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12-1-2023

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#### Recommended Citation

Kang, Chen-Yuen; Li, Gerrard; Au, Cheuk Hang; and Ho, Kevin K. W., "The Role of Celebrities' Personality Traits & Endorsement on Consumers' Online Brand Defending and Purchase Behaviour" (2023). *Digit 2023 Proceedings*. 9.

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# **The Role of Celebrities' Personality Traits & Endorsement on Consumers' Online Brand Defending and Purchase Behaviour**

*Research-in-Progress Paper*

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## **Abstract**

*Celebrity endorsements are widely adopted as part of the marketing strategies for many brands, given celebrities can engage their fans to patronize the brand and to distribute celebrity-featuring promotion messages online. With the proliferation of the Internet, these fans may also defend their beloved celebrities when they are being attacked. However, whether a consumer's positive attitude to the endorser would impact their behaviour toward the endorsed brand remains unclear. Qualitatively studying based on a few leading online communities, we explored the impact of attitude towards brand-endorsing celebrities on online consumers' behaviour (likelihood of brand defending and purchase intention), which would foster the brand's electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). We also identified several endorsers' traits that drive consumers' attitudes towards brand-endorsing celebrities and the role of exposure frequency of celebrity-featured advertisements on consumers' attitudes towards the endorsed brand.*

**Keywords:** Personality, Brand Defending, Celebrity Endorsement, Belief-Action-Outcome (BAO), Online Consumer Behavior

# **The Role of Celebrities' Personality Traits & Endorsement on Consumers' Online Brand Defending and Purchase Behaviour**

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## **Introduction**

Celebrity endorsements are increasingly common within the marketing strategies of large corporations, given there can enhance the uniqueness of the brand (Erdogan 1999). A celebrity endorser may be defined as any individual who enjoys public recognition and uses it on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement or marketing communications (McCracken 1989). Brand-endorsing celebrities can include prominent actors, sportspeople, musicians, journalists, politicians, and corporate executives (Morin et al. 2012). In addition, major sports brands have been inviting NBA stars to endorse their brands and co-developing sub-brands that feature them. A good example is Michael Jordan, who secured lucrative endorsements worth millions of dollars in different sectors. Among these endorsements, one of the most notable was Nike's Air Jordan sneakers (Knowles and Rangan 1997). The power of such endorsement may be explained by, for example, the influential power of these celebrities on their fans, who may become brands' potential consumers and contribute to brands' sales performance. In addition, consumers will recognize the endorsed brands if they perceive a fit between the endorser and the product of the brand (Herr et al. 1991). As a result, celebrity endorsements foster brands' future profits, thus offering tangible market-level justification for utilizing celebrity endorsers in advertising (Agrawal and Kamakura 1995).

On the other hand, the Internet has provided a space for individuals to share their viewpoints on different products and services (Tsai 2013). Fans of celebrities may speak for their beloved, especially when they are attacked (Colliander and Wien 2013). And yet, it remains unclear whether fans' defence of the celebrities would be extended to the brands endorsed by their beloved celebrities. Such defence extensions, if they exist, can be highly related to the eWOM of the brands.

This study aims to address the formation of brand defending caused by celebrity endorsement of sneakers and to understand how the image and traits of endorsers affect brand reputation and product sales. We conducted a qualitative study with netnography to identify the impact of brand-endorsing celebrities' traits on consumers' attitudes and online behaviour towards brands. Furthermore, we adopted the belief-action-outcome (BAO) framework as our theoretical foundation, which was a psychological framework initially developed for explaining individual's Green IS practices adoption, but gradually adopted in other IS research contexts. It is hoped that by addressing this gap, brand owners and managers are more informed about the impact of brand-endorsing celebrities and how these celebrities can be part of their marketing strategies. Accordingly, our Research Question (RQ) is, "How are online brand defending and purchase behaviour impacted by celebrities that endorse the brand?"

## **Literature Review on Consumers Online Brand Defending**

A brand serves as a marketing tool for companies, differentiating their products and communicating their identity through elements like names, logos, and promotional messages (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Well-established brands can enhance a company's competitiveness, promote growth, and drive profitability (Urde 1994). Moreover, loyal brand supporters are often willing to pay extra for the unique qualities they associate with the brand (Pessemier 1959).

Scholars have frequently proposed that online brand communities play a significant role in cultivating consumer loyalty (Algesheimer et al. 2005). Reviews of companies, brands, or products can initiate word-of-mouth (WOM) exchanges among consumers, prompting loyal customers to come to their defense (Casaló et al. 2011). Nevertheless, some readers may not concur with these criticisms, while others on the internet may openly challenge or critique such complaints. These actions can counteract negative publicity and aid brand image restoration (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Research has noted that defensive consumer brand behaviors can influence electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) both positively and negatively.

While they can shield a brand from adverse publicity, mishandling can result in negative eWOM co-creation. Hence, it is crucial to consider potential adverse consequences (See-To and Ho 2014). Known as consumer online brand defending, Table 1 outlines enabling factors and their effects.

| Factors   |  | Description |
|---|--|-------------|
| Enablers  |  |             |
| View brand as self-image  | Certain fans view the brands they favour as a reflection of their own identity and may feel inclined to safeguard their self-worth by defending the brand on social media (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016).  |             |
| Brand attachment  | Consumers emotionally attached to a brand tend to show greater brand loyalty and may engage in brand defense, especially when faced with negative comments about the brand, particularly from rival brand supporters (Japutra et al. 2014).                      |             |
| Social Status   | Brand defense behavior is often prompted by complaints from individuals of higher social status, as their influence can lead to increased reporting and community discussion (Au et al. 2021).   |             |
| Expectation discrepancies   | Upon experiencing products/services not aligning with expectations, one may openly complain or express a grievance. However, other internet users may not agree and openly challenge these complaints (Au et al. 2021).  |             |
| Impact  |  |             |
| Increase in social media presence                                       | Brand managers does not have to be frustrated by negative comments on social media from fans of rival brands, as such comments may actually trigger existing fans to defend their brand, leading to a net increase in social media presence (Ilhan et al. 2018). |             |
| Strengthen consumers relations  | The occurrence of conflicts arising from brand attacks may enhance consumers' in-group attachment, and thus brand loyalty (Miller and Laczniak 2011).  |             |
| Damages on communities  | Frequent brand defenders are sometimes labelled as “Internet-water-army” of individual brands, which negatively influences their image in social communities (Chen et al. 2013).   |             |
| Improve profitability   | Online brand defence by consumers may help the brand migrate the impact of negative comments, which in turn, enhances retention and improves profitability (Chang et al. 2015).  |             |
| <b>Table 1. Enablers and Impact of Consumers Online Brand Defending</b> |  |             |

Prior research explored factors and effects of consumers' online brand defense, yet the influence of celebrity endorsers on brands remains underdiscussed. Celebrities wield substantial influence over their fans and the brands they promote (Stavros et al. 2014). Consequently, investigating how fans' consumer behavior is influenced when their favorite celebrities endorse a brand is crucial, especially for brand owners.

## Literature Review on Celebrities as Endorser of Brands

Celebrities are commonly employed to enhance the persuasiveness of communication (Kim and Na 2007). Globally recognized celebrities, such as Tom Cruise, can help mitigate cultural barriers in international marketing communications (Kaikati 1987). Therefore, leading brands often utilize celebrity endorsements as part of their marketing strategies to enhance their images (McCracken 1989). For celebrities, brand endorsements have emerged as a significant income source of them in recent years (Keel and Nataraajan 2012). Table 2 shows a list of arguments related to the benefits and impact of celebrity endorsements.

| References         | Arguments   |
|--------------------|---|
| Chapman (2001)     | If celebrities engage in unethical activities, it can negatively impact consumers' willingness to purchase the brand they endorse.                        |
| Amos et al. (2008) | According to the match-up hypothesis theory, the effect of celebrity endorsement largely relies on the consistency of the endorser and the brand/product. |

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Glover (2009)         | A celebrity endorsement boosts the perceived quality of the brand, encouraging a positive attitude and consistent consumer loyalty.  |
| Liu and Brock (2011)  | Advertisements featuring an attractive celebrity have a strong positive link with consumer attention, message recall, and purchase intent."  |
| Fleck (2012)          | If consumers perceive a mismatch between the personality traits of the celebrity endorser and the attributes of the endorsed brand, it can create confusion in the advertisement and result in weaker purchase intentions. |
| Hung (2014)           | Thanks to the appealing and trustworthy celebrity endorser, consumers tend to give more attention to these advertisements, leading to a favorable brand perception and increased purchase likelihood.                      |
| Dwivedi et al. (2016) | Greater endorser-product congruence enhances endorsement effectiveness, especially in terms of physical attractiveness, expertise, and product alignment.  |

**Table 2. Arguments Related to the Benefits and Impacts of Celebrity Endorsement**

Table 2 shows that celebrity endorsements can boost brand awareness, loyalty, and purchase intent. However, their effectiveness depends on factors such as product type, celebrity credibility, and fit with the brand (Amos et al. 2008; Dwivedi et al. 2016). Consumers tend to develop a favorable attitude and make consistent purchases when a celebrity endorses a brand (Glover 2009), while advertisements with attractive celebrity endorsements positively impact consumer attention, message recall, and purchase intent (Liu and Brock 2011). Thus, before seeking celebrity endorsements, brand owners must carefully assess celebrities' social media activities to avoid potential brand damage (Abeza et al. 2020; Ge and Humphreys 2021). These activities are often influenced by the celebrities' personalities, with their impact on consumer behavior depending on the brand's image and the type of celebrity profiles (Ambroise et al. 2014).

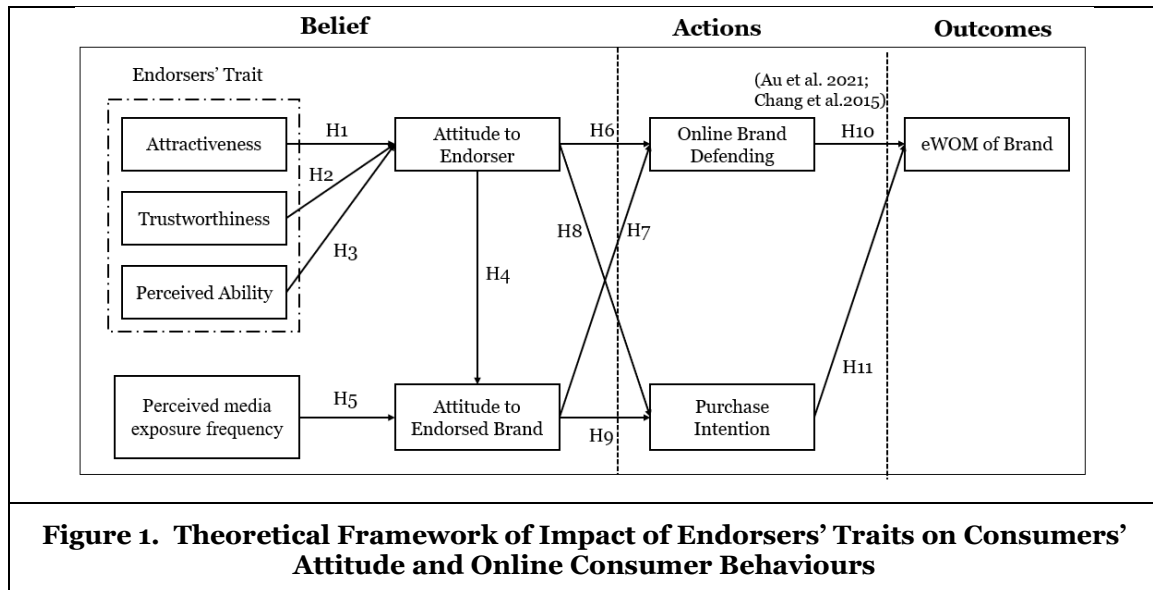
## Research Method

We chose the case study method for its ability to explore emerging phenomena, context-dependent processes, and 'how' research questions (Pan and Tan 2011), which align with our study's focus. We selected sports brands, often endorsed by celebrity athletes, due to their substantial market presence (Hung et al. 2011). Celebrity athletes serve as influential role models for young individuals, impacting their career aspirations and self-perceptions. Furthermore, the budgets allocated to their brand endorsements have seen recent significant growth, dominating public attention (Lee and Park 2014).

As our target phenomenon is primarily online, we employed netnography practices as well. Our data collection began with selecting online communities meeting two criteria: First, they had to be widely recognized with a substantial user base, enabling the observation of diverse user behaviors, including brand defense online (Pan and Tan 2011). Second, to align with our sports brand focus, the chosen community should be sports brand-related or engaged in active discussions about various sports brands. These criteria led us to pick several online communities for data collection to ensure data triangulation. Consequently, we chose PTT, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, and Quora, all highly ranked among the world's most visited websites according to Similarweb.com. As of now, we identified 82 relevant discussion threads. The webpage links are documented in an Excel file for data management purposes. Webpage title, authors (if any), and keywords were kept along with the links. We conduct data analysis alongside collection to maximize the case study's flexibility (Eisenhardt 1989). We initially derived a set of theoretical dimensions and second-order themes from literature on online brand defense and celebrity endorsements (Gioia et al. 2013) to guide data collection. The collected data was coded using open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998). More specifically, open coding was used to identify new and validate existing theoretical dimensions (e.g., consumers' online brand defending), while axial coding was used to identify new and validate existing, second-order themes that fall under those dimensions (e.g., enablers of consumers' online brand defending). Selective coding was used to distil our case evidence into several first-order categories, which were then assigned to the appropriate dimensions and themes (Pan and Tan 2011). Additionally, the theoretical framework underwent modifications throughout the coding process as new evidence surfaced that contested the existing schema (Walsham 2006). Visual mapping and narrative strategies were also used to make sense of the voluminous amount of data collected (Klein and Myers 1999; Langley 1999). The former involved documenting, for example, the key milestones and events of related brands, while the latter

entailed creating a textual summary of the key events, activities, and decisions that transpired concerning consumers' online brand defending behaviour. Iterations between data, analysis, and theory development will continue until theoretical saturation is reached (Eisenhardt 1989).

## Preliminary Findings



**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of Impact of Endorsers' Traits on Consumers' Attitude and Online Consumer Behaviours**

We adopted the Belief-Action-Outcome (BAO) framework as our foundation. The framework was developed by Melville and Ross (2010) in a green IS study for explaining the connections between individuals' belief, actions and outcomes, but has been adopted by some earlier IS literature (e.g., Dao et al. 2011; Elliot 2011). We discovered that three endorser traits (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and ability) influence consumer attitudes towards endorsers, impacting consumer behavior (brand defense and product/service purchase) and attitudes toward the endorsed brand. Moreover, the frequency of exposure to celebrity-endorsed advertisements is positively associated with attitudes toward the endorsed brand, affecting online brand defense and purchase intent. Both of these actions, in turn, boost electronic word-of-mouth (see Figure 1).

First, we identified that endorser's attractiveness can impact consumer attitudes to celebrities (H1) (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). An example of a successful celebrity endorsement is Kyrie Irving (KI), a player for the NBA team Dallas Mavericks who endorsed Nike products. KI is highly regarded for his charismatic playing style, and his Nike sneakers are top-sellers. Nike's advertisements featuring KI are often discussed online, where users highlight the appeal of KI's image. Their comments suggested that both the sneakers and KI were consistently attractive, which enhanced the effect of celebrity endorsement (Amos et al. 2008).

*"KI's playing style is gorgeous and handsome."*

*"KI's sneakers are good and have their personal charm."*

Trustworthiness (H2) is another factor that affects consumers' attitudes toward endorsers (Hung 2014). For example, Andrew Wiggins, a player in the NBA team Golden State Warriors, was an endorser of Peak, a sneaker brand from China. However, he was found wearing the sneaker of Nike when he was in the NBA Championship Game in 2022. Upon being challenged, his response was regarded as solely an excuse. More specifically, Wiggins claimed that he had to wear the new sneakers 3-5 times in order to get used to them, before wearing them in actual contests. However, the new sneaker was not delivered on time before the championship game. To deliver his best performance, he decided not to wear the sneakers of Peak. Internet users from PTT were not convinced but accused he was defrauding consumers.

*"Taking brand's money without wearing the brand's sneakers in the championship game greatly reduces brand's exposure."*

*"This excuse is too bad. I just don't want to him wear bad sneakers."*

*“He just doesn’t have a pair of Peak sneakers? There are still people who believe such a lousy excuse?”*

On this occasion, the social status of Andrew Wiggin triggered a wider discussion online (Au et al. 2021).

Furthermore, athletes’ abilities are often the focus of sports speculators (Glover 2009). Athletes are often regarded as heroes in the community after winning games, competitions, or medals (Parry 2021). Based on our findings, we hypothesise that perceived ability (H3) is also influencing consumers’ attitudes towards celebrities, beyond attractiveness and trustworthiness. Ja Morant (Ja), a member of the NBA team Memphis Grizzlies, was criticised by PTT users for being unable to play intelligently and risking his career.

*“If Ja doesn’t change his style of play, Ja will be a meteor.”*

*“Can he practice some offensive skills ? Stop relying on physical fitness.”*

*“If Ja (continues to) play like this, he will perish sooner or later. It’s a waste of his physical fitness.”*

We have also identified that consumers’ attitudes to the endorsed brand may be impacted by their attitude toward the endorser (H4) as well as the frequency at which they were exposed to celebrity-featured media (H5). More specifically, for the impact of consumers’ attitudes toward endorsers 67, a Reddit user once shared his earlier day memories in the 1990s around the Air Jordan commercials of Nike, which featured now-retired NBA star Michael Jordan. Having developed a strong positive association with both Jordan and Nike, his attitude to Nike was positively influenced.

*“I’m more likely to trust a brand if I know they have a celebrity endorser I admire. It’s like the endorser’s reputation rubs off on the brand and makes me feel more positively about it.”*

Another example for H4 was found in a post where a Reddit user criticised Under Armour for their lackluster marketing of Curry’s sneakers, despite Curry being one of the league’s top players. On the other hand, another consumer said that their admiration for Curry would boost their favorability towards Under Armour, regardless of the marketing.

*“Yeah was wondering why nobody mentioned how bad UA is at marketing Steph, like literally it’s super easy to, because he’s still playing at the highest level and one of the best players in the league at the moment. I remember Curry 8 had good marketing and it was everywhere, could see it being worn by players in random gyms and stuff but Curry 10 feels like it doesn’t even exist. ”*

*“But I think no matter what... I admire CURRY, so my favorability towards UA will also increase. I will still buy the sneakers I want to buy no matter how UA’s marketing is. “*

For the impact of celebrities-featured perceived media exposure (H5), we found a video advertisement of NIKE for the COVID-19 epidemic – “You Can’t Stop Us”. The short video was hailed as an outstanding ad and moved the hearts of people who didn’t exercise, given it told the stories of difficulties that emerged during the epidemic. As of August 2023, the video had reached a viewership of 7.4 million on YouTube.

*“Not (because of the fact) that I like Nike by any means, and I don’t give a shit about sports, but this.... got me a bit choked up..”*

*“Just a disclaimer that I do not endorse Nike..... (I) Just wanted to share an amazing piece of art.”*

*“It’s tugging heart strings and putting Nike in there in your brain. I bet everyone watching it is more inclined than they were before.”*

Our findings also suggested that a positive attitude can foster consumers’ likelihood of defending the brand online (H6). In PTT, it is often to see some members who leave unfavourable or hostile comments about celebrity-endorsed sneaker brands. However, they may not necessarily have become the brand’s consumers. This triggered consumers online brand defending behaviours.

For example, there was a discussion thread on Reddit discussion related to the lifetime deal of Kevin Durant (KD, a celebrity endorser in NBA) and Nike, as well as KD’s 16th signature shoe on the way. One regarded KD as a drag on Nike’s reputation when he previously signed with the Golden State Warriors. However, this was rejected by others, who highlighted the offensive ability of KD (Au et al. 2021). Some other internet users expressed support for KD and the brand he endorsed.

*“KD's brand was fire back (in sales) when people were also buying all the Lebrons and Kobes.....With KD, mix in the fact that his reputation took a major hit when he signed with Golden State, so it dragged his brand down even more.”*

*“(The fact that) KD(s) joining the Warriors might've stirred things up, but I don't care. His shooting is just out of this world, and I'll always admire him for that. As for Nike, KD's impact has been mostly good in my book. So let's keep going, KD! #Let's go NIKE #Justdoit”.*

Other than attitude to endorsers, attitude to the brand may also foster consumers' likelihood of defending the brand online (H7). For example, a Reddit user, who has been a long-term fan of Adidas, openly expressed his willingness to defend Adidas.

*“I'm a die-hard fan of Adidas and I will defend them to the death on social media. I think it's important to show support for brands you believe in, especially when they're being attacked by trolls.”*

Consumers' attitudes to endorsers, in turn, drive their purchase intention (H8, Glover 2009). KI, a celebrity endorser, tweeted the following in 2022.

*“Anyone who has even spent their hard-earned money on anything I have ever released, I consider you FAMILY, and we are forever connected. it's time to show how powerful we are as a community.”*

This was rapidly responded to by other Internet users, which shows continuous support.

*“My son loves your style and of course we had a serious conversation a few weeks ago about our continued support for your regardless, looking forward to the new things you have in the works much love.”*

*“Keep doing what you do! We gone continue to support! My son play the best in your sneakers (we have literally over 50 pairs since he's been playing ball since 4 years old)”*

Finally, consumers' attitude to endorse a brand could impact their purchase intention (H9, Fleck 2012). For example, a Reddit user openly expressed support for LeBron James, a celebrity endorser of Nike, stating his commitment to social justice and equality. As a result, he established a positive attitude and purchase intention with Nike.

*“Seeing him use his platform to speak out on important issues has definitely given me a positive attitude towards Nike, the brand he endorses. When I'm shopping for new sneakers, I'll always check out what Nike has to offer first, and I've recommended the brand to several friends who feel the same way.”*

These brand defending behaviours (H10) and purchase intention (H11), in turn, contribute to the enhancing e-WOM (Au et al. 2021).

## Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Drawing upon the BAO framework, our preliminary model suggested how celebrities' traits and exposure frequency of celebrity-featured advertisements drives consumers' attitudes, which, in turn, influences their behaviour and eWOM. In the future, we plan to extend and validate our model by collecting and analyzing further data in broader context, so that we can explicate the boundary conditions of our theoretical implications. In turn, we hope that we can establish a more holistic understanding of consumers' online brand defending, as well as its strategic and organizational implications.

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