there is a strong relationship between perceived similarity and purchase intention. This means that consumer's attitudes toward purchase intention increases when the perceived similarity between consumers and idealized model is high. Since idealized models represent a very small portion of the population and most of the consumers might not have the same level of physical body image, it might be possible that local consumers have drawn the conclusion about the similarity between themselves and

idealized model in terms of attitude or in terms of dress. This result has consistency with earlier studies (Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008; Sharma & Kumar, 2013). For example, earlier studies have empirically demonstrated that strong relationships between perceived similarity and attraction exists, but these lead to attitude toward purchase intention (Montoya et al., 2008). The consumers' perception of perceived similarity is in the context of attitude, followed by dress, and physical appearance. The order in which consumers draw inference about similarity on these attributes varies from consumer to consumer (Montoya et al., 2008).

In this study, a nonsignificant relationship was found between belief toward pretty fashion models and purchase intention. Several reasons could be attributed to these results. Earlier, most of the models and actresses in Pakistan belonged to lower strata. However, this trend is changing and now women belonging to the educated and upper classes are also entering the field of media. Still the old perception persists in the minds of some consumers; therefore, the relationship between belief and purchase intention was found to be nonsignificant. Another reason for this inconsistency could be that some of these models appear in the advertisements of different product categories with no synergy between the products. This result is inconsistent to the earlier studies on the relationship of belief in model and purchase intention (Swami & Tovée, 2005). In earlier studies, it was found that the general perception is that people who are physically attractive are generally successful in their lives and that they are intelligent, hence, consumers have strong positive belief toward them. As a consequence of this belief toward the model, consumers have a positive attitude toward the products these models endorse (Swami & Tovée, 2005). In this study, a significant positive relationship was found between likeability of the ideal model and purchase intention. These findings are consistent with earlier studies. For example, it has been found that attractive models are a source of inspiration; the individual then develops likeability toward the model, which then positively influences their purchase intention (Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 2006). It has also been found in earlier studies that this relationship of likeability and purchase intention is not universal; it varies from one category to another. For example, in case of tissue-related categories, this relationship was found to be nonsignificant (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

### **Implications**

The results show that belief toward the models has non-significant relationship with purchase intention. Since, the local film

stars in Pakistan do not have good reputations (Drama on Line, 2014), therefore, marketers should avoid them as celebrity endorsers. Alternatively, they could use Indian film celebrities for endorsement, which some brands are already following. Additionally, similarity and likeability have significant relationships with purchase intention. Thus, in this context, they should avoid over-exposure of endorsers and ensure that the endorsers and brand image maintain a high level of consistency (Pedhiwal, 2011). Although, culture in Pakistan, due to exposure to media, has changed greatly over the past few years, people are still vulnerable to fundamental values, which the marketers should consider. The corporate sector should take initiative by discouraging ultra-thin and and pretty models in their advertisement campaigns. Government and the corporate sector should also communicate the ill-effects of being ultra-thin through public service messages.

### **Limitations and Future Recommendations**

These findings are limited to a major city, Karachi; therefore, these results cannot be generalized as the opinion of the whole country. Moreover, only the opinion of women was sought in this study, although it is acknowledged that men are also inspired by the models, which may then have an effect on their purchase intentions. Also, this study is mainly restricted to the upper income group. One hundred and ninety eight (90%) were of higher income group and the rest 22(10%) were of middle income group. Future studies could include the whole country from all demographic areas. Cross-culture studies in this context would also generate interesting results. This study is restricted to female respondents, future, studies could explore whether the attitude and behavior of men towards celebrity endorser are similar or not.

### **Conclusion**

Celebrity endorsement was found to be an effective construct in forming consumer's positive attitude towards purchase intention. However, selecting the right endorser is significant for its success. For example, similarity and likeability positively affect purchase intention, therefore, these traits must be considered while selecting the endorsers for the target audience. No relationship between belief and purchase intention was found in this study, as consumer's perception about female film star is not very positive. Despite this result, its significance while selecting endorsers should not be ignored.

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