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Examining NCT Dream's Influence as a Celebrity Endorser on Consumer Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Brand Image

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Abstract

Marketers globally are leveraging celebrity endorsers to boost their business, with many Indonesian companies turning to Korean celebrities as endorsers for their products. The aims of this study are to examines the impact of NCT Dream as a celebrity endorser on consumer purchase intention for Tos-Tos snacks. The effectiveness of the celebrity endorser will be evaluated using the TEARS model, which includes trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, respect, and similarity. Additionally, the study investigates the mediating role of brand image on the relationship between celebrity endorsement and purchase intention. This study employed a quantitative research method, utilizing questionnaires for data collection, and 100 respondents meeting the criteria were analyzed using statistical procedures. One hundred data from qualified respondents was collected via questionnaires distributed through simple random sampling. The results reveal significant relationships between respect and purchase intention and between brand image and purchase intention. Furthermore, an insignificant relationship happens between trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity and purchase intention. Lastly, the result also shows that brand image mediates the relationship between expertise and purchase intention.

Keywords: Celebrity Endorser, Purchase Intention, Brand Image, TEARS Model

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INTRODUCTION

The global promotional spending increase indicates that marketers worldwide acknowledge how advertising and promotion help boost their product and service sales (Belch and Belch, 2003). According to Berjani and Strufe (2011), promotion is purposely used to retain customers. Thus, it is required for companies to carry out effective marketing communication tools to create credibility with the target that has been decided (Angelopulo and Plessis, 2007). One of the most effective marketing tools is celebrity endorsement, a well-known advertising strategy for promoting a variety of brands (Biswas et al., 2009). The effectiveness of celebrity endorsement is supported by a study by the Harvard Business School, which states that using celebrity endorsers led to an average increase of 4% of company sales (Elberse and Verleun, 2012). McCormick (2016) stated that utilizing attractive, famous individuals as endorsers could boost purchase intention. For instance, as the endorser of Mint Mobile, Ryan Reynold has contributed to a 50% increase in brand sales revenue within 3 years (Weinstein, 2021).

The success of Korean pop music across Asian countries has sparked public interest in the Korean wave (Ardhiyansyah et al., 2021). One of the countries with the most significant numbers of K-pop fans in Asian countries is Indonesia (CNN Indonesia, 2022). K-pop fans are known for being devoted to their idols and wanting to buy the things they use (Siskhawati and Maulana, 2021). The close relationship between artists and fans is exemplified by Kai of EXO, a global Gucci ambassador. The Kai x Gucci collection sold out within a day of its launch, significantly boosting Gucci's sales (Kaicsy, 2021). The collaboration's designs featured a bear motif inspired by Kai's fans' affection for teddy bears and their characterization of him as resembling a bear. Seeing the popularity of the Korean wave, many local companies have started to use Korean celebrities to endorse their brand (Nadila and Windasari, 2022).

Celebrity endorsements play a significant role in the marketing environment, as evidenced by the substantial investments companies make in them (Keller, 2008). In the Indonesian food industry, which ranks 4th in advertising spending, celebrity endorsements are a powerful tool to boost product awareness and drive sales (Databoks, 2022; Calvo-Porral et al., 2021). Compared to other industries, the influence of celebrities in food product endorsements on social media tends to have a more significant impact on consumer behavior (Chung, 2017). This has led many food companies to rely on celebrity endorsers to promote their products. One of the companies is PT. Dua Kelinci capitalized on the rise of the Korean wave by partnering with NCT Dream to endorse its new tortilla chip snack, Tos-Tos. The announcement of NCT Dream as the brand's celebrity endorser, accompanied by an advertisement clip on social media, quickly captured the attention of fans, earning over 44,000 likes. The post generated positive responses on Twitter, with the trending hashtag #TosTosxNCTDream amplifying the product's visibility (Kompas, 2023).

In addition to celebrity endorsement, brand image is believed to also significantly influence purchase intention (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Brand image refers to the perception of a brand held by consumers, which is shaped by their personal beliefs, ideas, and impressions (Malik et al., 2013). Brand image builds perceptions of value, attitude, quality, association, and

feelings (Kirmani and Zeithaml, 1993; Paul, 2018). A company with a positive brand image can affect consumers by encouraging them to make a purchase (Kazmi and Mehmood, 2016). Furthermore, Akbar et al. (2020) research clearly stated that brand image mediated the positive impact of celebrity endorsement on purchase intention.

Several studies have discussed the influence of celebrity endorsement of a global brand in several aspects, such as in Malaysia (Dom et al., 2016), Australia (Carrillat et al., 2019), and China (Chan et al., 2013). However, those journals mainly focused on international celebrity endorsements for a global brand. Hence, due to a lack of research on the impact of international celebrity endorsement on local brands, the researcher decided to do research on a local brand, particularly Tos Tos. Furthermore, as far as the researchers know, there has been no research investigating the effect of celebrity endorsement on consumer purchase intention with brand image as a mediating variable in the case of a new product like Tos Tos. Hence, the main objectives of this research are to study and determine the influence of NCT Dream as a celebrity endorser on Tos Tos's brand image and purchase intention and how brand image mediates the dimensions of celebrity endorsers in influencing purchase intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase intention, defined by Assael (2001), is the willingness of the consumer to initiate making a purchase, which is measured by the consumer's likelihood of buying. The decision-making process that investigates the customer's motivation for purchasing a particular brand is also part of purchase intention (Shah et al., 2012). From the point of view of marketers, purchase intention is a crucial factor in determining a consumer's purchase decision (Raza et al., 2014). Purchase intention can change due to the product's price or quality and value (Mirabi et al., 2015). Considering the definitions above, purchase intention can be defined as customers' willingness to buy a product, which may change over time.

There are four elements of purchase intention based on Ferdinand (2006): (1) A person's interest in a product by finding out positive information about the product (explorative interest), (2) A person's interest to purchase the product (transactional interest), (3) A person suggests the product to other people (referential interest), and (4) The behavior of someone who has a higher preference over a product compared to other similar products (preferential interest). These four elements of purchase intention highlight the various stages of consumer engagement, from curiosity to actual purchase behavior and even influencing others' decisions. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in understanding how consumers develop a stronger connection with a product, ultimately influencing their decision to make a purchase.

According to Belch and Belch (2001), most celebrities (popular people, movie stars, entertainers, athletes, or pop stars, although a politician may be used) whom a company hires to promote their products or services are known as celebrity endorsers. A celebrity endorser is someone who is well known and appears in an advertisement to affect customer attitudes toward the brand being promoted (Ranjbarian et al., 2010). Additionally, a celebrity endorser can be a public figure known for their accomplishments in fields that align with the qualities of the

endorsed product (Karasiewicz and Kowalcuk, 2014). People's perceptions of a brand may turn negative if a celebrity faces negative publicity (White et al., 2009). When a negative image of a celebrity is exposed, the company's brand image might deteriorate, causing a fall in consumer trust and confidence (Nelson, 2010). Therefore, a celebrity endorser's level of popularity and ability to represent the promoted product must be considered (Dwivedi, 2016).

This research used the TEARS model (trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, respect, and similarity) founded by Shimp (2003) to see the effectiveness of using celebrity endorsers and measure the impact of celebrity endorsement on purchase intention. Chan et al. (2021) argued that TEARS was a more appropriate model for this research than the Ohanian (1990) source of credibility model, as TEARS incorporated respect and similarity elements aligned with Eastern cultural values. Additionally, the TEARS model combines source credibility and source attractiveness theory, making it more comprehensive than Ohanian's model (Oteh et al., 2023). Five dimensions make up the TEARS model: trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, respect, and similarity, widely adopted globally.

Trustworthiness is the TEARS model's first dimension of celebrity endorsers (Shimp, 2003). Consumers' view of endorsers' honesty, integrity, and credibility explain trustworthiness (Erdogan, 1999). The public trust in celebrity endorsers is based on their disclosure of their personal life (Shimp, 2003). Nelson and Deboandah (2017) argued that spectators believed in the celebrity's identity, authenticity, and power of communication. As stated by Atkin and Block (1983), celebrities are considered more trustworthy than ordinary people as the public is persuaded more easily by someone they believe to have better standards. This supports the theory by O'Mahony and Meenandghan (1997) that source trustworthiness significantly influences how customer attitudes shift. Accordingly, Ohanian (1990) defined trustworthiness as the level of consumer assurance displayed toward a brand's conveying message. According to Ohanian (1990), the elements that measure trustworthiness are dependability, honesty, reliability, sincerity, and overall trustworthiness, widely adopted globally.

Prior studies have shown that trustworthiness affects consumers' purchase intentions. The Freeman and Chen (2015) study revealed that trustworthiness was the least important factor in influencing customers' purchase intention, although it still had some impact on the respondents. The statement has been supported by several researchers, such as Hassan and Jamil (2014), who found a negative relationship between trustworthiness and purchase intention. The negative relationship is caused by celebrity endorsers who only promote the brand without actually using the brand (Onu et al., 2019). In contrast, Khan et al. (2019) observed that the two variables have a positive and significant relationship. As long as the celebrity is trustworthy enough, consumers will accept the advertisement message without questioning and analyzing whether it is valid or not (Priester and Petty, 2003). Based on the mixed findings, hence, the researchers are interested in studying if the two variables have a positive or negative relationship. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H1. The trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser influences consumer purchase intention.

The extent to which a celebrity as a communicator is considered a source of valid assertions is called expertise (Erdogan, 1999). An expert endorser has the knowledge and ability to provide an authentic, dependable review of a particular brand (Afifah, 2022). A celebrity is believed to be more knowledgeable than a regular spokesperson (Nabil et al., 2022). A customer will have a more positive opinion of the brand because the expertise of a celebrity offers the customer more detailed information (Magnini et al., 2008). An endorser's expertise affects the product's credibility, which is seen as a crucial aspect in boosting the persuasiveness of marketing messaging (Silvera and Austad, 2004), ultimately boosting sales.

From the customer's perspective, a celebrity endorser with higher expertise is more likely to influence purchase decisions (Zakari et al., 2019). Experts provide compelling reasons for consumers to consider the product (Fitrianto et al., 2018). Research by Braunsberger (1996) suggests trust is easier to establish when the endorser is experienced and knowledgeable. In this study, the five elements of expertise, as outlined by Ohanian (1990) and Shimp (2007), include: 1) the ability to advertise the product effectively, 2) direct experience with the product, 3) knowledge of the product, 4) possessing qualifications to promote the product, and 5) skill in executing promotional activities. These elements enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the celebrity endorser in influencing consumer behavior.

A study by Till and Busler (2000) shows that the expertise of endorsers has contributed positively to consumer purchase intention. A celebrity's expertise can provide more specific information about the product, influencing consumer opinions positively toward the brand (Magnini et al., 2008). On the contrary, Faizal et al. (2019) discovered expertise is not significantly associated with customers' purchase intention. These contrasting findings highlight the need for further investigation into the actual impact of endorser expertise in different contexts. Looking at the previous results, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H2. The expertise of a celebrity endorser influences consumer purchase intention.

Attractiveness is part of a celebrity's lifestyle characteristics, athletic prowess, intellectual skills, and personality (Shimp, 2007). Celebrities who are physically appealing tend to be more popular with customers than those who are not (Chan et al., 2013). Since physical attractiveness has the potential to appeal to consumers' perceptions of advertisements and products, marketers usually consider it as the basis when choosing a celebrity as their endorser (Kahle and Homer, 1985). A model proposed by Ohanian (1990) believes that there are five things to determine the attractiveness of celebrities: attractiveness, classy, elegance, beauty or handsomeness, and sexiness, all of which influence consumer appeal.

Prior studies by Widyasari et al. (2024) and Freeman and Chen (2015) found that celebrity endorsers' attractiveness was the most influential factor affecting consumer purchase intention. This is supported by much research that has revealed that if endorsers are desirable and attractive, people respond positively to the endorsements (Bryne et al., 2003). Consumers believe that the physical attractiveness of an endorser is essential to boost the recognition and purchase intention of the brand (Liu et al., 2007). Moreover, Till and Busler (2000) discovered that the effect of attractiveness impacts the attitudes of individuals to brands and purchase

intention. Previous studies stated that a celebrity's physical attractiveness was the most highlighted point in the advertisement, which gave a positive impression and more significant acceptance by the soy (Kleck et al., 1974; Miller, 1970). On the other hand, a study by Hani et al. (2018) found that attractive celebrity endorsers had no significant impact on consumers' purchase intention, as more people take a look at the celebrity rather than the endorsed product. Based on the previous results, the following hypothesis can be formulated.

H3. The attractiveness of a celebrity endorser influences consumer purchase intention.

According to Shimp (2007), respect can be defined as how people view the endorser based on their potential and accomplishments. Respect is the admiration of the celebrity's abilities and accomplishments, including their acting, political opinion, and athletic prowess (Bergstrom and Skarfstad, 2004). There are four elements of respect by Oteh et al. (2023): (1) Consumers find no negative publicity against celebrity endorser, (2) Consumers find endorsed brand represent celebrity reputation, (3) Consumers find celebrity endorser as role model figure that they look up to, and (4) Consumers find celebrity to be highly likable endorser. Research by Akramiah et al. (2021) stated that respect toward celebrities had the highest impact on consumer purchase intention. The customer's respect for the celebrity will directly relate to the endorsed brand and positively influence the consumer's attitude (Shimp, 2007). Therefore, in this specific context, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H4. The respect for a celebrity endorser influences consumer purchase intention.

Similarity portrays how close an endorser and audience match regarding various attributes such as age, gender, ethnicity, and others (Shimp, 2003). A resemblance between the source and receiver of the message is interpreted as similarity (Erdogan, 1999). Similar lifestyles and needs can measure the resemblance between the two parties (Ohanian, 1990). Belch and Belch (2001) stated that companies chose endorsers that matched well with consumers to create empathy. A previous study discovered that people act more favorably toward those who are similar to themselves than toward people who are not similar regarding opinions, background, or personal traits (Cialdini, 2007). According to Shimp (2007), there are three key elements of empathy: the celebrity endorser has similar demographic characteristics to the target audience, has similar psychographic characteristics, shares tastes and preferences with the audience, communicates relatable values, and represents familiar experiences.

A prior study found a positive relationship between consumer purchase intention and celebrity similarity (Adnan et al., 2017). Similarly, Afifah (2022) found the positive relationship between similarity and purchase intention. The more a celebrity has in common with the consumers, the more likely the celebrity is to be seen as a credible source, thus increasing the intention to purchase the product (Zahaf and Anderson, 2008). This emphasizes the importance of perceived similarity in strengthening the emotional connection between consumers and celebrity endorsers, forming stronger bonds, ultimately influencing their purchase decisions. Based on this, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H5. The similarity of a celebrity endorser influences consumer purchase intention.

According to Zhang (2015), brand image involves consumers' understanding and emotions about a brand, which can influence their behavior. Brand image is a person's opinions, beliefs, and impressions about a brand (Kotler, 2001). These circumstances are made up of consumer interpretation, emotional or reasoned (Dewi et al., 2020; Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). How consumers remember the brand and how they perceive it is linked to the brand image (). Customers are more likely to be satisfied with a positive brand image (Savitri et al., 2022). Based on Balaw and Susan (2022) and Kotler and Keller (2016), there are three key elements of brand image: (1) Strength of brand association: the product or brand is famous and memorable, (2) Favorability of brand association: the product or brand is the best brand, and (3) Uniqueness of brand association: the product has features that set it apart from other brands.

According to Chan et al. (2021), the dimensions of celebrity endorsements show a positive relationship with brand image. When the celebrity endorser and the brand image coincide, consumers feel a stronger emotional connection with the brand (Mukherjee, 2011). Brand image positively affects purchase intention (Chi and Yeh, 2011). As Dewi et al. (2020) stated, a stronger brand image increases consumer loyalty and influences purchase decisions. A good brand image is more likely to be accepted and favoured than a neutral or negative one (Stephen, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2021). Consumer purchase intention often depends on the brand image rather than the product itself, due to increased market competition (Jessica et al., 2024; Wang and Hariandja, 2016). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated.

H6. There is a significant influence of brand image on purchase intention.

A study by Alawadhi and Örs (2020) showed that brand image did not mediate the impact of a celebrity's trustworthiness on purchase intention. Sometimes, advertisers may provide false information about the brand's value (Hussain et al., 2020). When consumers perceive a celebrity to be genuinely untrustworthy in promoting the brand, it negatively influences the brand attitude (Febrian and Fadly, 2021). These mixed findings underscore the need to empirically test the mediating role of brand image between trustworthiness and purchase intention in the context of celebrity endorsements. This highlights the importance of thoroughly understanding how trustworthiness and brand image interact in shaping consumer behavior. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be formulated.

H7. There is a significant influence of the trustworthiness of a celebrity endorser on purchase intention mediated by the brand image.

Expert celebrities increase customers' brand awareness (Cohen et al., 1998). Past research discovered how brand awareness can positively affect a brand image (Bilgin, 2018). Moreover, brand awareness can increase purchase intention (Khrisnanda and Dirgantara, 2021). These studies mentioned are aligned with Alawadi and Örs (2020), in which brand image is proven to mediate the impact of a celebrity's expertise on purchase intention. Understanding this mediation effect can offer valuable insights for marketers when selecting expert endorsers, ultimately enhancing marketing strategies. The following hypothesis can be formulated.

H8. There is a significant influence of the expertise of a celebrity endorser on purchase intention mediated by the brand image.

Prior research showed that an attractive celebrity endorser can increase brand image and cause people to willingly purchase that product (Hakimi et al., 2011). Joseph (1982) proved that an attractive model impacts brand name or recognition. This aligned with Memon et al.'s (2016) findings that consumers prefer buying products they recognize. On the other hand, the study by Alawadhi and Örs (2020) showed that brand image did not mediate the impact of a celebrity's attractiveness on purchase intention. This suggests that while attractiveness can influence purchase intention, its effect on brand image may vary across different contexts. Based on the previous results, the following hypothesis can be formulated.

H9. There is a significant influence of the attractiveness of a celebrity endorser on purchase intention mediated by the brand image.

A previous study by Ahmad et al. (2019) found that celebrity similarity and respect directly impact brand image. As brand image influences the brand's credibility, it will affect customer intention to buy that brand (Wijaya, 2013). This is aligned with Keller (1993), who stated that brand image could form purchase intention because a positive brand image leads to higher chances of specific brand choice. These insights imply that both respect and similarity not only directly influence consumer attitudes but may also exert indirect effects on purchase intention through the shaping of brand image. The following hypotheses are formulated:

H10. There is a significant influence of the respect on a celebrity endorser on purchase intention mediated by the brand image.

H11. There is a significant influence of the similarity of a celebrity endorser on purchase intention mediated by the brand image.

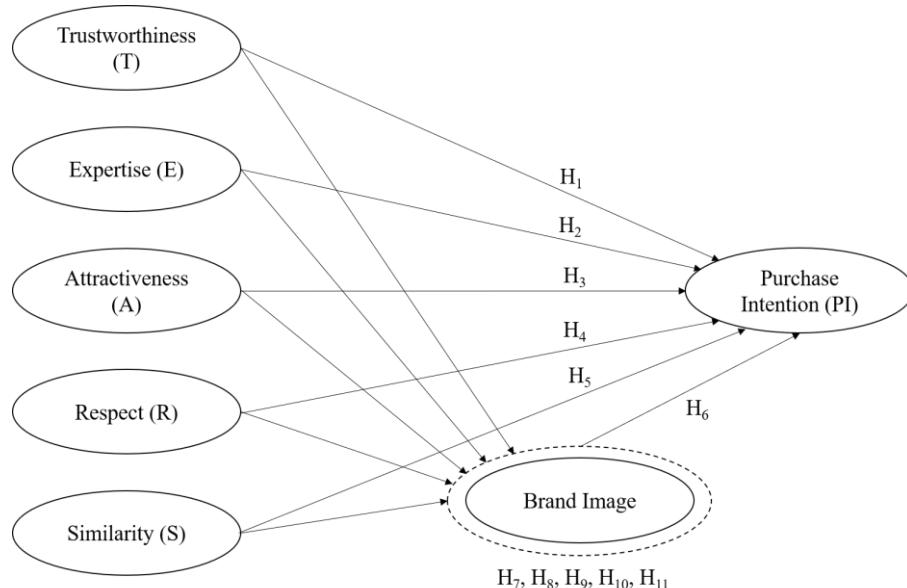


Figure 1. Research model

METHODS

This study used quantitative methods to examine the relationships between variables, utilizing instruments and statistical data analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). Questionnaires, a standard method in quantitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2019), were distributed to individuals aged 17 and above, living in Indonesia, and familiar with the NCT Dream and Tos Tos brands. A total of 109 respondents completed the questionnaire, but only 100 met the eligibility criteria. Out of the 100 respondents, 100% were female, and 49.5% were aged between 17 and 22 years. According to the 10 times rule by Hair et al. (2017), the minimum sample size for this study should be 60, based on the highest number of structural paths directed toward a specific construct. Using G*Power, a significance level of 0.05, and 80% power, the minimum required sample size is 98. Therefore, 100 respondents provide sufficient statistical power and validity to ensure the reliability of the study's results.

Measurement of purchase intention was adapted from Ferdinand (2006) and asks respondents to indicate how much they seek positive information about the products, express interest in buying them, recommend them to others, and prefer them over other snack options. Brand image assessment from Balaw and Susan (2022) invites participants to reflect on whether they see the products as well known snack options, remember the brand when thinking of snack choices, regard the brand as the best compared to competitors, and recognize its packaging as distinctive. For the TEARS dimensions, trustworthiness items ask respondents to state the extent to which they trust the endorser's product choices, believe the endorser is honest, sincere and reliable, and perceive the information provided as dependable.

Expertise items prompt respondents to consider whether the endorser has the skill and experience needed to promote the products, demonstrates knowledge and qualifications, and is able to advertise them effectively. Attractiveness is measured by asking whether the endorser is viewed as physically attractive, classy, and appealing. Similarity items have respondents assess how much they share age, attitudes, and preferences with the endorser. Respect items adapted from Oteh et al. (2023) ask participants whether they believe the endorser enjoys a good reputation without negative publicity, see the endorser as a role model, and feel a strong liking toward them, inspiring brand loyalty. These measures aim to capture key factors influencing consumer perception and behavior.

RESULT

Validity and Reliability Test

Before analysing the relationship between variables, it is essential to check the validity and reliability of the measurement items. Tables 1 and 2 showed no problems in the reliability and validity of the measurement items. The outer loadings are above 0.7 (except PI, R1, and S1), the AVE is above 0.5, and Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability are above 0.6. According to Hair et al. (2017), an item with outer loading between 0.4 and 0.7 should be deleted only if it increases composite reliability and AVE above the threshold value. In this case, the AVE and composite reliability have already been above the threshold value, and thus,

there is no need to delete PI, R1, and S1. Furthermore, there is no problem with discriminant validity since the result of the Fornell-Larcker criterion showed that the square root of each variable's AVE was higher than its correlation with other variables. The outer loadings for most items are also above the recommended threshold, ensuring the consistency and reliability of the constructs. The overall results indicate that the measurement model is valid and reliable for further analysis. Thus, we can proceed to the path coefficient analysis.

Table 1. Construct validity and reliability

Construct	Outer Loadings	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Purchase Intention (PI)		0.501	0.644	0.791
PI1	0.401			
PI2	0.721			
PI3	0.821			
PI4	0.805			
Trustworthiness (T)		0.697	0.889	0.920
T1	0.716			
T2	0.917			
T3	0.848			
T4	0.826			
T5	0.855			
Expertise (E)		0.649	0.866	0.902
E1	0.800			
E2	0.813			
E3	0.744			
E4	0.822			
E5	0.845			
Attractiveness (A)		0.669	0.876	0.910
A1	0.778			
A2	0.841			
A3	0.909			
A4	0.784			
A5	0.770			
Respect (R)		0.606	0.782	0.860
R1	0.687			
R2	0.800			
R3	0.820			
R4	0.801			
Similarity (S)		0.715	0.805	0.880
S1	0.628			
S2	0.929			
S3	0.942			
Brand Image (BI)		0.676	0.841	0.893
BI1	0.847			
BI2	0.809			
BI3	0.815			
BI4	0.817			

Table 2 below the results of the Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis, which helps assess the discriminant validity of the constructs. The diagonal values show the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct. These values, such as 0.818 for attractiveness, 0.822 for brand image, and 0.806 for expertise, are higher than the off-diagonal

correlations, indicating that each construct is distinct. For instance, the correlation between attractiveness and respect is 0.750, but the square root of AVE for attractiveness is 0.818, confirming discriminant validity. Similar trends are observed for other constructs, proving that they are sufficiently separate from each other. Overall, the results demonstrate that the measurement model meets the criteria for discriminant validity.

Table 2. Fornell–Larcker criterion analysis

	A	BI	E	PI	R	S	T
A	0.818						
BI	0.418	0.822					
E	0.599	0.561	0.806				
PI	0.408	0.514	0.476	0.708			
R	0.750	0.449	0.728	0.513	0.779		
S	0.538	0.394	0.474	0.250	0.598	0.846	
T	0.617	0.517	0.695	0.517	0.697	0.389	0.835

Path Coefficient Analysis

The inner model assessment will begin by rigorously evaluating the significance and strength of the structural model path coefficients to determine the direct effects between constructs. The coefficient of determination (R^2) values for each endogenous variable will be interpreted to assess how much variance in purchase intention and brand image is explained by the predictor variables. Effect size (f^2) will then be calculated to gauge the impact of each exogenous construct on the endogenous constructs, with values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicating small, medium, and large effects. Predictive relevance (Q^2) values obtained through empirical blindfolding procedures will be examined to confirm the model's capability to accurately predict omitted data points, with Q^2 values greater than zero signifying acceptable predictive accuracy. This comprehensive evaluation ensures the robustness, reliability, theoretical support, and explanatory power of the proposed structural model.

Table 3. Model testing results

Path	t-statistics	p-values	Result	Effect
H1. Trustworthiness → Purchase intention	1.473	0.141	Unsupported	Direct
H2. Expertise → Purchase intention	0.041	0.967	Unsupported	Direct
H3. Attractiveness → Purchase intention	0.121	0.903	Unsupported	Direct
H4. Respect → Purchase intention	2.151	0.031	Supported	Direct
H5. Similarity → Purchase intention	1.163	0.245	Unsupported	Direct
H6. Brand image → Purchase intention	3.211	0.001	Supported	Direct
H7. Trustworthiness → Brand image → Purchase intention	1.783	0.075	Unsupported	Indirect
H8. Expertise → Brand image → Purchase intention	2.172	0.030	Supported	Indirect
H9. Attractiveness → Brand image → Purchase intention	0.371	0.711	Unsupported	Indirect
H10. Respect → Brand image → Purchase intention	0.951	0.342	Unsupported	Indirect
H11. Similarity → Brand image → Purchase intention	1.696	0.090	Unsupported	Indirect

As shown in Table 3, the significant relationship only happened between respect and purchase intention and between brand image and purchase intention. Trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity do not significantly relate to purchase intention. To the mediating role of brand image, brand image was proven to only mediate the relationship between expertise and purchase intention. This means that expertise cannot influence consumers' purchase intention directly, but indirectly through brand image.

The R² values for brand image and purchase intention are 0.369 and 0.393, respectively, meaning that the impact of celebrity endorsement on brand image and the impact of celebrity endorsement and brand image on purchase intention can be considered weak. This weak relationship is also supported by the Q² value, indicating overall low explanatory power. Despite having a value above 0, celebrity endorsement dimensions can only predict 30.4% of brand image, and celebrity endorsement dimensions and brand image can only predict 21.9% of purchase intention. According to Cohen (1988), there are three categories to classify the effect of the variables: no effect, small effect, medium effect, and large effect. The f² values of trust, respect, similarity, and brand image are 0.020, 0.052, 0.020, and 0.118, respectively.

This means that the relationship between these four variables and purchase intention were categorized as a small effect as the f² values are equal or bigger than 0.02 and less than 0.15. A small effect means that if a certain independent variable is excluded from the model, it has a small effect on the dependent variable. On the other hand, the f² values of expertise and attractiveness are 0.000, meaning that there is no impact on purchase intention if these two variables are excluded from the model. This suggests that trustworthiness, respect, similarity, and brand image each contribute uniquely to driving purchase intention.

DISCUSSION

Based on the result of the research, trustworthiness does not have a significant impact on purchase intention. The value and value are 1.473 and 0.141, which prove trustworthiness and purchase intention are not related. Previous research by Alfarraj et al. (2021) also proved that trustworthiness does not significantly impact consumers' purchase intention. Sometimes celebrities who endorse a brand do not use the products they endorse, leading to a credibility gap (Onu et al., 2019). In reality, NCT Dream fans have never seen them eating Tos Tos snacks outside of the advertisement video and photo. Another possible reason is that consumers can perceive an endorser to be an untrustworthy celebrity because he or she does not look natural when promoting the product (Febrian and Fadly, 2021). Hence, NCT Dream's trustworthiness does not significantly impact purchase intention, and H1 is not supported.

The result shows that the expertise of a celebrity endorser has no significant impact on purchase intention. Based on analysis, their-value and value are 0.041 and 0.967. Therefore, expertise does not have a significant impact on purchase intention. The research done by Shrestha (2019) is aligned with the study result where celebrity endorsers' expertise had no significant impact on consumers' purchase intention. The most likely reason is that NCT Dream is not an expert in the product that they advertise. The image of a singer and performer makes

the public think that NCT Dream does not fit the snack product. Studies show that when an endorser's expertise matches the product endorsed, the higher the purchase intention will be (Till and Busler, 2000; Fink et al., 2004). Another finding reveals that a celebrity is considered to be less credible when the product endorsed does not fit their field of expertise (Dwivedi and Johns, 2013; Lee and Koo, 2015). Thus, there is a chance that people perceive that NCT Dream's expertise is not matched with the endorsed product (snacks), which results in no significance toward purchase intention, and H2 is not supported, indicating expertise mismatch.

The path coefficient result shows that attractiveness has no significant influence on purchase intention as the p-value is 0.903, which is higher than 0.05, and the t-value is 0.121, which is lower than 1.96. A past study by Hani et al. (2018) showed that celebrity endorsers' attractiveness had no significant effect on consumers' purchase intention because advertisements tend to draw attention to the celebrity rather than the advertised product. There is a possibility that the brand may be overshadowed by the celebrity endorser (Erfgen et al., 2015). Moreover, the attractiveness of an endorser is not strongly related to the food industry, but it can positively influence consumer behavior in industries like personal care and beauty products (Calvo-Porral et al., 2021). Knowing that Tos Tos is from the food industry, this aligns with the research finding that NCT Dream's attractiveness does not significantly affect consumer purchase intention for Tos Tos products. Therefore, NCT Dream's attractiveness does not significantly impact purchase intention, and H3 is not supported.

Respect is the only dimension of celebrity endorsers that significantly influences purchase intention. The results show that the value is 2.151 and 0.031, showing that respect for a celebrity endorser influences purchase intention. The result of this study is aligned with previous studies by Koththagoda and Weerasiri (2017) and Ahmad et al. (2019), which also found a positive relationship between respect and purchase intention. Most celebrity endorsers who appear in advertisements usually have knowledge, experience, and ability in their respective areas that make people appreciate and respect them for their achievements and thus influence people's purchase intention (Akramiah et al., 2021). The respect for the endorsers might extend to the endorsed brand, which leads to more positive brand attitude and higher purchase intention. When a celebrity endorser is known and popular among people, that endorser will be very effective in building awareness of the endorsed product (Aini, 2020).

A study by Akramiah et al. (2021) on Le Minerale showed that the most significant element of the TEARS model toward purchase intention was respect. Another study by Surentang (2023) on Blackpink and Oreo also found that respect was an important factor for effective endorsement. These two studies discussed research objectives similar to this study, which are food and beverage products. That is why it can be concluded that respect is the most important characteristic of a celebrity endorser in the context of the food and beverage industry. This might be because food and beverage products are low-involvement products that do not require extensive information search before purchasing or have high risk for buyers. As a result, buyers do not need someone trustworthy, expert, attractive, and similar to them to influence their purchase decision when making purchases.

However, if the K-pop idols that they like, adore, and respect try particular products, they might want to try them since K-pop fans tend to follow what their idols like, eat, or wear (Sari et al., 2022). Fans show strong passion and admiration for their idols, and this psychological effect influences how they perceive brands endorsed by their favourite celebrities (Chen et al., 2022). Not only that, a study by Ahmad et al. (2019) on young consumers found that respect and similarity were two important factors for effective young celebrity endorsement, while trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness were not. The results of the previous studies supported this study's findings since most respondents in this study are also young consumers, and the endorser discussed in this study is also a young celebrity. Thus, it can also be inferred that a respected young celebrity endorser will influence the purchase intention of young consumers more, particularly among fans.

In Indonesia, NCT Dream has a fanbase community called NCTDreamINA. This fanbase is very active on platform X (previously Twitter) to exchange information and interact with one another, discussing NCT Dream (Pramesti and Wenerda, 2023). Indonesia had the highest number of tweets related to K-Pop in 2020 and 2021, with NCT ranked the 2nd as the most-tweeted-about topic (Iskandar et al., 2024; Luckyo, 2022). This shows that NCT Dream is very popular and liked by many people in Indonesia. NCT Dream's strategy to engage Indonesian fans by "localization" strategy, starting from learning the Indonesian language, joining Indonesia's viral trend, adopting Indonesian culture and etiquette, up until trying Indonesian foods, successfully makes NCT Dream popular in Indonesia.

In 2020, NCT released content on YouTube entitled "Trying Indonesian Food and Snacks" in their Indonesian School series. The video discussing and trying popular Indonesian snacks has received a positive response, with more than 4.5 million views on YouTube (NCT Daily, 2020). This video shows NCT Dream's knowledge and information about Indonesian snacks. With this "localization" strategy, NCT Dream got a lot of respect from Indonesians and became very popular in Indonesia. Fans who see NCT Dream as their role model will be interested in trying what NCT Dream is trying. As a result, when NCT Dream promoted Tos Tos, the fans were interested in trying Tos Tos as well. In other words, respect for NCT Dream has a significant impact on purchase intention, and H4 is supported.

From the analysis, it can be concluded that the path analysis from similarity to purchase intention is found to have a value of 0.245 and a value of 1.163. Thus, the results show that the relationship between similarity and purchase intention is insignificant. The finding of this research is consistent with the past study that also found that similarity had no significant relationship with purchase intention (Adnan et al., 2017). In most cases, people often prefer someone similar to themselves rather than dissimilar (Munnuka et al., 2016). Sometimes consumers feel more emotional than rational, meaning they feel more similar and closer to ordinary people than to celebrities (Fitrianto et al., 2017). Ordinary people who appear in advertising deliver a more realistic and genuine feeling. Knowing that NCT Dream is a global star, the audience as ordinary people do not feel any similarity. Hence, NCT Dream's similarity has no significant impact on purchase intention, and H5 is rejected.

Brand image and purchase intention are significantly correlated, with a value of 3.211 and a value of 0.001. This is consistent with the study done by Hartono and Dewi (2019) and Savitri et al. (2022), which discovered that there was a significant and positive relationship between brand image and purchase intention. Brand image is necessary for brand reputation and credibility, which leads to customers' intention to buy the product (Wijaya, 2013). Moreover, Hung (2018) stated that a better brand image would lead to a more positive brand perception and increase purchase intention. Therefore, brand image is significantly related to purchase intention, and H6 is accepted across diverse contexts.

For the mediation analysis, the result shows that brand image mediates the relationship between expertise and purchase intention. With a value of 2.172 and p-value of 0.030, expertise is the only dimension of a celebrity endorser that is significantly mediated by brand image. Therefore, the only accepted mediating hypothesis is H8, particularly in celebrity marketing contexts. The results of the study are supported by Febriati and Respati (2020), who discovered that brand image mediates the relationship between celebrity endorsers' credibility and purchase intention, in which expertise is part of credibility (García-Conde et al., 2020).

Till and Busler (2000) found that expertise positively influenced brand attitudes and purchase intention. Similarly, Fitriani et al. (2023) revealed that expertise significantly affected consumers' intention to purchase Scarlett Whitening products in Yogyakarta. They also found that brand image mediated the effect of expertise on purchase intention. However, this study discovered that expertise did not directly influence purchase intention but only had an effect through brand image. Suryakrisna and Susanti (2024) also found a similar mediation effect in their study on the Erigo clothing line in Surabaya. These contrasting results suggest that the product type might influence the role of expertise in consumer decisions.

Snack products, such as Tos Tos, are considered low-involvement products. Consumers usually do not need to conduct extensive research or rely on expert evaluations before purchasing such items. In contrast, skincare or fashion products often require a higher level of trust and expertise before purchase. This difference explains why expertise might not directly impact the purchase intention of Tos Tos snacks. Consumers may simply be drawn to the product's appearance or brand familiarity rather than the expertise of the endorser. Therefore, the direct influence of expertise on purchase intention may be limited in this context.

Nevertheless, the absence of a direct effect does not eliminate the influence of expertise entirely. The findings indicate that brand image serves as a significant mediator between expertise and purchase intention. This means that greater perceived expertise enhances brand image, which in turn leads to higher purchase intention. Adiba et al. (2020) and Ing and Furuoka (2007) also found a positive relationship between expertise and brand image. According to Kang et al. (2019), a celebrity's expertise can elevate brand value and sustainability. NCT Dream has promoted many products before Tos Tos, including cosmetics, fashion, food, and beverages. Notably, they positively influenced the brand image of Lemonilo (Tridayanti and Nurfebiaraning, 2022), reinforcing the notion that their expertise indirectly strengthens brand image and encourages purchase intention for Tos Tos.

The findings of this study have important practical implications for marketers, particularly in the food and beverage industry. Companies should prioritize selecting celebrity endorsers who are respected by the target audience, as respect was found to be the only TEARS element with a significant direct impact on purchase intention. In addition, while expertise did not directly influence purchase intention, it indirectly enhanced it through brand image, emphasizing the importance of building a credible and positive brand perception. Therefore, marketers should not only focus on a celebrity's popularity or appearance but also consider their relevance to the product category and their ability to resonate with consumers. Selecting endorsers who embody these traits can significantly increase the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and boost consumer engagement with the brand.

CONCLUSIONS

The path coefficient analysis shows that among the TEARS elements, only respect has a significant direct impact on purchase intention, while trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and similarity do not. However, brand image has a significant positive effect on purchase intention, and only the relationship between expertise and purchase intention is mediated by brand image—indicating that the more expertise a celebrity endorser has, the better the brand image and the stronger the purchase intention. This study clearly highlights that the impact of celebrity endorsers on purchase intention depends heavily on the product and industry context. Therefore, companies should carefully select celebrity endorsers who are respected, have a strong public image, and possess relevant expertise to the product, as these aspects can effectively enhance brand image and drive consumer purchase intention. With the right endorsement strategy, celebrity endorsement can be a powerful and effective tool to strengthen the emotional relationship between consumers and the brand.

LIMITATION

This research has several limitations that can be improved for further research. First, all respondents in this study were women. Thus, further research can consider including men as the respondents and see if there are differences in the results of the research. Second, this research only focused on one K-Pop celebrity related to one brand. Further research can try to analyze different industry sectors and different types of endorser. Third, the cross-sectional design of this study limits the ability to draw causal inferences between celebrity endorsement and purchase intention. Additionally, the use of simple random sampling and an online questionnaire may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Future research could also benefit from incorporating qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into consumer perceptions and motivations, particularly in diverse contexts.

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