

# DOES ONLINE FANDOM MATTER FOR CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT? UNDERSTANDING THE INTERPLAY OF CELEBRITY AUTHENTICITY AND SENSE OF ONLINE FANDOM

Quang-An Ha  
School of International Business – Marketing  
University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City  
59C Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Xuan Hoa Ward, Ho Chi Minh City 700000, Vietnam  
[anhq@ueh.edu.vn](mailto:anhq@ueh.edu.vn)

Thanh-Minh Ha Le<sup>1</sup>  
University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City  
59C Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Xuan Hoa Ward, Ho Chi Minh City 700000, Vietnam  
[minh.lehathanh@gmail.com](mailto:minh.lehathanh@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

In today's digital era, where celebrities hold immense influence over consumer behavior, understanding the factors that shape trust and online purchase toward endorsed brands is crucial. Especially, in the landscape of celebrity endorsement, the effectiveness of celebrity authenticity, online celebrity fandom, and their interaction has been fruitful yet underexplored research direction. Drawing upon signaling theory and trust transfer mechanism, we conducted a 2×2 between-subjects factorial design experiment to examine how signals from celebrity authenticity and sense of online fandom affect trust development and subsequent online purchase among consumers. Data from 200 participants were analyzed using MANCOVA and PLS-SEM. Our findings indicate that high celebrity authenticity and a sense of healthy fandom lead to greater wishful identification and celebrity trust. Additionally, the effects of perceived celebrity authenticity on wishful identification and celebrity trust are stronger in the presence of a sense of healthy fandom compared to toxic fandom. Furthermore, wishful identification directly influences consumers' online purchase intentions, while brand trust fully mediates the effect of celebrity trust on purchase intention. This original study pioneers experimental research on the joint effects of celebrity authenticity and online fandom, advancing signaling theory and trust transfer literature within the e-commerce and celebrity endorsement context.

Keywords: Celebrity endorsement; Celebrity authenticity; Online fandom; Signal interaction; Online purchase

## 1. Introduction

The rapid adoption of digital technology has led to the exponential proliferation of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook (Sheikh et al., 2019), ultimately attracting a significant number of consumers (Jin, 2018). Brands are increasingly integrating SNS platforms like Facebook into their marketing strategies (Chiu, 2022), with celebrity endorsements emerging as an influential approach (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020), now a fundamental component of e-commerce (Breberina et al., 2022).

Celebrity endorsement refers to “an agreement between an individual who enjoys public recognition (a celebrity) and an entity (e.g., a brand) to use the celebrity for the purpose of promoting the entity” (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016, p. 3). In the first quarter of 2017, nearly 16% of internet users aged 16 to 34 found new brands through celebrity endorsements (Statista, 2017). Due to its effectiveness, around 10% of advertising expenses are allocated to celebrity endorsements (Carlson et al., 2020), and 10% of advertisements in the U.S. feature celebrities (Schimmelpfennig, 2018). Celebrity endorsement benefits both celebrities and brands: celebrities enhance their public image and consumer trust (Hussain et al., 2020), while brands strengthen consumer trust through association with reputable personalities (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Given the importance of trust in social commerce (Lee et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2017), celebrity authenticity in celebrity endorsements plays a crucial role in shaping positive

---

**Cite:** Ha, Q.-A., & Le, T.-M. H. (2026). Does online fandom matter for celebrity endorsement? Understanding the interplay of celebrity authenticity and sense of online fandom. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 27(3).

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author

consumer attitudes (e.g., trust) and behavioral intentions (e.g., online purchase intention) (Ilicic & Webster, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2021; Moulard et al., 2014).

It is also worth noting that celebrity endorsements may increase the sales volume of brands by establishing a genuine connection with the fandom of these celebrities (Hung, 2020; Rodrigues et al., 2025). Nevertheless, critical questions remain about the effectiveness of celebrity fandom despite its potential contribution to celebrity endorsement. While a substantial body of literature has predominantly focus on brand community (i.e., brand fans) (Cheng et al., 2020; Habibi et al., 2014), far less research has shed light on the influence of online celebrity fandom (Hung, 2020). Moreover, the prevailing focus on extreme behaviors within fandom studies (e.g., Kahr, 2019; Maltby et al., 2011) has reinforced negative bias against fans (i.e., toxic fandom) in the public perception (Doss, 1999) despite the diverse segments within fandoms (Hung, 2020). Fans often engage in aggression to protect or defend their favorite celebrities, typically through online hostility toward critics or rival fandoms (Forner et al., 2025). Not only in Western countries but also in Asian contexts, fan communities sometimes turn toxic, organizing collective online attacks against individuals or media outlets who criticize their idols or brands (Forner et al., 2025). However, not all fandoms manifest such hostility. For example, in some Vietnamese K-Pop fandom communities, digital SNS platforms like Facebook facilitate affective and supportive fan interactions, where shared emotions and mediated intimacy promote collective closeness and positive identification with the idol rather than aggression (Hoang, 2020). As such, exploring how a sense of healthy fandom could positively influence trust development of consumers and how it contributes to the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements remains an intriguing question. Since trust can drive consumer-generated value, examining this relationship is crucial for understanding how consumer perceptions of celebrity authenticity and celebrity fandom influence online purchase behavior toward endorsed brands (Wang et al., 2021). While celebrity endorsements are widely studied (El Hedhli et al., 2021), the influence of celebrity authenticity has received less attention within marketing literature (Ilicic & Webster, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2021; Moulard et al., 2015). In addition, to the best of our knowledge, the joint effects of perceived celebrity authenticity and sense of healthy fandom in celebrity endorsement have been a fruitful yet underexplored research direction.

To address these gaps, this study seeks to answer two research questions. The first research question (**RQ1**) is: *Do the interplay of celebrity authenticity and the sense of online fandom motivate wishful identification with celebrities and strengthen consumers' trust in them?* The second (**RQ2**) is: *Do wishful identification and celebrity trust from such signals drive a trust transfer mechanism to trust in the endorsed brand and subsequent online purchase?* To answer RQ1, we apply the well-known signaling theory (Spence, 1978) to explain how the signaler (i.e., the endorsed brand) possesses information based on signals from celebrity authenticity and sense of celebrity's online fandom to reduce information asymmetry for the receiver (i.e., the consumer) regarding an unknown brand. To answer RQ2, we employ trust transfer theory (Stewart, 2003) alongside the concept of trust transfer mechanisms in social commerce (Wang et al., 2021) to elucidate how consumers develop trust in endorsed brands through their trust in celebrities.

Through a 2×2 between-subjects factorial design experiment, this study makes four key contributions. *First*, this study contributes to the limited literature on celebrity authenticity (Kennedy et al., 2021) by examining the complex impact of perceived celebrity authenticity within the e-commerce context. *Second*, we enrich the literature on online fandom, as this study is among the first to examine how online fandom contributes to the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. *Third*, and notably, this study is distinct from existing literature as it advances signaling theory by providing a fresh perspective on the interactive effects of multiple signals in celebrity endorsements. To our knowledge, this is the first experimental study to examine the joint effects of celebrity authenticity and a sense of online fandom on consumers' attitudes and behavioral outcomes. In this respect, *fourth*, this study also fills previous research gaps and makes contributions to the literature on trust transfer mechanisms.

The flow of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the theoretical framework, proposes the conceptual framework, and formulates the research hypotheses. Section 3 explains the experiment design, followed by Section 4 with statistical analyses of the gathered data. Section 5 discusses the findings with implications and concludes the study.

## 2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

### 2.1. Celebrity authenticity and sense of online fandom

Authenticity in consumer behavior refers to the genuineness, realness, and truthfulness consumers perceive regarding a product, brand, or individual through their observation or experience (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). This perception sets the foundation for the concept of *celebrity authenticity*, which is defined as “the perception that a celebrity behaves according to his or her true self” (Moulard et al., 2015, p. 175). This perception is socially constructed and context-dependent (Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023), with consumers actively shaping what is considered authentic (Leigh et al., 2006) when they interact with the authentic object (Rose & Wood, 2005). On SNS

platforms, assessments of celebrity authenticity vary by followers over time (Kim & McDonald-Liu, 2023). In this respect, consumers play a defining role in shaping what is considered authentic (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016).

Fan is an individual who invests a substantial amount of time and a strong dedication in discussing and thinking about a particular object or person (Fiske, 2002). As such, the concept of *fandom* refers to the collective of individuals who passionately engage with a shared interest, such as celebrities. What differentiates fandom from the rest of the world lies in the strong delineation of distinct boundaries that are set by fans (Fiske, 2002). As Lewis (2002, p. 1) states, “perhaps only the fan can appreciate the depth of feeling, the gratifications, the importance for coping with everyday life that fandom represents”. Throughout history, the concept of a fan has been a subject of controversial discussions (Soukup, 2006) and has often been portrayed as a form of pathological fanaticism or “worship” believed to stem from alienating qualities of modern society (Ashe et al., 2005). However, such negative perspectives have been rebutted when as scholars have started to critically analyze and explore the varied experiences of fandom (e.g., Jones et al., 2022; Soukup, 2006).

Table 1. Review of literature on the effects of celebrity authenticity and online fandom

Study	Method	Theory	Effects of celebrity authenticity (CA)	Effects of online celebrity fandom (CF)	Interactive effects of CA and CF?
Moulard et al. (2014)	Survey	-	Perceived artist authenticity	-	No
Ilicic and Webster (2016)	Survey	Self-determination theory	Celebrity brand authenticity	-	No
Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016)	Survey and interview	Attachment theory	Celebrity authenticity	-	No
Kennedy et al. (2021)	Experiment	Self-determination theory	Celebrity authenticity	-	No
Zafar et al. (2021)	Survey and fsQCA	Latent state-trait theory	Digital celebrity post authenticity	-	No
<i>This study</i>	<i>Experiment</i>	<i>Signaling theory, trust transfer theory</i>	<i>Celebrity authenticity</i>	<i>Sense of online fandom</i>	<i>Yes</i>

Thus far, notwithstanding several prior studies that attempted to tackle the aforementioned issues, they have not achieved a comprehensive enough understanding to provide a holistic view of what we know about the role of fandom in celebrity endorsement. The literature review in Table 1 highlights two key points. *First*, research on the effects of celebrity authenticity in celebrity endorsement on consumer behavior remains limited (Ilicic & Webster, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2021; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Moulard et al., 2014; Zafar et al., 2021), given its novelty in the marketing literature (Moulard et al., 2015). *Second*, no study to date has examined the interactive effects of both celebrity authenticity and celebrity fandom. This study argues that, given the potential influence of celebrity authenticity and online fandom on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement, it is essential to explore their individual and interactive effects on consumer behavior.

## 2.2. Signaling theory

Signaling theory originates from the study of information economics and seeks to understand how sellers and buyers communicate valuable information under conditions where one party holds information that the other does not (Spence, 1978), the so-called *information asymmetry*. The key components of signaling theory include the *signaler*, the *signals*, and the *receiver* (Connelly et al., 2011; Connelly et al., 2025). *Signalers* are insiders who possess information that outsiders do not have (Spence, 1978). *Signals* refer to “observable characteristics attached to the individual that are subject to manipulation by [the signaler]” (Spence, 1978, p. 357). These signals provide insights that allow the *receivers*, who lack information about certain objects and are willing to receive additional details (Connelly et al., 2011), to form assessments and beliefs (Spence, 1978).

The goal of signalers is to send positive signals to receivers and avoid sending negative ones, thereby reducing information asymmetry and helping the organization achieve desired outcomes (Taj, 2016). The signaling process requires the signaler to benefit from an action taken by the receiver, an action the receiver would not have taken otherwise (Connelly et al., 2011). The signaling process begins when the signaler selects a signal that credibly reflects their unobservable attributes. The receiver then interprets this signal, thus reducing uncertainty about the signaler’s true characteristics. Such assessment influences attitude and subsequent decisions, such as hiring choices in the job market (Spence, 1978). In the context of our study, the signalers are conceptualized as the (*i*) celebrity endorsing the

brands and (ii) their fandom, both of which communicate hidden attributes of the given brand. We argue that consumers (the receivers) interpret both signals from celebrity (i.e., celebrity authenticity) and the nature of celebrity online fandom (e.g., a sense of healthy fandom). These signals shape consumers' attitudes toward this endorsement (i.e. wishful identification, celebrity trust, brand trust) and influence their subsequent decision (i.e., online purchase intention).

### 2.3. Signal from celebrity authenticity

Celebrity [brand] authenticity embraces the idea that celebrities, as human brands themselves, remain true to their core identities (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). In contemporary culture, there is a growing emphasis on preserving one's authentic identity, especially amid external pressures that may distort or compromise one's identity (Schallehn et al., 2014). In this vein, empirical studies highlight the importance of perceived celebrity authenticity in establishing meaningful consumer-celebrity relationships, which can lead to outcomes such as emotional attachment (Kowalczyk & Ponders, 2016) and favorable consumer attitudes (e.g., Kennedy et al., 2021).

One salient outcome of such perceived authenticity is *wishful identification*, which refers to consumers' aspiration to emulate or behave like the celebrity (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). When it comes to celebrity endorsements, such meaningful consumer-celebrity connections strengthen the attachment bonds of consumers with celebrities, ranging from mild, curious interest to even instances of celebrity worship (Reeves et al., 2012). This notion aligns with Kowalczyk and Ponders (2016), who found that consumers who perceive a celebrity as genuine or authentic on SNSs tend to feel closer and more attached to that celebrity. This engagement may progress to the extent that consumers are inclined to adopt the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the celebrity (Kelman, 2006), ultimately resulting in a greater inclination towards wishful identification. In essence, when consumers perceive celebrities as authentic, they are more likely to develop a sense of admiration and aspiration toward them. Thus, we hypothesize:

**H1a.** *Perceived high celebrity authenticity will lead consumers to have higher wishful identification compared to perceived low celebrity authenticity.*

Beyond wishful identification, trust has also been regarded as a potential outcome of authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015). While trust and authenticity are conceptually distinct, they are positively correlated (Napoli et al., 2014). In this study *celebrity trust* is defined as "an online fan community member's trust involving positive expectations about a particular celebrity in situations entailing risk" (Kim & Kim, 2017, p. 235). Trust relates to uncertainties and risks associated with celebrities (Hung et al., 2015), whereas authenticity signifies the certainty that celebrities remain true to their identities (Schallehn et al., 2014). Extensive literature demonstrates strong associations between general brand authenticity (Portal et al., 2019), influencer authenticity (Kim & Kim, 2021), and even virtual assistant authenticity (Alimamy & Kuhail, 2023) in relation to trust. Given that celebrities are also considered human brands (Osorio et al., 2020), we argue that this concept of increasing greater trust in brands among consumers is applicable to celebrity endorsers. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

**H1b.** *Perceived high celebrity authenticity will lead consumers to have higher celebrity trust compared to perceived low celebrity authenticity.*

### 2.4. Signal from sense of fandom

Celebrity fandoms consist of fans who consume and admire a specific celebrity, among other things (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021). The evolving media landscape, driven by technological advancements and internet connectivity, has amplified fan engagement (Booth, 2010). Fans leverage diverse media channels for communication, creative expression, and knowledge sharing (Bennett, 2014; Liao & Fu, 2022). On these platforms, online celebrity fandoms provide fans with a sense of escapism that allows them to immerse themselves in a fantasy world (Madrid-Morales & Lovric, 2015). However, given the massive size and influence of these fandoms, both negative aspects, such as toxic behavior (e.g., bullying; Park et al., 2021), and positive aspects of celebrity fandom, such as healthy behavior (e.g., donations; Kim, 2015), attract media attention. Arguably, every fandom inherently exhibits a mix of both toxicity and positivity, making it unrealistic to categorize a fandom as entirely toxic or wholly positive. However, due to their scale, celebrity fandoms often display a higher frequency of both negative and positive behaviors, making these behaviors more visible to consumers.

Under conditions of information asymmetry, individuals may rely only on a limited number of informational cues or even a single cue (e.g., toxic or healthy behaviors of celebrity fans) to form judgments (Tam & Ho, 2005). In the context of this study, consumers perceive toxic or healthy behaviors as indicative of a fandom's overall nature. A sense of healthy fandom reflects mutual respect in interactions, whereas a toxic fandom implies a lack of respect and empathy. Arguably, consumers may consider this limited information to form judgments about the associated celebrity. That is, a healthy fandom sense is more likely to garner positive attitudes, while a toxic fandom sense may generate negative perceptions that unfavorably affect consumer attitudes toward celebrity. Prior research has shown that perceptions of healthy fandoms can help reshape negative stereotypes associated with celebrity fan communities

(Kim, 2015), potentially leading to increased wishful identification and trust in the respective celebrity. Therefore, based on these premises, we posit the following hypotheses:

**H2a.** *A high sense of healthy fandom will lead consumers to have higher wishful identification compared to a low sense of healthy fandom.*

**H2b.** *A high sense of healthy fandom will lead consumers to have higher celebrity trust compared to a low sense of healthy fandom.*

### 2.5. Interaction of signals from celebrity authenticity and sense of fandom

Signaling theory discusses “the interaction of potential signals” (Spence, 1978, p. 356). In this respect, signals do not operate in isolation. Rather, the information conveyed by one observable characteristic can depend critically on the presence of other characteristics. In the context of management, negative signals from interim government regimes (e.g., violent interim-regime dominance) interact with firms’ resilience signals to motivate positive reactions from investors (El Nayal et al., 2020). Similarly, Xia et al. (2016) have found that security analyst recommendations can serve as signals of firm quality, interacting with signals arising from alliances and ownership structures to affect a firm’s hazard of delisting.

Despite this theoretical foundation, little is known about the interaction effects of signals in celebrity endorsement for brands. As Connelly et al. (2025, p. 51) point out, when we “[look] at the signaling context more holistically, opportunities exist to consider signaling from a systems perspective, [...] where signals interact with each other, [and examine] what outcomes they jointly produce.” Drawing on these insights and acknowledging the need to explore these interactive effects, we aim to address this gap. From the perspective of such co-occurrence, we propose that, compared to a sense of toxic fandom, a sense of healthy fandom perceived by consumers is more likely to amplify the favorable effects of their perceived authentic celebrity on their attitudes toward the celebrity:

**H3a.** *The impact of perceived authentic celebrity on wishful identification increases in the presence of a sense of healthy fandom compared to a sense of toxic fandom.*

**H3b.** *The impact of perceived authentic celebrity on celebrity trust increases in the presence of a sense of healthy fandom compared to a sense of toxic fandom.*

### 2.6. Wishful identification

Wishful identification is the extension of an individual’s initial emotional engagement with a celebrity to the aspiration to emulate or imitate that celebrity. Such engagement develops from “an affinity toward the character that is so strong that [they] become absorbed in the text and come to an empathic understanding for the feelings the character experiences, and for [their] motives and goals” (Cohen, 2013, p. 184). When individuals regard a celebrity as their role model, they may wishfully identify with them, given that emulating such a role model could bring social rewards and acceptance within their peer group (Shoenberger & Kim, 2019).

In this regard, wishful identification may lead to a shared viewpoint between the celebrity and the consumer (Hoffner, 1996), potentially leading to a one-sided consumer trust toward celebrities. More so, it is worth noting that wishful identification surpasses simple liking as it constitutes a profound psychosocial bond between individuals and celebrities that leads them to envision themselves as the respective celebrity (Bui et al., 2021). Thus, we anticipate wishful identification to function as an antecedent of celebrity trust, forming the basis for our subsequent hypothesis:

**H4.** *Wishful identification positively affects celebrity trust.*

### 2.7. Trust transfer theory: From celebrity trust to brand trust

According to trust transfer theory, trust transfer refers to a cognitive process by which trust established in one entity extends to another entity (Stewart, 2003). Initially, the *trustor*, who determines whether to place trust, establishes initial trust in a *trusted party*, which is the broker facilitating the trust transfer process (Stewart, 2003). This trust increases a sense of comfort within the environment, enabling product information exchange and social interactions (Shi & Chow, 2015).

*Brand trust* refers to “the feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer” (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003, p. 11). Trust transfer may occur when the unknown trustee and the trusted party are contextually related (Leung et al., 2022). In such instances where the trustor perceives the environment in which the unknown trustee is encountered as trustworthy (McKnight et al., 2002), there is a high likelihood that trust in the familiar trusted party will transfer to the unknown trustee. Drawing upon trust transfer theory, we argue that when consumers lack sufficient familiarity or knowledge with a particular brand, they may rely on their trust in celebrity

endorsers to establish trust in that brand.<sup>2</sup> Such trust development is likely to positively influence attitudes towards the endorsed brand (Hsu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Hence, we postulate that:

**H5.** *Celebrity trust positively affects endorsed brand trust.*

2.8. Online purchase intention

Previous studies demonstrate that wishful identification plays a vital role in forming purchase intention (Shoenberger & Kim, 2019; Tian et al., 2023). For instance, Shoenberger and Kim (2019) examine how wishful identification, derived from fictional character attributes, influences purchase intention towards the brand products used by a favorite character in a television show. Their findings reveals that wishful identification mediates the impact of endorser characteristics on purchase intention, with the affluent endorser cluster generating the strongest prediction of product purchasing behavior. Likewise, Tian et al. (2023) investigate the effects of wishful identification on purchase intention among Gen Z consumers from a social comparison perspective. Their study highlights that wishful identification has a favorable impact on both assimilative and contrastive comparison emotions. These emotional responses drive consumers to follow SNS influencers for self-improvement, ultimately leading to higher purchase intention among Gen Z consumers. Based on the above literature and arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H6.** *Wishful identification positively affects consumers' online purchase intention.*

Engaging in transactions within the online environment requires buyers to navigate social complexities and the potential risks associated with sellers' opportunistic behaviors (Lu et al., 2016). In such contexts, trust is a critical factor in fostering positive attitudes toward transaction behaviors (Jarvenpaa et al., 1999) and is widely recognized as a strong predictor of purchase behavior (Chae et al., 2020). In particular, brand trust positively influences purchase intention by reducing perceived uncertainty and encouraging purchasing behavior (Chae et al., 2020; Gong et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). Given that celebrities are also perceived as human brands, we extend this logic to celebrity trust. Therefore, we formulate the final hypotheses as follows:

**H7.** *Celebrity trust positively affects consumers' online purchase intention.*

**H8.** *Brand trust positively affects consumers' online purchase intention.*

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study.

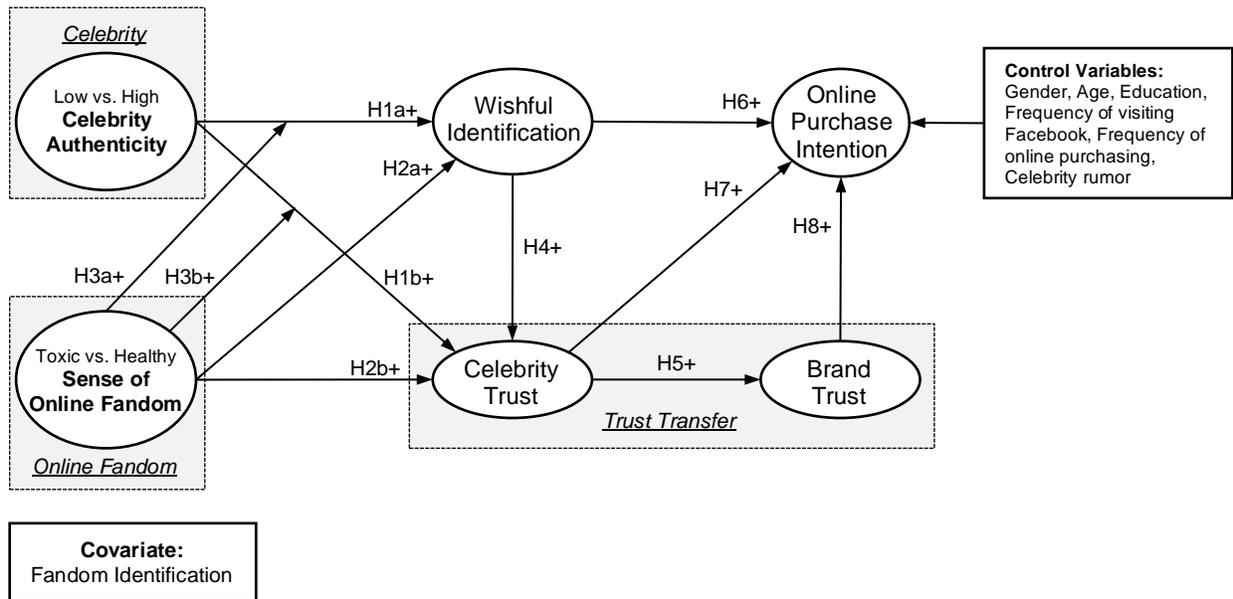


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

<sup>2</sup> Although e-commerce involves multiple layers of trust (Kim, 2014), our study focuses on SNSs as pre-purchase persuasion environments rather than transactional platforms. On SNSs, consumers do not evaluate escrow policies, payment guarantees, or dispute mechanisms; instead, they assess interpersonal cues such as authenticity, attractiveness, and credibility (Aguinis et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). Thus, platform trust or institutional mechanisms may play a secondary or latent role at this stage. We argue that these elements become salient only when consumers engage in actual purchase transactions, not during attitudinal formation in social endorsement contexts.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Experiment design

The present study employed a 2 (*celebrity authenticity*: high vs. low)  $\times$  2 (*sense of fandom*: toxic vs. healthy) factorial between-subjects experimental design (see Table 2). Leonardo DiCaprio was selected as the celebrity endorser for a fictional outdoor watch brand named *Wandara* because of three main reasons. *First*, familiarity and likability are key factors in the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements (Carrillat et al., 2013). According to Kennedy et al. (2021), experimental pre-tests identified Leonardo DiCaprio as the most familiar and likable celebrity among U.S. consumers. *Second*, one of our primary objectives was to examine the impact of consumers' perceived celebrity authenticity and their sense of the celebrity's online fandom (*distinct from a brand community or fanbase*) on trust development and subsequent purchase intention in e-commerce. Third, since we applied signaling theory, we aimed to maximize information asymmetry between consumers and the brand. This rationale explains why we chose a real celebrity to endorse a fictional brand rather than an actual one (Please refer to the Appendix A, B, and C for details on our manipulation stimuli).

Table 2. Experiment Design

		Sense of online fandom	
		Healthy	Toxic
Celebrity authenticity	Authentic	1 (AH) ( $n = 50$ )	2 (AT) ( $n = 50$ )
	Inauthentic	3 (IH) ( $n = 50$ )	4 (IT) ( $n = 50$ )

**Manipulation materials for celebrity authenticity.** To provide participants with a realistic context, we designed a simulated article modeled after The New York Times, a highly influential national publication in the U.S. known for adhering to ethical reporting standards and embodying classic journalism elements (Newman et al., 2023). The endorsement poster featuring Leonardo DiCaprio for *Wandara* was meticulously designed by an expert designer.

Following the procedure outlined by Kennedy et al. (2021), participants were shown one of two fictitious articles portraying Leonardo DiCaprio as either highly authentic or lacking authenticity. Manipulation materials, based on items developed by Ilicic and Webster (2016), were integrated throughout the article. For instance, participants in the high-authenticity condition encountered statements such as, "A person of integrity, Leonardo truly acts in a consistent manner with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so," while those in the low-authenticity condition read "Many people claimed that Leonardo does not act in a consistent manner with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so." The most substantial manipulation came from two comments made by fictitious commentators. To ensure participants read these comments, we included two attention-check questions: (1) *What are the names of the two commentators in the news?* and (2) *Wandara is a [Luxury/Outdoor] watch brand?* Participants then answered three manipulation check questions measuring perceived celebrity authenticity (Moulard et al., 2015) using a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., "Leonardo DiCaprio is genuine").

**Manipulation materials for sense of fandom.** From the rationale discussed in Section 1, Facebook was chosen as a suitable SNS platform for the endorsement simulation. Participants were presented with the fictitious endorsement post of *Wandara* featuring Leonardo DiCaprio on Facebook. Within the comment section, a contrasting comment regarding Leonardo's authenticity was displayed. This initiated a discussion among Leonardo's fandom members, reflecting either a healthy or toxic sense. Following this interaction, participants answered four manipulation check questions for sense of healthy fandom also on a 7-point scale (e.g., "Leo's fandom replies to Harley Thomas reflect a sense of [1 = toxic/7 = healthy] attitude.").

#### 3.2. Measures

After reading the situation with stimuli and completing manipulation checks accordingly, participants proceeded to respond to the dependent variable measures using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Most of these measures were adapted from validated scales employed in prior studies with modifications made to fit the context of the present study.

**Wishful identification.** Participants rated their agreement with five items adapted from Lim et al. (2020). A higher mean score across these items represents a stronger wishful identification, indicating that a participant desires more to be or behave like their favorite celebrity (e.g., "Leonardo DiCaprio is the sort of person I want to be like myself").

**Celebrity trust.** Five items were adapted from Terres et al. (2015) and Kim and Kim (2017) to measure consumers' trust in celebrity endorsers (e.g., "I consider Leonardo DiCaprio to be trustworthy").

**Brand trust.** A five-item brand trust scale (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Habibi et al., 2014) was adapted to measure consumers' trust in the endorsed brand (e.g., "Wandara is truthful").

**Online purchase intention.** We adapted three items from the subsequent online purchase intention scale of Le and Ha (2021) to assess the extent to which a consumer is willing to purchase products of the endorsed brand online after viewing an advertisement featuring the celebrity endorser (e.g., “It is likely that I will purchase the endorsed product of Wandara online.”).

### 3.3. Data collection and sampling method

**Procedure.** We gathered initial feedback on the early versions of the experiment from a small sample of Vietnamese netizens. We chose this group because netizens in Vietnam do not restrict their content consumption to domestic celebrities but also follow international figures (Gammon & Phan, 2025b). Moreover, they are known for their sensitivity to violations of celebrity norms and to perceived inauthenticity or performative behavior (Gammon & Phan, 2025a). Based on this feedback, we carefully refined the design in preparation for the main experiment. Participants of the present study were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a prominent crowdsourcing platform used by researchers to recruit the workforce for various subjective tasks, including participation in experimental surveys (Sharpe Wessling et al., 2017). MTurk’s meticulous verification process for the U.S. workforce, utilizing security numbers or American passports among other means (Hajian et al., 2023), enhances the credibility of its samples, which are often more diverse and representative than convenience samples, yielding high-quality self-reports (Buhrmester et al., 2011). Consequently, MTurk is deemed suitable for rigorous data collection in research (Steelman et al., 2014) and is extensively employed in academic studies (e.g., Chen & Hao, 2025; Ha et al., 2021; Ryu & Vargas, 2025). Notably, MTurk workers exhibit only marginal differences in judgment accuracy compared to participants recruited through traditional methods, such as paper surveys (Paolacci et al., 2010).

Adhering to the current best practices for research with MTurk research to mitigate demographic heterogeneity among participants (Go & Sundar, 2019), we implemented several quality control measures. To increase data quality, we restricted recruitment to participants with a task approval rating above 90%, U.S. residency (Go & Sundar, 2019), and online shopping experience (Le & Ha, 2021). Before participation, each respondent provided informed consent by agreeing to confidentiality terms, acknowledging the study’s purpose, and confirming understanding of ethical standards. Participants then completed demographic questions and verified their fandom of Leonardo DiCaprio. Next, they were randomly assigned to one of four scenarios (Table 2) with clear instructions and explanations. Participants first read a fictional post depicting DiCaprio’s authenticity and subsequently answered attention-check and manipulation-check questions. They then proceeded to a second post featuring online fandom comments in response to a brand-endorsed Facebook post and completed measures for the remaining constructs. On average, the experiment took approximately 19.43 minutes to complete. Afterward, participants were debriefed, thanked, and compensated with a \$1.00 participation fee.<sup>3</sup>

**Data collection results.** A total of 336 participants were drawn from the population, with no missing data. After the data cleaning process, 200 participants were deemed usable and subsequently included in the analysis.<sup>4</sup> As shown in Table 3, the sample consisted of 66.0% males and 34.0% females. Most participants fell within the 25-34 age group (75.0%) and held a bachelor’s degree (78.0%). The income distribution was relatively balanced, with a focus on middle-income participants. The most common income bracket was \$400-799 (51.0%). Majority of participants engaged in moderate to high levels of online shopping. Regarding Facebook usage, 41.5% of participants used the platform 2-3 times per day, while 38.5% used it more than five times per day. Additionally, 59.0% of participants identified as fans of Leonardo DiCaprio, while 41.0% did not.

---

<sup>3</sup> We argue that this compensation is reasonable for two main reasons. *First*, although participants were required to carefully read two short stimulus posts and complete several measurements, the cognitive effort involved was comparable to that of typical MTurk experiments and caused minimal fatigue. *Second*, because the task included clear instructions and familiar SNS-based scenarios, the overall participation burden was low.

<sup>4</sup> We acknowledge that excluding participants who fail manipulation checks can inadvertently inflate Type I error rates (Varaine, 2023). Thus, we did not exclude participants solely based on manipulation-check performance. Instead, we used several remedies to ensure the quality of our data (Aguinis et al., 2021). Among 336 participants recruited in our online experiments, 92 failed two attention-check questions: (1) *What are the names of the two commentators in the news?* and (2) *Wandara is a [Luxury/Outdoor] watch brand?*. This resulted in 244 participants. The rationale for this exclusion was to avoid obscuring the results with data from inattentive participants (Maniaci & Rogge, 2014). To further detect inattentiveness prior to treatment exposure, we also excluded participants whose completion times were unrealistically short (Wood et al., 2017). Another 32 participants dropped out at this point. Finally, we checked for possible outliers, causing 12 participants to be removed, leaving 200 participants in the final analysis.

Table 3. Demographic Information

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (N = 200)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	132	66.0
	Female	68	34.0
Age	15-24	1	0.5
	25-34	150	75.0
	35-44	21	10.5
	45-54	21	10.5
	55-64	6	3.0
	>64	1	0.5
Education	High school or below	5	2.5
	Two years college	2	1.0
	Bachelor's	156	78.0
	Master's	36	18.0
	PhD	1	0.5
Monthly income (USD)	200-399	32	16.0
	400-599	55	27.5
	600-799	47	23.5
	800-999	36	18.0
	Above 999	30	15.0
Online purchasing frequency (per month)	Less than 4	21	10.5
	4-7	77	38.5
	8-11	72	36.0
	12-15	12	6.0
	More than 15	18	9.0
Facebook usage frequency (per day)	At least one	7	3.5
	2-3 times	83	41.5
	4-5 times	33	16.5
	More than 5 times	77	38.5
Fandom identification	Non-fan	82	41.0
	Fan	118	59.0

**Data analysis techniques.** We assessed the assumption of normality within the dataset by examining the skewness and kurtosis of each construct. Results from the descriptive analysis (see Table 7) suggest that the response patterns for most constructs were normally distributed, except for online purchase intention, which had a kurtosis value of 3.04, exceeding the threshold of  $\pm 2$  (Sarstedt et al., 2021). Considering this and the exploratory research objective of our study, we employed two analytical methods to examine the data and test the proposed hypotheses.

For the first part of our framework, we conducted a two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to test the main and interactive effects of the signals (i.e., celebrity authenticity and sense of fandom) on wishful identification and celebrity trust.

For the second part, we employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships between wishful identification, the trust transfer mechanism, and online purchase intention among participants. PLS-SEM is commonly used to handle complex models and performs well with non-normally distributed data, even with a small sample size (Hair et al., 2019). Accordingly, we performed confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) procedure for measurement model (Hair Jr et al., 2020). As PLS-SEM is a non-parametric model (Chin, 1998), which requires the bootstrap method utilization to prove the statistical significance of the research hypotheses, we used 5,000 subsamples through Bias-Corrected and Accelerated (BCa) bootstrapping operation to verify all the hypotheses of the second part.

**Sample size calculation.** For MANCOVA analysis, we used G\*Power v.3.1 (Faul et al., 2007) to calculate the sample size needed. A priori power analysis, based on an effect size of 0.1, an alpha level of .05, a statistical power of 0.95, four groups, two predictors, and two response variables, indicated a minimum of 24 participants per group (96 in total). Given we had 50 participants for each scenario under randomization technique, our current sample was sufficient. For the second part, we calculated the required sample size for PLS path modeling by employing the inverse square root technique (Kock & Hadaya, 2018; Le & Ngoc, 2024). With a statistical power of 0.95, a significance level of 5%, and a minimum path coefficient of  $\pm 0.25$  for the main association, the analysis determined a minimum requirement of 173 participants. Thus, our sample size of 200 was appropriate for PLS analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Hypotheses testing for RQ1: Hypothesis 1 to hypothesis 3

Table 4. Manipulation Checks Results

Manipulated factors	Treatment	N	M	SD	F-value
<i>Celebrity authenticity</i>	Low	100	4.02	1.08	163.913***
	High	100	5.71	0.76	
<i>Sense of online fandom</i>	Toxic	100	3.15	1.04	351.185***
	Healthy	100	5.57	0.76	

CA1. “Leonardo DiCaprio is genuine.”  
 CA2. “Leonardo DiCaprio seems real to me.”  
 CA3. “Leonardo DiCaprio is authentic.”  
 FS1. “Leo’s fandom replies to Harley Thomas reflect a sense of [1 = toxic/7 = healthy] attitude.”  
 FS2. “Leo’s fandom replies to Harley Thomas are [1 = harsh/7 = supportive].”  
 FS3. “Leo’s fandom replies to Harley Thomas in a [1 = derogatory/7 = respectful] manner.”

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Manipulation check.** Two one-way ANOVAs were conducted to test differences in participants’ perceptions of *celebrity authenticity* (Low vs. High) and *sense of fandom* (Toxic vs. Healthy). Results from Table 4 indicate that the manipulation of celebrity authenticity was successful ( $F = 163.913, p < .001$ ), as participants who received the low-authenticity treatment perceived the celebrity as less authentic ( $M = 4.02, SD = 1.08$ ) compared to those in the high-authenticity condition ( $M = 5.71, SD = 0.76$ ). Likewise, the manipulation of sense of fandom was also successful ( $F = 351.185, p < .001$ ), with participants in toxic fandom condition perceiving the fandom as less healthy ( $M = 3.15, SD = 1.04$ ) than those in healthy fandom condition ( $M = 5.57, SD = 0.76$ ).

Table 5. MANCOVA Results

Multivariate effects			Wilks’ $\Lambda$	F-value	$\eta_p^2$		
Covariate: Fandom identification			$\Lambda = 0.970$	$F_{[2,194]} = 2.982$	0.030		
Main effect: Celebrity authenticity			$\Lambda = 0.871$	$F_{[2,194]} = 14.347***$	0.129		
Main effect: Sense of online fandom			$\Lambda = 0.924$	$F_{[2,194]} = 7.940***$	0.076		
Interaction: Celebrity authenticity $\times$ Sense of fandom			$\Lambda = 0.930$	$F_{[2,194]} = 7.337***$	0.070		
IVs	DVs	Treatments	N	M	SE	F-value	$\eta_p^2$
Covariate: Fandom identification	Wishful identification	-	-	-	-	5.953*	0.030
	Celebrity trust	-	-	-	-	3.438	0.017
Main effect: Celebrity authenticity (CA)	H1a: Wishful identification	Low	100	4.64	0.082	12.607***	0.061
		High	100	5.05			
	H1b: Celebrity trust	Low	100	4.80	0.077	27.466***	0.123
		High	100	5.37			
Main effect: Sense of online fandom (FS)	H2a: Wishful identification	Toxic	100	4.66	0.082	10.380**	0.051
		Healthy	100	5.04			
	H2b: Celebrity trust	Toxic	100	4.86	0.077	15.962**	0.076
		Healthy	100	5.30			
Interaction: Celebrity authenticity $\times$ Sense of online fandom	H3a: Wishful identification	Low CA $\times$ Toxic FS	50	4.60	0.117	6.191*	0.031
		Low CA $\times$ Healthy FS	50	4.68			
		High CA $\times$ Toxic FS	50	4.72			
		High CA $\times$ Healthy FS	50	5.39			
	H3b: Celebrity trust	Low CA $\times$ Toxic FS	50	4.78	0.107	13.931***	0.067
		Low CA $\times$ Healthy FS	50	4.81			
		High CA $\times$ Toxic FS	50	4.95			
		High CA $\times$ Healthy FS	50	5.79			

Note:  $R^2_{\text{Wishful identification}} = 0.16$ ;  $R^2_{\text{Celebrity trust}} = 0.24$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Reliability test and factor analysis.** We used SPSS v.27 to conduct reliability test and factor analysis on *wishful identification* and *celebrity trust*. The results showed that, (i) the factor loadings and communalities for the items were greater than 0.60 and 0.50, respectively; (ii) the KMO value was greater than 0.50; (iii) cumulative variance exceeded 60%; and (iv) Cronbach's alpha was greater than 0.70. Therefore, the scales can be considered both reliable and valid for further analysis.

**MANCOVA results.** We conducted a two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to test the effect of our experimentally manipulated factors on wishful identification and celebrity trust, while controlling for fandom identification (see Table 5). Results from multivariate tests indicate that celebrity authenticity ( $F_{[2,194]} = 14.347, p < .001, \text{Wilk's } \Lambda = 0.871, \eta_p^2 = .129$ ), sense of fandom ( $F_{[2,194]} = 7.940, p < .001, \text{Wilk's } \Lambda = 0.924, \eta_p^2 = .076$ ), and their interaction effect ( $F_{[2,194]} = 7.337, p < .001, \text{Wilk's } \Lambda = 0.930, \eta_p^2 = .070$ ) had significant effects on two dependent variables. Meanwhile, the multivariate test for covariate (i.e., fandom identification) was not significant ( $F_{[2,194]} = 2.982, p > .05, \text{Wilk's } \Lambda = 0.970, \eta_p^2 = .030$ ), suggesting that after controlling for the covariate, the overall pattern of group differences remained unchanged.

Follow-up univariate analyses were conducted on each dependent variable while adjusting for the covariate. For *wishful identification*, the effect of celebrity authenticity was significant ( $F_{[1,195]} = 12.607, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .061$ ). Participants in high-authenticity condition ( $M = 5.05, SE = 0.082$ ) reported greater wishful identification compared to those in the low-authenticity condition ( $M = 4.64, SE = 0.082$ ). Thus, **H1a** was supported. Likewise, the main effect of sense of fandom was also significant ( $F_{[1,195]} = 10.380, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .051$ ). Participants in healthy fandom condition ( $M = 5.04, SE = 0.082$ ) reported greater wishful identification than those in the toxic fandom condition ( $M = 4.66, SE = 0.082$ ), indicating that **H2a** was accepted. We also found the hypothesized interaction effect between celebrity authenticity and sense of fandom on wishful identification to be significant ( $F_{[1,195]} = 6.191, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .031$ ). When the sense of fandom was toxic, the difference in wishful identification between low ( $M = 4.60, SE = 0.117$ ) and high celebrity authenticity ( $M = 4.72, SE = 0.117$ ) was minimal. However, when the sense of fandom was healthy, high celebrity authenticity led to significantly higher wishful identification ( $M = 5.39, SE = 0.117$ ) compared to low celebrity authenticity ( $M = 4.68, SE = 0.117$ ). Interaction graph from Figure 2 also implies that the positive effect of celebrity authenticity on wishful identification is stronger when the fandom is healthy rather than toxic. In other words, **H3a** was confirmed.

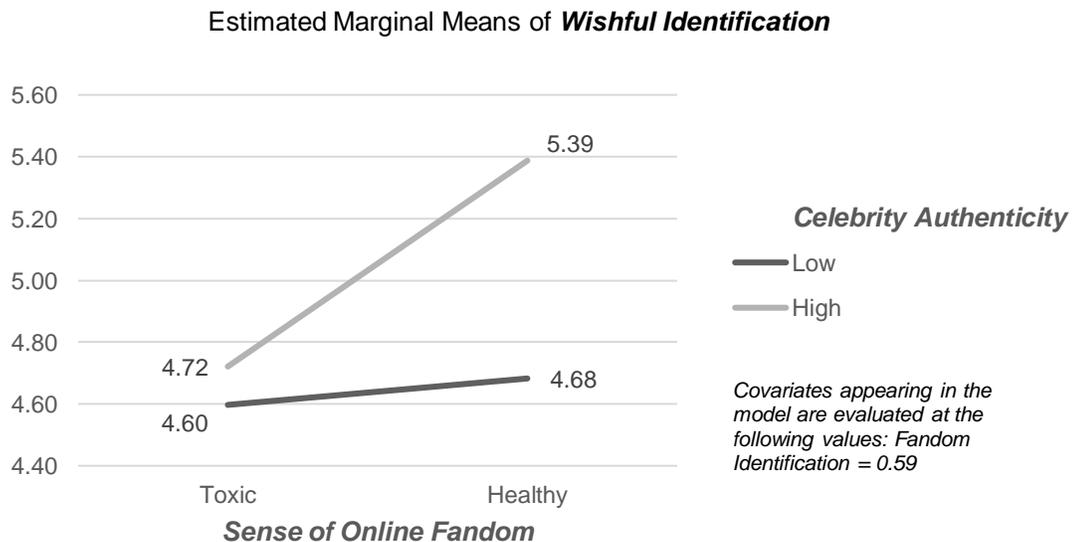


Figure 2. Interaction Effect of *Sense of Online Fandom* and *Celebrity Authenticity* on *Wishful Identification*

For *celebrity trust*, main effects of celebrity authenticity ( $F_{[1,195]} = 27.466, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .123$ ) and sense of fandom ( $F_{[1,195]} = 15.962, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .076$ ) were both significant. In this respect, participants in high-authenticity ( $M = 5.37, SE = 0.077$ ) and healthy fandom conditions ( $M = 5.30, SE = 0.077$ ) perceived greater trust than those in the low-authenticity ( $M = 4.80, SE = 0.077$ ) and toxic fandom conditions ( $M = 4.85, SE = 0.077$ ), respectively. These findings support **H1b** and **H2b**. The interaction effect between celebrity authenticity and sense of fandom was

significant ( $F_{[1,195]} = 13.931, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .067$ ). When the sense of fandom was toxic, celebrity trust was slightly different between the low ( $M = 4.78, SE = 0.107$ ) and high-authenticity conditions ( $M = 4.95, SE = 0.107$ ). However, in the healthy fandom condition, high celebrity authenticity led to substantially greater trust ( $M = 5.79, SE = 0.107$ ) compared to low celebrity authenticity ( $M = 4.81, SE = 0.107$ ). Likewise, the interaction graph (Figure 2) demonstrates that the positive effect of celebrity authenticity on trust is stronger when the fandom is healthy rather than toxic, further supporting **H3b**.

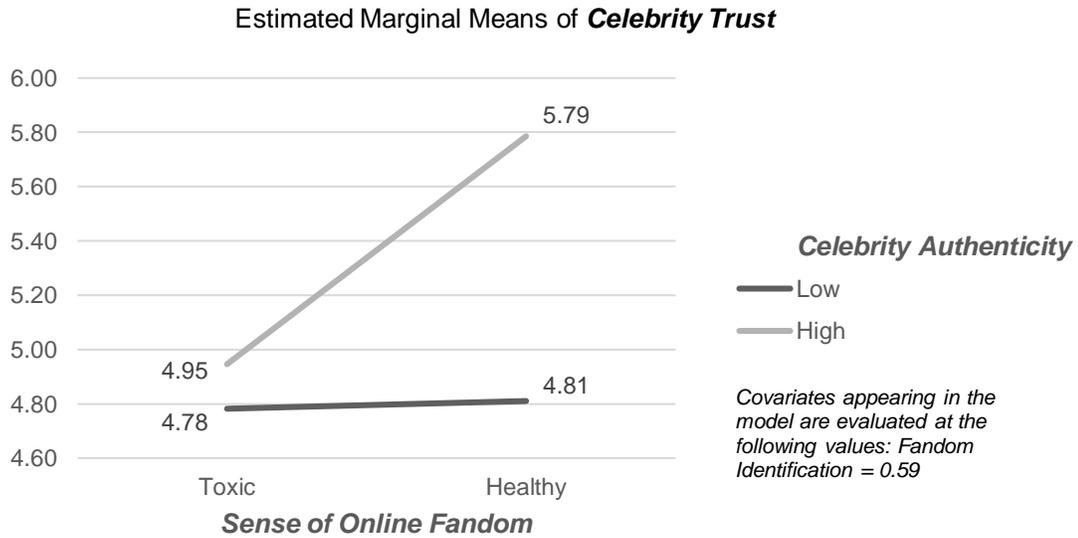


Figure 3. Interaction Effect of Sense of Online Fandom and Celebrity Authenticity on Celebrity Trust

4.2. Hypotheses testing for RQ2: Hypothesis 4 to hypothesis 8

**Measurement model.** We performed confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) to assess the measurement procedure. Accordingly, factor loadings, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity (see Table 6), and discriminant validity (see Table 7) were evaluated using PLS algorithm (Hair Jr et al., 2020). As shown in Table 6, after removing items that did not meet the criteria (i.e., WI2, CT1, BT4), the remaining items displayed strong factor loadings, all exceeding 0.70 (Hair Jr et al., 2020). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and composite reliability, both of which exceeded the 0.70 threshold, indicating high reliability (Hair et al., 2020).

Table 6. Measurement Properties of Constructs

Items (from 1 = <i>strongly disagree</i> to 7 = <i>strongly agree</i> )	Loadings
<b>Wishful identification (<math>\alpha = 0.83, CR = 0.89, AVE = 0.66</math>)</b>	
WI1. “Leonardo DiCaprio is the sort of person I want to be like myself.”	0.86
WI2. “Sometimes I wish I could be more like Leonardo DiCaprio.”	Removed
WI3. “I would like to have the same job as Leonardo DiCaprio.”	0.77
WI4. “I would like to do the kinds of things Leonardo DiCaprio does in his life.”	0.74
WI5. “Leonardo DiCaprio is someone I would like to emulate.”	0.88
<b>Celebrity trust (<math>\alpha = 0.81, CR = 0.87, AVE = 0.63</math>)</b>	
CT1. “I consider Leonardo DiCaprio to be trustworthy.”	Removed
CT2. “I respect Leonardo DiCaprio.”	0.83
CT3. “Leonardo DiCaprio approaches his job with professionalism and dedication.”	0.81
CT4. “Leonardo DiCaprio has integrity.”	0.80
CT5. “Overall, I can trust Leonardo DiCaprio.”	0.75
<b>Brand trust (<math>\alpha = 0.85, CR = 0.90, AVE = 0.66</math>)</b>	
BT1. “Wandara is truthful.”	0.81

<b>BT2.</b> “Wandara is safe.”	0.77
<b>BT3.</b> “Wandara is reliable.”	0.85
<b>BT4.</b> “I would trust Wandara.”	Removed
<b>BT5.</b> “I rely on Wandara.”	0.88
<b>Online purchase intention (<math>\alpha = 0.75</math>, <math>CR = 0.86</math>, <math>AVE = 0.66</math>)</b>	
<b>PI1.</b> “It is likely that I will purchase the endorsed product of Wandara online.”	0.84
<b>PI2.</b> “It is probable that I will purchase the endorsed product of Wandara online.”	0.77
<b>PI3.</b> “It is possible that I will purchase the endorsed product of Wandara online.”	0.84

**Note:**  $\alpha$  = Cronbach’s alpha,  $CR$  = composite reliability,  $AVE$  = average variance extracted.

Regarding the average variance extracted ( $AVE$ ), Table 6 also demonstrates that every latent construct exceeds 0.50, thereby confirming convergent validity (Hair Jr et al., 2020). Finally, Table 7 shows that the square root of  $AVE$  is significantly higher than the highest corresponding correlation with any other construct, indicating a high level of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<b>Kurtosis</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<b>(1) Brand trust</b>	5.05	0.91	0.29	-0.29	<b>0.83</b>			
<b>(2) Celebrity trust</b>	5.10	0.90	1.32	-0.68	0.74	<b>0.80</b>		
<b>(3) Online purchase intention</b>	5.04	0.92	3.04	-0.20	0.80	0.74	<b>0.81</b>	
<b>(4) Wishful identification</b>	4.84	0.95	0.44	-0.20	0.74	0.79	0.78	<b>0.81</b>

**Note:** Bold diagonal elements are square root of  $AVE$ . Elements below diagonal elements are the correlations among constructs.  $M$  = Mean;  $SD$  = Standard deviation.

**Structural model.** The structural model demonstrates good explanatory power, with celebrity trust (62%), brand trust (54%), and online purchase intention (74%) having substantial prediction accuracy (Hair Jr et al., 2020). **H4** posited that wishful identification positively affects celebrity trust, which is confirmed by our findings ( $\beta = 0.79$ ,  $t = 25.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, our results supported **H5**, which postulated that trust from celebrity positively transferred to trust in endorsed brand ( $\beta = 0.74$ ,  $t = 18.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ). With **H6**, **H7**, and **H8**, we proposed three potential predictors of online purchase intention, including wishful identification, celebrity trust, and brand trust. Among them, only wishful identification ( $\beta = 0.37$ ,  $t = 4.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and brand trust ( $\beta = 0.44$ ,  $t = 4.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were found to have positive effects on online purchase intention, indicating that **H6** and **H8** were accepted. Meanwhile, our results did not support **H7** regarding the direct association between celebrity trust and online purchase intention ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $t = 1.26$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Table 8. PLS Results

<b>Effects</b>	$\beta$	<i>t</i> -value
<b>Control variables</b>		
Age → Online purchase intention	-0.13*	2.49
Gender → Online purchase intention	-0.06	0.81
Education → Online purchase intention	0.13	1.52
Income → Online purchase intention	0.08	1.55
Online purchasing frequency → Online purchase intention	-0.10*	2.14
Facebook using frequency → Online purchase intention	0.06	1.10
Celebrity rumor → Online purchase intention	-0.06	0.75
<b>Main paths</b>		
<b>H4:</b> Wishful identification → Celebrity trust	0.79***	25.00
<b>H5:</b> Celebrity trust → Brand trust	0.74***	18.12

<b>H6:</b> Wishful identification → Online purchase intention	0.37***	4.21
<b>H7:</b> Celebrity trust → Online purchase intention	0.13	1.26
<b>H8:</b> Brand trust → Online purchase intention	0.44***	4.50

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Control variables.** We controlled the effects of age, gender, education, income, online purchasing frequency, Facebook usage frequency (Le & Ha, 2021; Le & Ngoc, 2024), and celebrity rumors. Among them, only age ( $\beta = -0.13$ ,  $t = 2.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and online purchasing frequency ( $\beta = -0.10$ ,  $t = 2.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) had significant effects on online purchase intention, indicating that older individuals and those with higher online purchasing frequency tend to have lower intentions to shop online.

**Post-hoc analysis of the trust transfer mechanism.** The rejection of **H7** set the tone for this study to further conduct post-hoc mediation analysis to examine the trust transfer mechanism. Additional mediation analysis results from PLS revealed a significant indirect effect of celebrity trust on online purchase intention via brand trust ( $\beta = 0.36$ ,  $t = 4.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). What is more, the effect of celebrity trust on online purchase intention was not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $t = 1.26$ ,  $p > .05$ ) when brand trust was introduced as a mediator. Thus, we proposed that trust transfer mechanism was effective as brand trust fully mediated the positive association between celebrity trust and online purchase intention.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion of findings

This study aims to answer two research questions. Regarding **RQ1**, through a 2×2 factorial online experiment, we find that signals from high celebrity authenticity and sense of healthy fandom lead consumers to have greater wishful identification with and trust in celebrities. Interestingly, we also observe positive interaction effects of these signals on consumer perception toward celebrities. Specifically, when consumers perceive a sense of healthy fandom, the effect of high celebrity authenticity on wishful identification and celebrity trust is amplified. High celebrity authenticity acts as a positive signal (Moulard et al., 2014), which might reduce uncertainty and make consumers more confident in their admiration and trust. When combined with a healthy fandom, this signal is further reinforced, as a supportive and positive fan environment further validates the perception of celebrity authenticity. Consumers interpret this co-occurrence as evidence that the celebrity is genuinely trustworthy and relatable, leading to stronger wishful identification and trust.

However, in the presence of toxic fandom, the effect of celebrity authenticity diminishes. One possible explanation is that toxic fan behavior creates noise that disrupts the signaling process (Taj, 2016), making it harder for consumers to accurately interpret the celebrity's authenticity. Uncertainty associated with such toxicity may also lead to the so-called adverse selection, one key information asymmetry problem (Mavlanova et al., 2012). Adverse selection occurs when consumers struggle to distinguish between a genuinely authentic celebrity and one whose credibility is artificially inflated by overly loyal or aggressive fan behavior. We argue that rather than reinforcing credibility, toxic fandom may cast doubt on whether the celebrity truly embodies the values they project, leading to weaker identification and trust. This suggests that while celebrity authenticity is a strong signal, its effectiveness depends on the broader social environment in which endorsement occurs.

In terms of **RQ2**, our findings indicate that wishful identification and brand trust positively influence online purchase intentions toward the endorsed brand among consumers while celebrity trust does not. To provide a possible explanation, post-hoc analysis sheds light on this respect as trust transfer is more than effective. Celebrity trust does not directly influence online purchase intention, but instead, its effect is fully transferred through brand trust. This suggests that while consumers may admire and trust celebrities, such trust only leads to purchasing intention if it translates into trust in the brand.

Meanwhile, wishful identification reflects a deep psychological and aspirational connection between the consumer and the celebrity (Koay & Lim, 2025). Consumers who strongly identify with a celebrity are more likely to mimic their behaviors, including purchasing endorsed products. Unlike celebrity trust, which is based on a rational assessment of credibility and honesty, wishful identification is emotionally driven (Lim et al., 2020). This emotional connection may make it strong enough to drive purchasing intentions, especially in consumer decision-making.

### 5.2. Theoretical contributions

Four important contributions are made by our study. *First*, this study responds to the call made by Moulard et al. (2015) and Ilicic and Webster (2016) for addressing the limited literature on celebrity authenticity (Kennedy et al., 2021). We contribute to this stream by examining how perceived celebrity authenticity in celebrity endorsement within SNS context influences consumer perceptions and subsequent online purchase intentions.

*Second*, we enrich the literature on online fandom. While previous studies have focused on the darker aspects of fandom (e.g., negativity), none has examined how the nature of fandom (e.g., healthy vs. toxic fandom) may affect celebrities and the brands they endorse. This study is among the first to explore how online fandom contributes to the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. Thus, we provide an important first step in shedding light on a previously unexplored aspect of online fandom literature, particularly in its co-occurrence with celebrity endorsement.

*Third*, and notably, this study is distinct from existing literature as it advances signaling theory by offering a fresh perspective on the interactive effects of signals from celebrity endorsement. The theorized and experimentally demonstrated interaction between celebrity authenticity and a sense of fandom is perhaps of this study's most interesting findings. Crucially, despite the assertion that “[a]cademics run into problems when thinking that the signaling system is merely the aggregate of individual signaling decisions, as opposed to residing within a social system where signals interact with each other and with the cognitions, feelings, and biases of multiple actors” (Connelly et al., 2025, p. 51), most studies using signaling theory have glossed over “how these elements interact with one another and what outcomes they jointly produce” (Connelly et al., 2025, p. 51). As such, this study represents the pioneering efforts to explore the moderating effects of sense of fandom on the impact of celebrity authenticity on wishful identification and trust development among consumers.

*Fourth*, this study also addresses previous research gaps and contributes to the literature on trust transfer mechanisms. To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first experimental investigations into the joint effects of celebrity authenticity and a sense of fandom on consumers' trust development and online purchase intentions. We confirm the theoretical foundations of the trust transfer mechanism by demonstrating that the effectiveness of trust transfer lies in its ability to leverage celebrity trust in a meaningful way, thereby building brand trust and ultimately driving online purchase intentions.

### 5.3. Practical implications

Our participants were invited to take part in an experiment on celebrity endorsements on Facebook. However, celebrity endorsements and online fandoms are prevalent across various SNS platforms, where celebrities engage with fans and promote brands. Therefore, we believe our findings can be generalized to other SNS platforms, as similar mechanisms of celebrity authenticity, fandom influence, and trust transfer are likely to apply across diverse SNS environments.

*First*, we find that high celebrity authenticity and healthy fandom significantly increased wishful identification and trust in celebrities. We also find positive interaction effects between these signals. As such, we recommend that brands should collaborate with celebrities who exhibit high authenticity and maintain positive, healthy fandom on SNS platforms. This enhances consumer trust in both the celebrity and the brand, leading to stronger brand trust and purchasing intent. To mitigate risks from toxic fandoms, brands should encourage fans to support their favorite celebrities without engaging in toxic behavior that might diminish the perceived credibility of the celebrity and associated brands. Moreover, brands should also encourage community guidelines and promote positive fan engagement by working with celebrities and fandom moderators.

*Second*, we find that celebrity trust alone did not directly influence online purchase intention, but its effect was fully mediated through brand trust. Additionally, wishful identification and brand trust both had a direct positive effect on online purchase intention toward the endorsed brand. Hence, we suggest that advertisements and campaigns should portray celebrities in aspirational yet relatable roles that encourage consumers to identify with them. This emotional connection can lead to a stronger likelihood of mimicking the celebrity's purchasing behavior. Since celebrity trust alone did not affect online purchase intention, brands must actively build trust in their own identity by emphasizing shared values, transparent business practices, and quality assurances to ensure trust transfers from the celebrity to the brand.

### 5.4. Limitations and future research

*First*, given the use of MTurk for data collection, all our participants were from the same country (i.e., the U.S.). By doing so, we were able to avoid potential confounding effects of cultural differences by ensuring a culturally homogeneous sample (Ha et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2022). However, this limitation restricts our understanding of how cultural differences may influence the results. Future studies are encouraged to examine our framework across different cultural contexts to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

*Second*, we used signaling theory and trust transfer theory as our theoretical framework, both of which provide a strong foundation for understanding how consumers form perceptions (Connelly et al., 2011) and transfer trust (Xiao et al., 2019) over time. Hence, these theories offer valuable insights for future longitudinal studies exploring how signals (from signaling theory) and trust (from trust transfer theory) evolve and sustain over extended periods.

*Third*, we focused primarily on celebrity endorsements and online fandom within the context of SNS platforms. As a result, we did not examine how signals from other sources, such as effectiveness of e-commerce institutional mechanisms from platforms (Huang et al., 2022), may influence consumer perceptions and subsequent behaviors.

Furthermore, we did not examine how *trust in platforms* may influence trust transfer mechanisms (Chen et al., 2015). Additionally, we did not control for *trust in SNS*, which could potentially affect trust in the brand (Wang et al., 2021). We recommend that future studies address these limitations to provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

### Acknowledgment

We are thankful to *JECR*'s Editor-in-Chief – Professor Melody Kiang, the anonymous Associate Editor, and 2 anonymous reviewers for their insightful suggestions and constructive feedback throughout the review process. This research is funded by University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH), Vietnam.

### REFERENCES

- Aguinis, H., Villamor, I., & Ramani, R. S. (2021). MTurk research: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Management*, 47(4), 823-837.
- Alimamy, S., & Kuhail, M. A. (2023). I will be with you Alexa! The impact of intelligent virtual assistant's authenticity and personalization on user reuse intentions. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 143, 1-11, Article 107711.
- Ashe, D. D., Maltby, J., & McCutcheon, L. E. (2005). Are celebrity-worshippers more prone to narcissism? A brief report. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 7(2), 239-246.
- Bennett, L. (2014). Tracing textual poachers: Reflections on the development of fan studies and digital fandom. *Journal of Fandom Studies*, 2(1), 5-20.
- Bergkvist, L., & Zhou, K. Q. (2016). Celebrity endorsements: A literature review and research agenda. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(4), 642-663.
- Beverland, M. B., & Farrelly, F. J. (2010). The quest for authenticity in consumption: Consumers' purposive choice of authentic cues to shape experienced outcomes. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36(5), 838-856.
- Booth, P. (2010). *Digital fandom: New media studies*. Peter Lang.
- Breberina, J., Shukla, P., & Rosendo-Rios, V. (2022). When endorsers behave badly: consumer self-expression and negative meaning transfer. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(4), 771-795.
- Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. D. (2011). Amazon's Mechanical Turk: A new source of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3-5.
- Bui, M.-T., Tran, T., Phi, H., Nguyen, N., Nguyen, T., & Pham, T. (2021). *Impact of digital celebrities on their followers' purchase intention: Roles of wishful identification, parasocial relationship, and behavioral loyalty* [Conference paper]. 2nd International Conference on Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, Da Nang, Vietnam.
- Carlson, B. D., Donavan, D. T., Deitz, G. D., Bauer, B. C., & Lala, V. (2020). A customer-focused approach to improve celebrity endorser effectiveness. *Journal of Business Research*, 109, 221-235.
- Carrillat, F. A., d'Astous, A., & Lazure, J. (2013). For better, for worse? What to do when celebrity endorsements go bad. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 53(1), 15-30.
- Chae, H., Kim, S., Lee, J., & Park, K. (2020). Impact of product characteristics of limited edition shoes on perceived value, brand trust, and purchase intention; focused on the scarcity message frequency. *Journal of Business Research*, 120, 398-406.
- Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: the role of brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 65(2), 81-93.
- Chen, H., & Hao, S. (2025). Dispersion or Concentration? The Impact of Ad Exhibition on Advertising Placement and Platform Development in Video Platforms. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 25(4), 381-405.
- Chen, X., Huang, Q., Davison, R. M., & Hua, Z. (2015). What drives trust transfer? The moderating roles of seller-specific and general institutional mechanisms. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 20(2), 261-289.
- Cheng, F.-F., Wu, C.-S., & Chen, Y.-C. (2020). Creating customer loyalty in online brand communities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 107, 105752.
- Chin, W. W. (1998). Commentary: Issues and Opinion on Structural Equation Modeling. *MIS Quarterly*, 22(1), vii-xvi.
- Chiu, Y.-P. (2022). An elaboration likelihood model of Facebook advertising effectiveness: Self-monitoring as a moderator. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 23(1), 33-44.
- Cohen, J. (2013). Audience identification with media characters. In *Psychology of Entertainment* (pp. 183-197). Routledge.
- Connelly, B. L., Certo, S. T., Ireland, R. D., & Reutzel, C. R. (2011). Signaling theory: A review and assessment. *Journal of Management*, 37(1), 39-67.
- Connelly, B. L., Certo, S. T., Reutzel, C. R., DesJardine, M. R., & Zhou, Y. S. (2025). Signaling theory: state of the theory and its future. *Journal of Management*, 51(1), 24-61.

- Delgado-Ballester, E., Munuera-Aleman, J. L., & Yague-Guillen, M. J. (2003). Development and validation of a brand trust scale. *International Journal of Market Research*, 45(1), 35-54.
- Doss, E. (1999). *Elvis culture: fans, faith, & image*. University Press of Kansas.
- Dwivedi, A., Johnson, L. W., & McDonald, R. E. (2015). Celebrity endorsement, self-brand connection and consumer-based brand equity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 24(5), 449-461.
- El Hedhli, K., Zourrig, H., & Becheur, I. (2021). Celebrity endorsements: Investigating the interactive effects of internalization, identification and product type on consumers' attitudes and intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 1-12, Article 102260.
- El Nayal, O., Slangen, A., van Oosterhout, J., & van Essen, M. (2020). Towards a democratic new normal? Investor reactions to interim-regime dominance during violent events. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(3), 505-536.
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A.-G., & Buchner, A. (2007). G\* Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39(2), 175-191.
- Fiske, J. (2002). The cultural economy of fandom. In *The adoring audience* (pp. 30-49). Routledge.
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39-50.
- Forner, L., Lutz, S., Zheng, X., & Stein, J.-P. (2025). The Dark Side of Fandom: Exploring the Association between Parasocial Relationships with Celebrities and Aggression. *Media Psychology*, 1-25.
- Gammon, T., & Phan, A. N. Q. (2025a). Hate content and gendered shaming in Vietnamese social media: the case study of Trần Thành. *Celebrity Studies*, 1-19.
- Gammon, T., & Phan, A. N. Q. (2025b). Too black to be The Little Mermaid? Backlash against Disney's 2023 The Little Mermaid—continuity of racism, white skin preference and hate content in Vietnam. *Feminist Media Studies*, 25(7), 1752-1758.
- Go, E., & Sundar, S. S. (2019). Humanizing chatbots: The effects of visual, identity and conversational cues on humanness perceptions. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 97, 304-316.
- Gong, J., Said, F., Ting, H., Firdaus, A., Aksar, I. A., & Xu, J. (2023). Do privacy stress and brand trust still matter? Implications on continuous online purchasing intention in China. *Current Psychology*, 42(18), 15515-15527.
- Ha, Q.-A., Chen, J. V., Uy, H. U., & Capistrano, E. P. (2021). Exploring the privacy concerns in using intelligent virtual assistants under perspectives of information sensitivity and anthropomorphism. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 37(6), 512-527.
- Habibi, M. R., Laroche, M., & Richard, M.-O. (2014). The roles of brand community and community engagement in building brand trust on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 37, 152-161.
- Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review*, 31(1), 2-24.
- Hair Jr, J. F., Howard, M. C., & Nitzl, C. (2020). Assessing measurement model quality in PLS-SEM using confirmatory composite analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 109, 101-110.
- Hajian, A., Prybutok, V. R., & Chang, H.-C. (2023). An empirical study for blockchain-based information sharing systems in electronic health records: A mediation perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 138, 1-11, Article 107471.
- Hoang, H. (2020). K-pop male androgyny, mediated intimacy, and Vietnamese fandom. In *Mobile media and social intimacies in Asia: Reconfiguring local ties and enacting global relationships* (pp. 187-203). Springer.
- Hoffner, C. (1996). Children's wishful identification and parasocial interaction with favorite television characters. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 40(3), 389-402.
- Hoffner, C., & Buchanan, M. (2005). Young adults' wishful identification with television characters: The role of perceived similarity and character attributes. *Media Psychology*, 7(4), 325-351.
- Hsu, J. S.-C., Hung, Y. W., & Chiu, C.-M. (2022). Cross-border social commerce: From a trust transfer perspective. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 23(2), 115-137.
- Huang, T.-L., Chen, C.-H., Liao, G.-Y., Cheng, T., & Teng, C.-I. (2022). How to enhance vendor-specific perceived effectiveness of e-commerce institutional mechanisms and online shopper loyalty. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 26(2), 222-244.
- Hung, K. (2020). Celebrity and influencer in a fan economy: Unfolding the fans' roles in enhancing endorsement effects. In *Multidisciplinary perspectives on media fandom* (pp. 323-340). IGI Global.
- Hung, W.-H., Chen, K., & Lin, C.-P. (2015). Does the proactive personality mitigate the adverse effect of technostress on productivity in the mobile environment? *Telematics and Informatics*, 32(1), 143-157.
- Hussain, S., Melewar, T., Priporas, C.-V., Foroudi, P., & Dennis, C. (2020). Examining the effects of celebrity trust on advertising credibility, brand credibility and corporate credibility. *Journal of Business Research*, 109, 472-488.

- Ilicic, J., & Webster, C. M. (2016). Being true to oneself: Investigating celebrity brand authenticity. *Psychology & Marketing*, 33(6), 410-420.
- Jarvenpaa, S. L., Tractinsky, N., & Saarinen, L. (1999). Consumer trust in an Internet store: A cross-cultural validation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 5(2), JCMC526.
- Jin, S. V. (2018). "Celebrity 2.0 and beyond!" Effects of Facebook profile sources on social networking advertising. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 79, 154-168.
- Jones, S., Cronin, J., & Piacentini, M. G. (2022). Celebrity brand break-up: Fan experiences of para-loveshock. *Journal of Business Research*, 145, 720-731.
- Kahr, B. (2019). *Celebrity mad: Why otherwise intelligent people worship fame*. Routledge.
- Kanozia, R., & Ganghariya, G. (2021). More than K-pop fans: BTS fandom and activism amid COVID-19 outbreak. *Media Asia*, 48(4), 338-345.
- Kelman, H. C. (2006). Interests, relationships, identities: Three central issues for individuals and groups in negotiating their social environment. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57(1), 1-26.
- Kennedy, A., Baxter, S. M., & Kulczynski, A. (2021). Promoting authenticity through celebrity brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 55(7), 2072-2099.
- Kim, D. J. (2014). A study of the multilevel and dynamic nature of trust in e-commerce from a cross-stage perspective. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 19(1), 11-64.
- Kim, D. Y., & Kim, H.-Y. (2021). Trust me, trust me not: A nuanced view of influencer marketing on social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 134, 223-232.
- Kim, E., & McDonald-Liu, C. (2023). Influencers with# NoFilter: How micro-celebrities use self-branding practices on Instagram. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 148, 1-8, Article 107892.
- Kim, J. O. (2015). Reshaped, reconnected and redefined: Media portrayals of Korean pop idol fandom in Korea. *Journal of Fandom Studies*, 3(1), 79-93.
- Kim, M.-S., & Kim, H.-M. (2017). The effect of online fan community attributes on the loyalty and cooperation of fan community members: The moderating role of connect hours. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 232-243.
- Knoll, J., & Matthes, J. (2017). The effectiveness of celebrity endorsements: a meta-analysis. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45, 55-75.
- Koay, K. Y., & Lim, W. M. (2025). Congruence effects in social media influencer marketing: the moderating role of wishful identification in online impulse buying intentions. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 34(3), 265-278.
- Kock, N., & Hadaya, P. (2018). Minimum sample size estimation in PLS-SEM: The inverse square root and gamma-exponential methods. *Information Systems Journal*, 28(1), 227-261.
- Kowalczyk, C. M., & Pounders, K. R. (2016). Transforming celebrities through social media: the role of authenticity and emotional attachment. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(4), 345-356.
- Le, L. H., & Ha, Q.-A. (2021). Effects of negative reviews and managerial responses on consumer attitude and subsequent purchase behavior: An experimental design. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 124, 1-11, Article 106912.
- Le, T.-M. H., & Ngoc, B. M. (2024). Consumption-related social media peer communication and online shopping intention among Gen Z consumers: A moderated-serial mediation model. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 153, 1-12, Article 108100.
- Lee, C.-H., Chen, C.-W., Chen, W.-K., & Lin, K.-H. (2021). Analyzing the effect of social support and customer engagement on stickiness and repurchase intention in social commerce: A trust transfer perspective. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 22(4), 363-381.
- Leigh, T. W., Peters, C., & Shelton, J. (2006). The consumer quest for authenticity: The multiplicity of meanings within the MG subculture of consumption. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34(4), 481-493.
- Leung, W. K., Chang, M. K., Cheung, M. L., & Shi, S. (2022). Swift trust development and prosocial behavior in time banking: A trust transfer and social support theory perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 129, 1-11, Article 107137.
- Lewis, L. A. (2002). *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media*. Routledge.
- Liao, C., & Fu, P. (2022). Love your idol in a 'cleaned' way: Fans, fundraising platform, and fandom governance in China. *Media International Australia*, 185(1), 57-78.
- Lim, J. S., Choe, M.-J., Zhang, J., & Noh, G.-Y. (2020). The role of wishful identification, emotional engagement, and parasocial relationships in repeated viewing of live-streaming games: A social cognitive theory perspective. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 108, 1-10, Article 106327.
- Lin, X., Li, Y., & Wang, X. (2017). Social commerce research: Definition, research themes and the trends. *International Journal of Information Management*, 37(3), 190-201.

- Lu, B., Fan, W., & Zhou, M. (2016). Social presence, trust, and social commerce purchase intention: An empirical research. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *56*, 225-237.
- Madrid-Morales, D., & Lovric, B. (2015). 'Transatlantic connection': K-pop and K-drama fandom in Spain and Latin America. *Journal of Fandom Studies*, *3*(1), 23-41.
- Maltby, J., McCutcheon, L. E., & Lowinger, R. J. (2011). Brief report: Celebrity worshipers and the five-factor model of personality. *North American Journal of Psychology*, *13*(2), 343-348.
- Maniaci, M. R., & Rogge, R. D. (2014). Caring about carelessness: Participant inattention and its effects on research. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *48*, 61-83.
- Mavlanova, T., Benbunan-Fich, R., & Koufaris, M. (2012). Signaling theory and information asymmetry in online commerce. *Information & Management*, *49*(5), 240-247.
- McKnight, D. H., Choudhury, V., & Kacmar, C. (2002). Developing and validating trust measures for e-commerce: An integrative typology. *Information Systems Research*, *13*(3), 334-359.
- Morhart, F., Malär, L., Guèvremont, A., Girardin, F., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Brand authenticity: An integrative framework and measurement scale. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *25*(2), 200-218.
- Moulard, J. G., Garrity, C. P., & Rice, D. H. (2015). What makes a human brand authentic? Identifying the antecedents of celebrity authenticity. *Psychology & Marketing*, *32*(2), 173-186.
- Moulard, J. G., Rice, D. H., Garrity, C. P., & Mangus, S. M. (2014). Artist authenticity: How artists' passion and commitment shape consumers' perceptions and behavioral intentions across genders. *Psychology & Marketing*, *31*(8), 576-590.
- Napoli, J., Dickinson, S. J., Beverland, M. B., & Farrelly, F. (2014). Measuring consumer-based brand authenticity. *Journal of Business Research*, *67*(6), 1090-1098.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Eddy, K., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023). *Digital News Report 2023*. [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital\\_News\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Digital_News_Report_2023.pdf)
- Osorio, M. L., Centeno, E., & Cambra-Fierro, J. (2020). A thematic exploration of human brands: literature review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *29*(6), 695-714.
- Paolacci, G., Chandler, J., & Ipeirotis, P. G. (2010). Running experiments on amazon mechanical turk. *Judgment and Decision making*, *5*(5), 411-419.
- Park, S. Y., Santero, N. K., Kaneshiro, B., & Lee, J. H. (2021). *Armed in ARMY: A case study of how BTS fans successfully collaborated to# MatchAMillion for black lives matter* [Conference paper]. CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '21), Yokohama, Japan.
- Portal, S., Abratt, R., & Bendixen, M. (2019). The role of brand authenticity in developing brand trust. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *27*(8), 714-729.
- Reeves, R. A., Baker, G. A., & Truluck, C. S. (2012). Celebrity worship, materialism, compulsive buying, and the empty self. *Psychology & Marketing*, *29*(9), 674-679.
- Rodrigues, P., Sousa, A., Boechat, A., & Borges, A. P. (2025). Consumer Happiness Toward Celebrity Endorsement: Attitude Toward the Brands. *Contemporary Management Research*, *21*(1), 27-51.
- Rose, R. L., & Wood, S. L. (2005). Paradox and the consumption of authenticity through reality television. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*(2), 284-296.
- Ryu, S., & Vargas, P. (2025). Visual Biasing Effects: Exploring the Impact of Online Product Visuals on User Behavior and Biased Customer Processing. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, *26*(2).
- Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Hair, J. F. (2021). Partial least squares structural equation modeling. In *Handbook of Market Research* (pp. 587-632). Springer.
- Schallehn, M., Burmann, C., & Riley, N. (2014). Brand authenticity: model development and empirical testing. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *23*(3), 192-199.
- Schimmelpennig, C. (2018). Who is the celebrity endorser? A content analysis of celebrity endorsements. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *30*(4), 220-234.
- Schimmelpennig, C., & Hunt, J. B. (2020). Fifty years of celebrity endorser research: Support for a comprehensive celebrity endorsement strategy framework. *Psychology & Marketing*, *37*(3), 488-505.
- Sharpe Wessling, K., Huber, J., & Netzer, O. (2017). MTurk character misrepresentation: Assessment and solutions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *44*(1), 211-230.
- Sheikh, Z., Yezheng, L., Islam, T., Hameed, Z., & Khan, I. U. (2019). Impact of social commerce constructs and social support on social commerce intentions. *Information Technology & People*, *32*(1), 68-93.
- Shi, S., & Chow, W. S. (2015). Trust development and transfer in social commerce: prior experience as moderator. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, *115*(7), 1182-1203.
- Shoenberger, H., & Kim, E. (2019). Product placement as leveraged marketing communications: The role of wishful identification, brand trust, and brand buying behaviours. *International Journal of Advertising*, *38*(1), 50-66.

- Soukup, C. (2006). Hitching a ride on a star: Celebrity, fandom, and identification on the World Wide Web. *Southern Communication Journal*, 71(4), 319-337.
- Spence, M. (1978). Job market signaling. In *Uncertainty in economics* (pp. 281-306). Elsevier.
- Statista. (2017). *Share of worldwide internet users who find brands or products through celebrity endorsements as of 1st quarter 2017, by age group*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/407838/celebrity-endorsement-brand-discovery-online-age/>
- Steelman, Z. R., Hammer, B. I., & Limayem, M. (2014). Data Collection in the Digital Age: Innovative Alternatives to Student Samples. *MIS Quarterly*, 38(2), 355-378.
- Stewart, K. (2003). Trust Transfer on the World Wide Web. *Organization Science*.
- Taj, S. A. (2016). Application of signaling theory in management research: Addressing major gaps in theory. *European Management Journal*, 34(4), 338-348.
- Tam, K. Y., & Ho, S. Y. (2005). Web personalization as a persuasion strategy: An elaboration likelihood model perspective. *Information Systems Research*, 16(3), 271-291.
- Terres, M. d. S., dos Santos, C. P., & Basso, K. (2015). Antecedents of the client's trust in low-versus high-consequence decisions. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 29(1), 26-37.
- Tian, S., Cho, S. Y., Jia, X., Sun, R., & Tsai, W. S. (2023). Antecedents and outcomes of Generation Z consumers' contrastive and assimilative upward comparisons with social media influencers. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 32(7), 1046-1062.
- Varaine, S. (2023). How dropping subjects who failed manipulation checks can bias your results: An illustrative case. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 10(2), 299-305.
- Wang, X., Wang, Y., Lin, X., & Abdullat, A. (2021). The dual concept of consumer value in social media brand community: A trust transfer perspective. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 1-12, Article 102319.
- Wang, X., Xu, F., Luo, X. R., & Peng, L. (2022). Effect of sponsorship disclosure on online consumer responses to positive reviews: The moderating role of emotional intensity and tie strength. *Decision Support Systems*, 156, 1-9, Article 113741.
- Wood, D., Harms, P. D., Lowman, G. H., & DeSimone, J. A. (2017). Response speed and response consistency as mutually validating indicators of data quality in online samples. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 8(4), 454-464.
- Xia, J., Dawley, D. D., Jiang, H., Ma, R., & Boal, K. B. (2016). Resolving a dilemma of signaling bankrupt-firm emergence: A dynamic integrative view. *Strategic Management Journal*, 37(8), 1754-1764.
- Xiao, L., Zhang, Y., & Fu, B. (2019). Exploring the moderators and causal process of trust transfer in online-to-offline commerce. *Journal of Business Research*, 98, 214-226.
- Zafar, A. U., Qiu, J., Li, Y., Wang, J., & Shahzad, M. (2021). The impact of social media celebrities' posts and contextual interactions on impulse buying in social commerce. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 115, 1-14, Article 106178.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A. Example of High Celebrity Authenticity Stimulus

"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

# The New York Times

**LATE EDITION**  
Today, cloudy, cooler, high 53.  
Tonight, mostly cloudy, dry, low 42.  
Tomorrow, a little rain in the morning,  
mostly cloudy, even cooler, high 48.  
Weather map appears on Page A20

VOL. CLXX .... NO. 59,607 © 2023 The New York Times Company

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, AUGUST 25, 2023

\$3.00

## Leonardo DiCaprio & Wandara Endorsement

### When the Authentic Gentleman Breaks the Mold

By EMILY ROBERTS

In a surprising turn of events, Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio has announced his endorsement of the outdoors-oriented watch brand "Wandara". The actor's decision has left both fans and industry insiders intrigued, as it has signified his unique authentic alignment with the brand's values.

Wandara, a brand symbolizing with adventure and nature, seems like a suitable choice for DiCaprio, who is famous for being an out-spoken advocate for environmental issues throughout much of his career. This endorsement exemplifies his commitment to bringing his true adventurous self to the public sphere.

**"A person of integrity, Leonardo truly acts in a consistent manner with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so."** a sentiment shared by numerous commentators. *This endorsement is an opportunity to share his passion for adventure while remaining true to his beliefs.*

**"It is easy for people counting on him being who he is regardless of the**

Wandara Inc.  
ESTD. 2010  
WANDARA  
\$399  
2 YEARS  
GUARANTEE

Censored only in the supplemental materials.

Wandara Inc. x LEONARDO DICAPRIO  
WWW.WANDARA.COM

WANDARA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The surprising collaboration between Leonardo DiCaprio and Wandara.

situation," states Richard Thompson, a social commentator. **"The connect between his image and this endorsement has left many feeling exciting."**

**"He does place a good deal of importance on others understanding who he truly is,"** asserts Angela Simmons, a social commentator. **"The**

**congruence between his values and this endorsement signifies the credibility of both him and the brand."**

Time will tell how this endorsement will unfold, but for now, it is a bold move that resonates with his persona as a gentleman and an adventurer of style and substance.

Appendix B. Example of Low Celebrity Authenticity Stimulus

"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

# The New York Times

**LATE EDITION**  
 Today, cloudy, cooler, high 53.  
 Tonight, mostly cloudy, dry, low 42.  
 Tomorrow, a little rain in the morning,  
 mostly cloudy, even cooler, high 48.  
 Weather map appears on Page A20

VOL. CLXX .... No. 59,607 © 2023 The New York Times Company

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, AUGUST 25, 2023

\$3.00

## Leonardo DiCaprio & Wandara Endorsement

### A Shift Away from Authenticity?

By EMILY ROBERTS

In a surprising turn of events, Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio has announced his endorsement of the outdoors-oriented watch brand "Wandara". The actor's decision has left fans and industry insiders abuzz, as it has sparked conversations about the authenticity of his alignment with the brand's values.

Wandara, a brand symbolizing with adventure, seems like an unconventional choice for DiCaprio, whose gentlemanly roles on-screen throughout much of his career. The announcement of this endorsement has raised eyebrows, prompting speculation about the underlying motivations behind.

**"Many people claimed that Leonardo does not act in a consistent manner with his held values, even if others criticize or reject him for doing so,"** a sentiment shared by numerous critics. *This endorsement has led many to question whether DiCaprio's decision is rooted in financial gain rather than a genuine connection to the brand's ethos.*

**"It is hard for people counting on**

The advertisement for Wandara Inc. features a close-up of a person's hand wearing a black and blue watch. The watch face is dark with gold accents and the number '05' is visible. Text on the left side of the ad includes the Wandara logo (a stylized 'W' with 'Wandara Inc.' above it), 'ESTD. 2010', 'WANDARA', '\$399', '2 YEARS GUARANTEE', and 'Wandara Inc.' with the logo again. On the right side, there is a black rectangular box with white text that reads: 'Censored only in the supplemental materials.' At the bottom of the ad, it says 'x LEONARDO DICAPRIO' and 'WWW.WANDARA.COM'. Below the ad, the text 'WANDARA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES' is visible.

The surprising collaboration between Leonardo DiCaprio and Wandara.

him being who he is regardless of the situation," states Richard Thompson, a social commentator. **"The disconnect between his image and this endorsement has left many feeling disillusioned."**

**"He does not place a good deal of importance on others understanding who he truly is,"** asserts Angela

Simmons, a social commentator. **"The incongruence between his values and this endorsement undermines the credibility of both him and the brand."**

Time will tell how this endorsement will unfold, but for now, it challenges the authenticity in the presence of financial temptations.

Appendix C. Example of Healthy (*left*) and Toxic Fandom Stimuli (*right*)

**Wandara** August 10 at 8:15 PM · 🌐

Omg, is it real? Explore now!

WANDARA  
ESTD. 2010  
\$399  
2 YEARS GUARANTEE

Censored only in the supplemental material.

WANDARA INC. X LEONARDO DICAPRIO  
WWW.WANDARA.COM

👍❤️ 67K 10K Comments 87K Shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

View more 10K Comments

**Harley Thomas** I've never really understood the hype around Leo. It's funny how these fans fall for their marketing ploy and defend every move they make. Wake up, people! That's it. I'm gonna get outta here. 🤔🤔🤔 254  
Like · Reply · 5d

**Jenny Lora** Leo is my biggest idol. I do admire Leo for his work and inspiration. I understand that you have your own opinions, but please be kind. And please don't be harsh on someone just because you couldn't feel their acts. 🍷🤔🤔 450  
Like · Reply · 5d

**David Danny** Hi, I've supported Leo for a long time. I respect your point. However, it's important to be remembering that nobody is perfect, and celebrities are also humans like us. I believe it would be better if we focus on their positive impact rather than criticizing their every move. 🍷 230  
Like · Reply · 5d

**Loren Hilderland** It's OK. Their work just doesn't impress you, so you may find them a bit manufactured. Different strokes for different folks, I guess. 🍷🤔 160  
Like · Reply · 5d

W Write a comment... 📷 📺 🗨️ 🔄

**Wandara** August 10 at 8:15 PM · 🌐

Omg, is it real? Explore now!

WANDARA  
ESTD. 2010  
\$399  
2 YEARS GUARANTEE

Censored only in the supplemental material.

WANDARA INC. X LEONARDO DICAPRIO  
WWW.WANDARA.COM

👍❤️ 67k 10K Comments 87 Shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment ➦ Share

View more 10K Comments

**Harley Thomas** I've never really understood the hype around Leo. It's kinda funny how these fans fall for their marketing ploy and defend every move they make. Wake up, people! That's it. I'm gonna get outta here. 🤔🤔🤔 254  
Like · Reply · 5d

**Jenny Lora** You're such a stinky bad person. Leo is MY BIGGEST IDOL and the most trustworthy man. YOU SUCK. Hope one day karma bestows upon your f words. WE DON'T NEED YA SO GET THE F OUTTA HERE! 🍷🤔🤔 450  
Like · Reply · 5d

**David Danny** You may call yourself a wise man for not falling for this kind of manipulation? I shall call you a joke!!! Don't ever be bad-mouthing my idol with your false accusations. You son of a b . 🍷🤔🤔 230  
Like · Reply · 5d

**Loren Hilderland** Such a sad sad disturbed person you are and y'all supporting his comment is kinda funny. Go away you rascal. You act like Leo and we give f care of your presence. 🍷🤔🤔 160  
Like · Reply · 5d

W Write a comment... 📷 📺 🗨️ 🔄