The aim of this research is to extend the discussion on celebrity endorsement by exploring the impact of brand personality-celebrity personality congruence on consumer attitudes and intentions. In particular, the aim is to assess how personality-based congruence of celebrity and brand affects the celebrity’s credibility as a source of information and his/her suitability as an endorser, and how these factors subsequently impact on believability of an endorsement, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intentions.

This personality-based congruence between celebrity and brand could be explained with the help of two existing theories of motivation: Social Adaptation Theory and Attribution Theory. In the following sections these theories are discussed with their applications.

6.1. Social Adaptation Theory

The social adaptation theory has its origins in social psychology, wherein Bromley (1978) used the neo-Piagetian adaptation theory in social realm. It has been described as a neo-Piagetian account of attitudes, values and other social cognitions. According to Kahle and Homer (1986), “It implies that cognitions function to facilitate adaptation to an individual’s environment. Persons seek equilibrium with the environment by assimilating new information into existing schemata, while, accommodating mental structures to incorporate new discrepant information...Individuals evaluate information in terms of its adaptive significance” (p. 52). Kahle and Homer (1985) also opined that the information will be based on usefulness for adaptation. The social adaptation theory has been majorly used in social psychology. Kahle, Klingel and Kulka (1981) studied the attitudes and self-reported behaviors of outgoingness of
adolescents toward other people. Kulka, Kahle and Klingel (1982) investigated the alienation from, or involvement in, the social and educational systems of the high school to determine the extent with which the school experiences may influence aggressive and deviant behavior. In marketing, the social adaptation theory has been used by Kahle and Homer (1986). This study investigated the effects of surrealism on advertising.

In the case of celebrity endorsements, for example, an attractive celebrity may serve as an effective new source of information and would lead to ‘adaptive significance’ with the existing schemata, that is, the endorsed attractiveness-related product (Kamins, 1990). In other words, when consumers are exposed to an attractive celebrity endorsing an attractiveness-related product, consumers would think that the product would also enhance their attractiveness as it did for the celebrity, thus providing an adaptive significance of the new information, that is, attractiveness of the celebrity. This adaptive significance would lead to positive evaluation of the celebrity by consumers assimilating new information and accommodating cognitions, thus leading to attitude change.

In the celebrity endorsement literature, Kahle and Homer (1985) were the first to use social adaptation theory to explain the positive impact of celebrity-product match-up on consumer attitudes. They studied the impact of three manipulated factors (celebrity-source physical attractiveness, celebrity-source likeability and participant product involvement) on attitudes and purchase intentions. The interaction effect of likeability, attractiveness and involvement was also checked. On the bases of likeability and attractiveness, 8 (4 male and 4 female) celebrities were selected. For the main experiment, 200 students participated. A ‘disposable razor’ for higher involvement product and ‘toothpaste’ for lower involvement product were selected. ANOVA was used to analyze the data. Only the physical attractiveness
was found to have significant impact on the crucial attitude (dependent) variable. Main effect of attractiveness \times involvement was found to be significant. Involvement was found to significantly enhance brand recall. This finding was similar to the results of Petty, Harkins and Williams (1980). But brand recall was also found getting enhanced by physical attractiveness. Interaction effect of gender, likeability and involvement was also found. Attitudes and purchase intentions changed due to celebrity-source attractiveness. Results supported social adaptation theory.

Kamins (1990) extended the match-up hypothesis on the basis of social adaptation theory and showed that for an attractiveness-related product (luxury car), an attractive celebrity had significant effects on spokesperson credibility and attitude toward the advertisements. Kamins (1990) study is based on the social adaptation theory, which has been discussed in details under section 3.4.1.

On the basis of social adaptation theory; and Kahle and Homer’s (1985) and Kamins’ (1990) study findings, it could be argued that, in the case of celebrity personality-brand personality congruence too, the congruent celebrity would be considered as an effective new source of information, which would lead to significant adaptation with the existing brand on matching personality trait. Eventually, this adaptive significance of the information would lead to positive evaluation of the new source of information (that is the celebrity) by assimilation of the new information about the celebrity’s personality and the accommodation of attitude accordingly. Therefore, it could be argued that there would be a significant and positive impact of celebrity personality-brand personality congruence on endorser suitability and credibility.

6.2. Attribution Theory
Attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Jones and Davis, 1965; and Kelley, 1972) is a family of theories based on the process by which individuals, as social perceivers, infer the causes behind a behavior through its observation and experience. Individuals focus on the conditions or reasons that caused a behavior or event (Kamins, 1990). Heider (1958) highlighted two types of factors that could drive an attribution of motive: (1) personal factors internal to the actor (intrinsic motives), and (2) situational factors external to the actor (extrinsic motives). Correspondence theory (Jones and Davis, 1965) provides a more focused approach by concentrating on the conditions under which an individual would attribute either internal (correspondent attribution) or external (non-correspondent attribution) causes to an event. A perceiver makes a correspondent attribution when he/she attributes the event’s cause to the actual dispositional properties or the true feelings of the actor (that is, the communicator) involved. A perceiver makes a non-correspondent attribution when the observed behavior of the actor is perceived to be getting effected by the situational constraints or pressure.

This causal inference theory was first extended to the promotional situation by Settle and Golden (1974). They proposed that readers of advertisements would evoke attributional processes to interpret the validity of message claims. But, Burnkrant (1974) objected Settle and Golden’s (1974) crucial assumption that their experimental stimuli evoked causal inference processes. Later, Smith and Hunt (1978) tried to address the shortcomings of Settle and Golden’s (1974) study. This study was based on product claim (varied vs. non-varied). The study described the impact of claim types on the basis of Jones and Davis (1965) correspondence theory. This study addressed three core issues related to the use of correspondence theory in marketing. The core issues were (1) whether attributions are evoked by consumers while
evaluating advertisements; (2) which model best explains consumers’ behavior; and (3) whether product claim attributions mediate the perceived credibility of the source.

In the phenomena of celebrity endorsements, for example, when an attractive celebrity endorses an attractiveness-enhancing product, it could be construed that the product might have played a part in the endorser’s attractiveness. Therefore, the endorser is truly motivated by the product’s merits (internal or correspondent attribution) rather than motivated by the endorsement fee (external or non-correspondent attribution). A discussion on Rifon, Choi, Trimble and Li’s (2004); and on Silvera & Austad (2004) studies would further substantiate the theory.

Rifon et al. (2004) evaluated the effects of the congruence between a sponsor (company vs. brand) and sponsored cause on consumer attitude toward the sponsor, on the basis of attribution theory. This study also investigated the mediating roles of consumer attributions of sponsor motive and sponsor credibility. Responses from subjects were collected at two different points of time, prior to exposure to the stimulus website (pretest) and after the exposure to the stimulus website (posttest). A fictitious health and disease prevention website was created as the context for sponsorship by real companies. Contraception information was selected as the health topic on the website. On the basis of the degree of match between website topic and company’s products, two companies, Reebok (low congruent) and Ortho-McNeil Pharmaceuticals (high congruent) were chosen through pre-test. A 2x2 randomized experimental design with two types of promotional messages (company vs. brand) and congruence levels of website’s health topic with sponsoring company’s product offerings (high vs. low) gave four experimental conditions. A sample size of 191 undergraduate students participated in the study. ANCOVA was used to see the impact of congruence and company/brand level messages on consumer attributions of sponsor motive. High congruent condition generated stronger motive attributions than low
congruent condition. There was no main effect of other independent variable company/brand level message was found on the dependent variables. ANCOVA was used to investigate the effects of congruence and company/brand level messages on sponsor credibility and attitude. Here again, there was no significant effect of company/brand level messages was found on sponsor credibility and attitude but significant main effect of congruence was found on these dependent variables. Step-down analysis and path analysis results showed significant indirect effect of congruence on sponsor attitude. The effect was mediated through sponsorship motives.

Silvera and Austad (2004) using correspondence theory, investigated the factors predicting the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement advertisements. This study presented a model to show that, how the celebrity endorser’s likings and knowledge of the product impacts on correspondent inferences; attitude toward endorser and attitude toward product. The study assumed correspondent inferences as the direct measure of celebrity’s credibility. This study was divided in two experiments. In first experiment, 66 students participated and were randomly assigned to two groups, ‘paid’ condition (celebrity has not received any payment for endorsement) and ‘unpaid’ condition (celebrity has received a hefty endorsement fees). SEM was used and respondents’ gender was taken as covariate. Second Experiment was the replication of the first experiment to show the generalizability. Again a total of 66 university students participated in the experiment. To check correspondence bias, 2 (baseline vs. endorser) ×2 (paid vs. unpaid) ANOVA was used for first experiment and 1×3 (baseline, paid and unpaid) between-subjects ANOVA for second experiment was used. A model was proposed predicting participants’ attitude toward an endorsed product from their attitude toward the endorser and their attributions about the endorser’s likings for the product. The results found the significant stronger impact of correspondent inferences on product attitudes than the impact of the attitude
toward the endorser. In this study, correspondent inferences were based on the endorser’s sense of style and on endorser’s perceived knowledge of the product domain.

On the basis of explanation of the attribution theory and the above-mentioned findings from Rifon et al. (2004) and Silvera & Austad’s (2004) studies, it could be argued that an endorsement by a celebrity whose personality matches with the endorsed brand’s personality would lead to internal attributions and would have a positive and significant impact on the actor’s (i.e. endorser’s) suitability and credibility, this would subsequently impact ad believability, consumers’ attitudes and intention.