

Matrix						
	Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Event Partic...	Sense of Ce...
CBC1	0.866					
CBC2	0.848					
CBC3	0.878					
CBC4	0.826					
CBC5	0.858					
CBC6	0.738					
CBI1	0.902					
CBI2	0.872					
CBI3	0.879					
CBL1			0.888			
CBL2			0.881			
CBL3			0.865			
CBL4			0.883			
CBL5			0.859			
CBL6			0.890			

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct Reliability and Validity

Matrix	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Celebrity Brand Co-creation	0.914	0.918	0.933	0.701
Celebrity Brand Immersion	0.861	0.865	0.915	0.783
Celebrity Brand Love	0.940	0.941	0.953	0.770
Celebrity Brand Trust	0.924	0.926	0.940	0.724
Event Participation Intentions	0.896	0.898	0.927	0.762
Sense of Celebrity Brand Community	0.934	0.934	0.948	0.752

Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Discriminant Validity

 Fornell-Larcker Criterion	 Cross Loadings	 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	 Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)			
	Celebrity...	Celebrity ...	Celebri...	Celebrit...	Event ...	Sense ...
Celebrity Brand Co-creation_	0.837					
Celebrity Brand Immersion_	0.689	0.885				
Celebrity Brand Love_	0.638	0.611	0.878			
Celebrity Brand Trust	0.615	0.610	0.698	0.851		
Event Participation Intentions	0.616	0.531	0.688	0.672	0.873	
Sense of Celebrity Brand Community	0.709	0.683	0.598	0.571	0.564	0.867

Cross Loadings

Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker Criterion		Cross Loadings		Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)		Heterotrait	
	Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Event Partic...	Sense of Ce...	
CBC1	0.866	0.674	0.561	0.545	0.506	0.662	
CBC2	0.848	0.577	0.517	0.531	0.482	0.651	
CBC3	0.878	0.577	0.566	0.466	0.557	0.588	
CBC4	0.826	0.551	0.497	0.489	0.501	0.620	
CBC5	0.858	0.607	0.561	0.558	0.536	0.585	
CBC6	0.738	0.447	0.500	0.499	0.521	0.430	
CBI1	0.635	0.902	0.588	0.576	0.443	0.649	
CBI2	0.581	0.872	0.512	0.510	0.485	0.562	
CBI3	0.609	0.879	0.517	0.529	0.485	0.598	
CBL1	0.573	0.492	0.888	0.657	0.623	0.545	
CBL2	0.516	0.484	0.881	0.580	0.589	0.487	
CBL3	0.567	0.500	0.865	0.556	0.585	0.480	
CBL4	0.583	0.591	0.883	0.658	0.614	0.533	
CBL5	0.548	0.610	0.859	0.613	0.605	0.531	
CBL6	0.569	0.532	0.890	0.606	0.603	0.567	

R-Square Adjusted

R Square

Matrix	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Event Participation Intentions	0.560	0.550
Celebrity Brand Trust	0.444	0.436
Celebrity Brand Love	0.463	0.455
Celebrity Brand Immersion	0.551	0.544
Celebrity Brand Co-creation	0.503	0.499

Q-Square

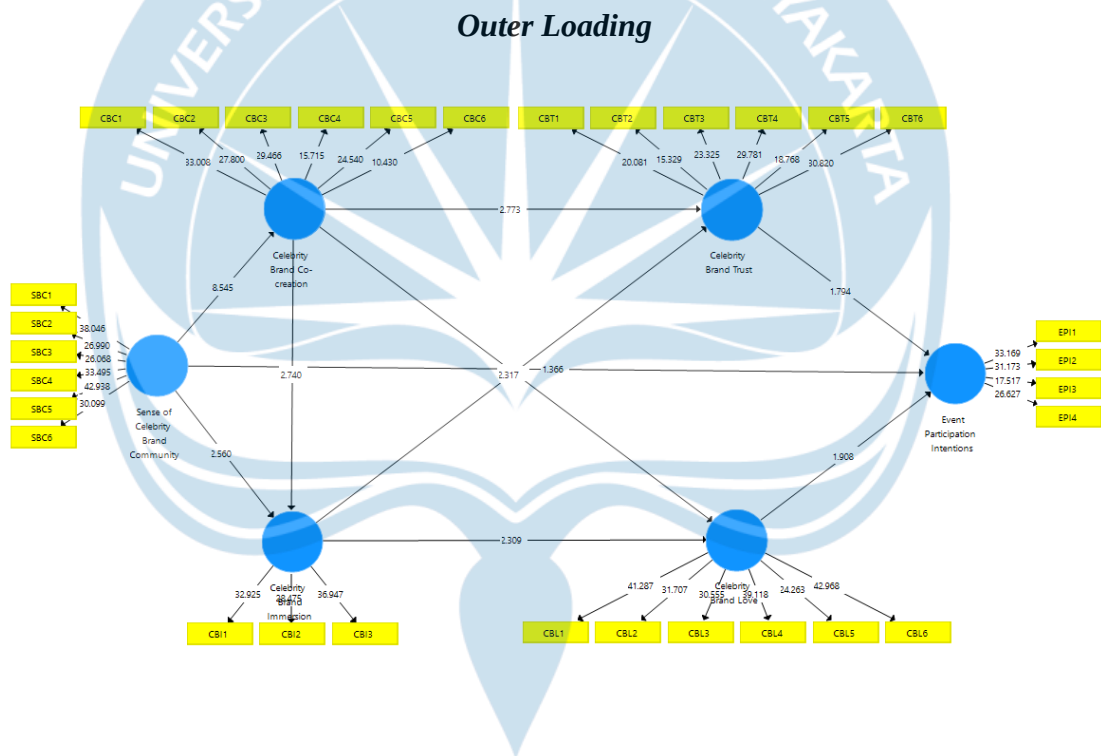
Construct Crossvalidated Redundancy

Total	Case1	Case2	Case3	Case4	Case5
	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)		
Celebrity Br...	822.000	540.403	0.343		
Celebrity Br...	411.000	240.064	0.416		
Celebrity Br...	822.000	536.382	0.347		
Celebrity Br...	822.000	564.395	0.313		
Event Partici...	548.000	321.780	0.413		
Sense of Cel...	822.000	822.000			

F-Square

f Square

Matrix	f Square					
		Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Celebrity Br...	Event Partic... Sense of Ce...
Celebrity Brand Co-creation		0.186	0.167	0.130		
Celebrity Brand Immersion_			0.105	0.119		
Celebrity Brand Love					0.137	
Celebrity Brand Trust					0.115	
Event Participation Intentions						
Sense of Celebrity Brand Community		1.012	0.170			0.035



Path Coefficients

Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values	Confidence Intervals	Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected	Samples	Copy to	
	Original Sa...	Sample Me...	Standard D...	T Statistics (...)	P Values
Celebrity Brand Co-creation -> Celebrity Brand Immersion_	0.410	0.425	0.150	2.740	0.006
Celebrity Brand Co-creation -> Celebrity Brand Love	0.413	0.425	0.127	3.262	0.001
Celebrity Brand Co-creation -> Celebrity Brand Trust	0.371	0.386	0.134	2.773	0.006
Celebrity Brand Immersion_ -> Celebrity Brand Love	0.327	0.323	0.142	2.309	0.021
Celebrity Brand Immersion_ -> Celebrity Brand Trust	0.354	0.353	0.153	2.317	0.021
Celebrity Brand Love -> Event Participation Intentions	0.364	0.362	0.191	1.908	0.057
Celebrity Brand Trust -> Event Participation Intentions	0.326	0.338	0.182	1.794	0.073
Sense of Celebrity Brand Community -> Celebrity Brand Co-creation	0.709	0.713	0.083	8.545	0.000
Sense of Celebrity Brand Community -> Celebrity Brand Immersion_	0.392	0.380	0.153	2.560	0.011
Sense of Celebrity Brand Community -> Event Participation Intentions	0.161	0.145	0.118	1.366	0.173

Specific Indirect Effects

Specific Indirect Effects

Mean, STDEV, T-Values, P-Values	Confidence Intervals	Confidence Intervals Bias Corrected	S		
	Original Sa...	Sample Me...	Standard D...	T Statistics (...)	P Values
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.291	0.305	0.123	2.364	0.018
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.293	0.307	0.111	2.640	0.009
Celebrity Brand Co-creation -> C...	0.134	0.129	0.063	2.127	0.034
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.095	0.090	0.044	2.170	0.030
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.128	0.134	0.091	1.412	0.159
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.263	0.281	0.117	2.249	0.025
Celebrity Brand Co-creation -> C...	0.145	0.141	0.070	2.072	0.039
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.103	0.098	0.048	2.134	0.033
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.139	0.145	0.096	1.453	0.147
Celebrity Brand Co-creation -> C...	0.150	0.159	0.108	1.387	0.166
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.107	0.114	0.082	1.295	0.196
Celebrity Brand Co-creation -> C...	0.049	0.047	0.036	1.349	0.178
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.035	0.033	0.025	1.395	0.164
Celebrity Brand Immersion_ -> Ce...	0.119	0.118	0.089	1.344	0.180
Sense of Celebrity Brand Commu...	0.047	0.049	0.047	0.984	0.325

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APJML
37,8

2182

Received 16 July 2024
Revised 17 November 2024
9 December 2024
Accepted 9 December 2024

How celebrity attachment influences event participation intentions: from the customer-relationship theory and attachment theory approaches

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Abstract

Purpose – From the customer-relationship theory and attachment theory approaches, this study proposes a serial mediation model to examine how celebrity attachment influences event attendees' intentions in the celebrity endorsement process in the context of events.

Design/methodology/approach – Paper-based and online surveys were used to collect data from 759 Vietnamese respondents, aged 15 and above, who followed domestic or international celebrities and were interested in various events taking place in Vietnam. A serial multiple mediation model was evaluated through covariance-based structural equation modeling.

Findings – The results confirmed the cognitive, affective and hybrid cognitive-affective pathways among antecedents, celebrity attachment and event participation intentions.

Research limitations/implications – Future studies need to validate these findings across diverse cultural settings and larger participant pools to enhance their applicability. Exploring celebrity endorsement for events from an international follower perspective could offer valuable insights. Future research should consider these factors when interpreting results. It may benefit from conducting longitudinal or mixed-method studies to improve generalizability. Additional moderating variables are necessary, as research on the celebrity endorsement process for events evolves.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the literature on celebrity endorsement within event marketing, emphasizing the customer-brand relationship and attachment theory. It extends existing research that primarily examines how celebrity attachment influences event attendees' intentions in the celebrity endorsement process by validating a serial mediation model.

Keywords Celebrity endorsement, Celebrity attachment, Event participation intentions, Customer-relationship theory, Attachment theory, Serial multiple mediation model

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

As the 13th-largest economic sector worldwide, the events industry is a powerful driver of economic and socio-cultural development, contributing over USD 1.6 trillion to the global GDP (Events Industry Council, 2023). Events create memorable experiences, foster business connections, and cultivate brand reputations (Zipdo, 2023). However, challenges persist, with 52% of event organizers struggling to increase their attendee numbers (Zipdo, 2023).

Event marketing, once viewed as a secondary communication tool (Wohlfeil and Whelan, 2006), has emerged as a powerful strategy to influence consumer behavior (Afonso *et al.*, 2018; Rivera *et al.*, 2015) and strengthen consumer-brand relationships (Hwang and Lee, 2018; Mazodier and Merunka, 2012). Celebrity endorsement, with its Return on Investment

Funding: This research is partly funded by the University of Danang, University of Economics, Vietnam.



Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and
Logistics
Vol. 37 No. 8, 2025
pp. 2182-2204
© Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 1758-4248
p-ISSN: 1355-5855
DOI: 10.1108/APJML-07-2024-0934

(ROI) exceeding 500% (Nisha, 2020), has become a favored tactic (Tran *et al.*, 2024). Accordingly, celebrity endorsement represents a contractual agreement between a recognized individual and a brand for promotional purposes (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016). Acting as human brands, celebrities shape follower intentions (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024; Tran *et al.*, 2024; Yu, 2024). However, research into event marketing, particularly celebrity endorsement, remains surprisingly limited (Mair and Weber, 2019; Setiawan *et al.*, 2022).

Existing studies have mainly examined the impact of celebrity endorsement on consumer attitudes toward events or brand effectiveness. A review of existing studies into celebrity endorsements in event marketing revealed three gaps: (1) the unexplored mechanisms behind how celebrity endorsements influence consumer behavior, (2) the overlooked role of celebrities as unique human brands, and (3) the narrow focus on social media influencers rather than a broader view that includes both online and offline celebrities. Therefore, by conceptualizing celebrities as human brands, this study investigates how celebrity endorsement drives consumer intentions to participate in events.

Celebrity endorsement revolves around three key entities: customers, celebrities, and brands (Özer *et al.*, 2022). Within the framework of the consumer-brand relationship (CBR) theory, these interactions unfold through a cognitive-affective-behavioral process (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024). Event marketing, which engages consumers through immersive experiences (Martensen and Gronholdt, 2008; Nufer, 2015), strategically employs celebrity endorsement to strengthen these bonds. This study proposes a model to explore how celebrity endorsement enhances cognitive, emotional, and behavioral connections between celebrities and event attendees, addressing the call of Setiawan *et al.* (2022) for deeper investigation into the psychological and behavioral dimensions of event marketing.

Moreover, considering celebrity endorsement effectiveness, celebrity attachment can enable celebrities to shape followers' perceptions, emotions, and intentions (Özer *et al.*, 2022). However, this study found two gaps in celebrity attachment literature. First, existing models inadequately address the emotional and cognitive bonds consumers form with celebrity brands (Moraes *et al.*, 2019). Emotions like admiration and love amplify the impact of celebrity marketing messages, while cognitive factors like trust foster positive responses to endorsements. Despite their importance, these dimensions remain underexplored (Moraes *et al.*, 2019). This study therefore examines the cognitive and affective dimensions of celebrity attachment by incorporating celebrity brand trust and celebrity brand love into the proposed model.

Second, most research on celebrity endorsement relies on communication theories, such as source credibility and attractiveness (Saldanha *et al.*, 2020), but rarely incorporates psychological theories like attachment theory. While attachment theory has been applied to studies on idols and celebrities (Huang *et al.*, 2015; Giles and Maltby, 2004), its application in celebrity endorsement remains sparse (El Hedhli *et al.*, 2021; Saldanha *et al.*, 2020). Attachment theory suggests that celebrity-follower interactions foster cognitive and emotional bonds (Bowlby, 1973), prompting the need to explore what drives these attachments. Thus, this study proposes three drivers: celebrity brand community, reflecting followers' identification with the brand (Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022); co-creation, where followers actively shape the brand through engagement (Centeno and Wang, 2017; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004); and immersion, the deep emotional connection that enhances brand love (Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022; Le *et al.*, 2024).

Overall, this study proposes a serial mediation model to examine how celebrity attachment influences event attendees' intentions in the celebrity endorsement process through cognitive, affective, and hybrid cognitive-affective pathways. As the first to explore these pathways in the context of event marketing, it bridges gaps in celebrity attachment and consumer-brand relationship theories. Notably, over 60% of event marketing research focuses on Europe and America, leaving Asian markets underexplored (Mair and Weber, 2019). Given the prominence of celebrity culture and high endorsement receptivity in Asia, this study addresses this gap by examining Vietnam, a rapidly growing market in the region. Practically, the findings offer actionable strategies for celebrity endorsers, marketers, and event organizers.

2. Literature review

2.1 Events

Events are gatherings held for purposes such as meetings, conventions, or parties, typically involving interconnected functions (Events Industry Council, 2023). Unlike everyday operations, they are social phenomena that draw diverse audiences and significantly contribute to societal, communal, and corporate development (Kirby *et al.*, 2018). This study conceptualizes events as unique activities that engage varied audiences, incorporating spatial and temporal elements distinct from daily routines.

Overall, event research remains limited despite the rapid growth of the event industry (Mair and Weber, 2019). Most existing studies focus on specific categories of events, such as festivals (Kim *et al.*, 2018), sports events (Chiu *et al.*, 2019; Rai *et al.*, 2024), and tourism events (Jeong and Kim, 2020). Arguably, the field lacks studies that generalize across event categories (Park and Park, 2017).

2.2 Celebrities and celebrity brands

Giles (2000) characterizes celebrities as media constructs that exist independently of specific achievements, while Rojek (2001) views them as cultural constructs that achieve fame for diverse reasons. Subsequently, Turner (2013) identifies celebrities as figures created by the media.

Recently, celebrities have been recognized as human brands (Tran *et al.*, 2024) with the capacity to influence behavioral intentions (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024). Celebrity brands embody brand identity attributes such as personality, image, and recognition (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024; Tran *et al.*, 2024). Notably, celebrity brands are co-created by a range of stakeholders, including the celebrities themselves, customers, fans, and business organizations (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002). In this study, celebrities are media-created figures from multiple domains whose human brands are characterized by identity attributes, including personality, image, and recognition.

2.3 Overview of celebrity endorsement in event marketing

In event marketing, hosts increasingly rely on celebrity endorsements to add star power and prestige to their events (Park and Park, 2017). Typically, they choose celebrities whose professional fields or lifestyles align closely with the event's theme or brand (Mair and Weber, 2019). For instance, a well-known author might endorse a literary festival to engage local readers, while famous football players can promote the host country of a global football cup, building excitement and credibility among fans. Indeed, celebrity endorsements can enhance event visibility and brand image (Van Heerden *et al.*, 2008). In addition, attitudes of the celebrities can influence followers' attitudes toward the endorsed event (Sun *et al.*, 2021).

To date, existing studies into celebrity endorsement in event marketing primarily concentrated on two themes. The first theme centers on the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards events (Sun *et al.*, 2021; van Heerden *et al.*, 2008). Another theme examines the influence of celebrity endorsement on brand effectiveness (Cianfrone and Zhang, 2006; Doyle *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2018). This study summarizes relevant existing studies in Table 1.

Table 1 highlights three literature gaps in prior research. First, the mechanisms by which celebrity endorsements shape consumer attitudes and behaviors toward events remain largely unexplored. In other words, the pathways through which celebrities influence their followers' perceptions and actions are not yet understood. Specifically, except for the study of Chen *et al.* (2012) which employed an experimental approach, existing studies explored the indirect effects of celebrity endorsement on consumers' attitudes and intentions through brand attributes. Mair and Weber (2019) emphasize that uncovering the influence mechanism of celebrity endorsement is essential for optimizing event marketing's impact on tourism. Second, existing studies uniformly treat celebrities as intermediaries between consumers and brands whose objective is to strengthen the brand attributes and economic gains of hosts.

Table 1. Existing literature in celebrity endorsement in event marketing

Authors	Scope of study	Methodology	Main constructs	Theory	Findings
Sun <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Online event endorsement by social media influencers (SMIs)	- A quantitative survey with N = 335 valid responses - The data was analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 3	- Influencer attitude - Social media post attitude - Event attitude - Intention to share a post – Intention to attend an event - Moderator: gender differences	Congruity theory of attitude change	A follower's attitude and behavioral intentions toward the event are affected by his or her influencer attitude
Kim <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Celebrity writer endorsement of literary festivals in Korea	- A quantitative survey with N = 405 valid responses - The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS 24 and AMOS software	- Attributes of celebrities: trustworthiness, familiarity, and expertise - Festival brand equity dimensions: brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty - Attachment to the festival destination	- Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) - Symbolic communications theory	Among celebrity attributes, expertise was revealed to be most related to brand equity and destination attachment
Doyle <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Celebrity endorsement of a motorsport event in Australia	- Two studies framed within a motorsport event context were conducted	- Negative celebrity endorser publicity - Familiarity with event and sponsor brands - Consumers' attitudes towards event and sponsor brands	N/A	Negative publicity about a celebrity endorser reduces consumer attitudes toward associated brands, but familiarity with the brand can moderate and lessen this negative impact
Chen <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Celebrity endorsement of sporting events in Taiwan	Four experiments across university students from major Taiwanese universities to determine whether classical conditioning (the systematic pairing of celebrity endorsers with sporting events) produces positive attitudes towards sporting events	N/A	The match-up theory	Individuals exposed to the systematic pairing of a sporting event with a celebrity did develop a more favorable attitude towards the event than individuals in the control condition

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2185

2186

Asia Pacific
Journal of
Marketing and
Logistics

APJML
37,8

Table 1. Continued

Authors	Scope of study	Methodology	Main constructs	Theory	Findings
van Heerden <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Celebrity endorsement of sporting events in South Africa	An experimental design with a quantitative approach (N = 210 participants)	- Extrinsic cues of interest (celebrity endorsement and event sponsorship) - Brand/manufacturer related variables (perceived product quality, perceived product uniqueness, manufacturer esteem, perceived corporate social responsibility) - Consumers' pre-purchase attitudes	- Cue utilization theory - Balance theory	The sport celebrity endorsement cue had a significant effect on uniqueness and esteem, but did not significantly influence brand quality
Cianfrone and Zhang (2006)	Athlete endorsement of an action sport event in the United States	A 2 x 4 independent-group experimental design that consists of two experimental conditions (experimental and control) and four video footage interventions with different promotional procedures (television commercial, athlete endorsement, venue signage, and combined promotion) (N = 253 participants)	- TV commercials - Athlete endorsements - Venue signage - A combination of TV commercials, athlete endorsements, and venue signage	N/A	All four promotional procedures effectively increased brand awareness during a televised action sports event

Source(s): Authors' own work

Arguably, nobody considers celebrities as “human brands” who possess distinctive brand attributes. Accordingly, these human brands are capable of directly shaping audience attitudes and behaviors thanks to their strong brand attributes (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024). As previously discussed, these human brand characteristics warrant deeper examination. Third, current research predominantly focuses on online celebrities, known as social media influencers. Thus, existing studies fail to generalize the concept to encompass both online and offline celebrities. In fact, generalizing the concept of celebrities is important to capture the full range of their influence in event marketing. In response to these gaps, the current study conceptualizes celebrities, both online and offline ones, as human brands and aims to examine how celebrity endorsements influence consumers’ intentions to participate in events through cognitive – affective pathways.

2.4 Research concepts

There are six concepts proposed by this study. In the context of event marketing, these concepts can be defined as follows:

Sense of celebrity brand community (SBC) refers to followers’ feelings of belonging and unity with a celebrity, emerging as they identify with the fan community and engage positively with the celebrity (adapted from Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022).

Celebrity brand co-creation (CBC) is the collaborative value creation between celebrity brands and their followers, where followers are socially legitimized to react, comment, express opinions, and even engage in critical actions toward celebrities (adapted from Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Celebrity brand immersion (CBI) describes the depth of thought, focus, and reflection followers invest in celebrity brands—whether positive or negative—through interactions that lead to admiration, idolization, and strong beliefs in the celebrity (adapted from Jiang and Tu, 2023).

Celebrity brand trust (CBT) refers to followers’ willingness to be vulnerable to celebrities’ actions based on confidence in their reliability, honesty, dedication, and competence, seeing these qualities as markers of the celebrities’ uniqueness and responsibility (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024; Hussain *et al.*, 2020).

Celebrity brand love (CBL) followers’ intense affection for a celebrity, characterized by positive emotional connections, dedication, joy, passion, and a deep, long-term attachment that combines emotional bonds and brand passion (adapted from Le *et al.*, 2024).

Event participation intentions (EPI): followers’ willingness to attend events involving or endorsed by specific celebrities, influenced by their attachment to these events formed through the celebrity endorsement process. This intent, similar to purchase intention, reflects a readiness to engage and can be shaped by personal perceptions and external circumstances (adapted from Liu *et al.*, 2020; Tran *et al.*, 2024).

2.5 Conceptual framework development

2.5.1 The relationship between the customer-brand relationship theory and attachment theory.

A customer-brand relationship is seen as a relationship of resonance, where customers feel a harmonious connection with the brand (Keller, 2001). From a CBR perspective, celebrity brands can be considered direct interactive partners with followers for two reasons. First, celebrities frequently conduct win-win social interactions with their followers (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024). While followers can reduce risks related to celebrity endorsement as they get to know the celebrities (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024), celebrities can reinforce their economic benefits through meaningful connections with followers (Hudson *et al.*, 2015). This mutual benefit is central to a robust CBR. Second, followers can establish emotional connections with celebrity brands if trust persists (Escalas, 2004). Celebrities drive follower-celebrity congruence by constantly sharing their uniqueness and personal values with followers (Leite and Baptista, 2022), thus fostering mutual emotional connections (Ho-Mai *et al.*, 2024).

Attachment theory, initially explored in psychology (Bowlby, 1969), has been extended to understand how customers form emotional connections with brands (Kennedy, 2017). This theory posits that perceptions and emotions arising from interactions help establish intimacy between individuals and entities (Bowlby, 1973). Customer-brand attachment fosters customer-brand relationships (Park *et al.*, 2010). Gradually, this bond captures customer loyalty and desirable actions (Jiao *et al.*, 2024; Kennedy, 2017). Applying the attachment theory, existing studies have explored attachment to idols (Huang *et al.*, 2015) and interest in celebrities (Giles and Maltby, 2004). Recently, Saldanha *et al.* (2020) and Özer *et al.* (2022) advocated applying attachment theory to understand celebrity endorsements.

Accordingly, this study proposes that combining CBR theory with attachment theory creates a cohesive framework for understanding the mechanism under which celebrity endorsements influence followers. To elaborate, within the CBR concept, celebrities as human brands forge deep relational bonds with followers through trust, love, and authenticity—core drivers of consumer behavior. Attachment theory complements this by uncovering the psychological roots of these bonds, such as a sense of celebrity brand community, celebrity brand co-creation, and celebrity brand immersion, each of which critically shapes attitudes and intentions. Together, these theories interact to reveal how cognitive, affective, and hybrid cognitive-affective celebrity attachment (attachment theory) is maintained and amplified by relational dynamics (CBR theory).

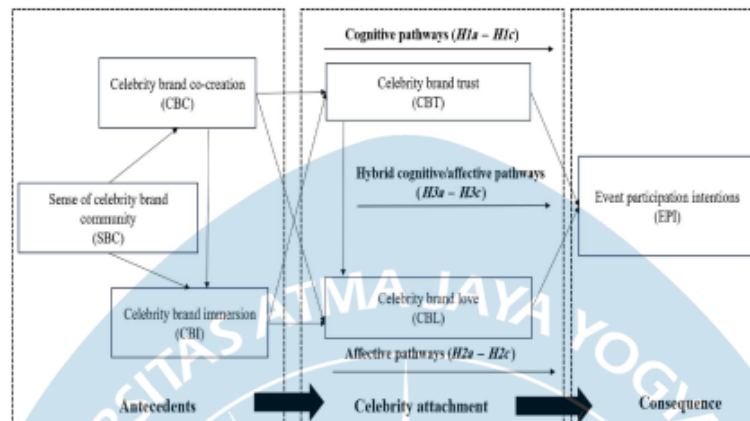
In the context of this study, attachment theory explains why followers develop cognitive and emotional investments in celebrities, while CBR theory demonstrates how this investment evolves into loyalty and behavioral commitment. This synergy forms a feedback loop: celebrity attachment reinforces relational bonds, which in turn deepen the attachment. As a result, followers feel both emotionally compelled and relationally aligned, leading to stronger behavioral intentions, such as participating in events endorsed by the celebrity.

2.5.2 The proposed theoretical model. Based on CBR theory and attachment theory, this study develops a serial mediation model to explore how celebrity attachment influences event attendees' intentions in the celebrity endorsement process through cognitive, affective, and hybrid cognitive-affective pathways. Specifically, the first cognitive pathway stretches from the antecedents of celebrity attachment (i.e. sense of celebrity brand community, celebrity brand co-creation, and celebrity brand immersion) to cognitive attachment (i.e. celebrity brand trust) and ultimately to followers' behavioral intentions (i.e. event participation intentions). The second pathway, namely the affective pathway, stems from antecedents to emotional attachment (i.e. celebrity brand love) and ultimately to followers' event participation intentions. The third pathway, the hybrid cognitive-affective pathway, links the antecedents with cognitive attachment, emotional attachment, and followers' event participation intentions.

The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

2.6 Research hypothesis development

2.6.1 The sequential relationship among antecedents. In this study, antecedents of celebrity attachment include a sense of celebrity brand community, celebrity brand co-creation, and celebrity brand immersion. Accordingly, a sense of belonging to the brand community can enhance brand co-creation and foster brand immersion (Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022; Alloza, 2008). The stronger the individuals' sense of belonging to the brand community, the greater their immersion and attachment to the brand (Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022). Furthermore, according to attachment theory, engaging in an experience fosters immersion (Lutz and Guiry, 1994). Brand co-creation strengthens customers' bond with the brand and encourages long-term support (Hollebeek, 2011). In the context of celebrity endorsement, when followers care about a celebrity, they engage in community-building behaviors. This sense of belonging prompts fans to co-create a richer brand community image, thus enhancing brand immersion. Likewise, followers who advocate a particular celebrity actively participate in building and



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. Conceptual model

developing the celebrity brand through meaningful activities (e.g. creating fan clubs or organizing offline activities), all of which increase brand immersion.

Therefore, this study posits a sequential relationship among the antecedents of celebrity attachment which originates from a sense of celebrity brand community to celebrity brand co-creation, and to celebrity brand immersion.

2.6.2 Development of cognitive pathways in the celebrity endorsement process for events. A sense of brand community influences brand trust (Habibi *et al.*, 2014; He *et al.*, 2012; Labrecque, 2014) through word-of-mouth, information exchange, product experience comparisons, advice-seeking, and social relationship building (Srinivasan *et al.*, 2002). Likewise, engaging in co-creation processes increases customer awareness and reduces brand uncertainty (Ba, 2001). Concerning celebrity brands, co-creation activities develop celebrity brand trust (Villagra *et al.*, 2021), which in turn increases customer intentions (Sanny *et al.*, 2020), and enhances purchase intentions (Kennedy, 2017).

Therefore, this study assumes that the process of celebrity endorsement starts with building a sense of community among followers, which then leads to celebrity brand co-creation. This co-creation fosters cognitive attachment (celebrity brand trust), ultimately enhancing followers' participation intentions towards events endorsed by celebrities. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1a. Celebrity brand co-creation and celebrity brand trust jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.

Immersed customers are more likely to trust a brand and commit to it (Paulssen, 2009). To elaborate, followers develop profound trust in celebrity brands as they become immersed in them. Immersion also increases brand choice intentions (Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022). Likewise, when followers immerse themselves in celebrity brands, their intentions to participate in events endorsed by the celebrities increase. Based on this, the current study proposes that the cognitive pathway in celebrity endorsement begins with a sense of celebrity brand community, leading to celebrity brand immersion, thus achieving cognitive attachment (celebrity brand trust) and encouraging participation intentions towards events endorsed by celebrities. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1b. Celebrity brand immersion and celebrity brand trust jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.

This study assumes that active celebrity brand co-creation activities positively lead to affective development toward celebrities, resulting in deeper brand immersion. Based on the CBR theory and attachment theory, this study suggests that the cognitive pathway in the celebrity endorsement process involves the following steps: followers first develop a sense of community around the celebrity brands, then engage in celebrity brand co-creation, which enhances their immersion in the brands. This progression leads to cognitive attachment in the form of celebrity brand trust and ultimately results in increased participation intentions towards events endorsed by the celebrities. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1c. Celebrity brand co-creation, celebrity brand immersion, and celebrity brand trust jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.

2.6.3 Development of the affective pathway in the celebrity endorsement process for events. A sense of brand community influences brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013). Participation in online fan communities precedes purchase intentions (Kudeshia *et al.*, 2016). Customers who love a brand generate favorable word-of-mouth (Albert and Merunka, 2013) and remain loyal (Thompson *et al.*, 2005). Celebrity love correlates with fan support efforts, such as promoting the celebrity's brand and favoring products they endorse (Kudeshia *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, engaging in brand communities involves co-creating value through interactions (Zhou *et al.*, 2012) and serves to foster emotional investment (Mollen and Wilson, 2010). This emotional investment enhances brand love, cultivating brand affection and loyalty (Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022). In the context of celebrity brands, followers can actively participate in these communities, initiating celebrity brand co-creation, thus cultivating emotional connections with those celebrities. As a result, followers invest significant time, energy, and money into supporting celebrities, leading to positive behavioral intentions (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Thompson *et al.*, 2005).

Thus, this study posits an affective pathway in the celebrity endorsement process for events. This pathway begins with followers forming a sense of celebrity brand community to develop celebrity brand co-creation, then achieving emotional bonding (celebrity brand love), thereby increasing event participation intentions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2a. Celebrity brand co-creation and celebrity brand love jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.

Brand immersion occurs when customers invest emotionally, physically, or psychologically in a brand (Mollen and Wilson, 2010). Immersed customers tend to exhibit supportive behaviors driven by their affective connection (Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022). Even unfamiliar brands can leave a lasting impact on customers through exceptional experiences (Park *et al.*, 2010). As a result, such brand immersion can cultivate passionate feelings toward the brand (Su *et al.*, 2019), known as brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Le *et al.*, 2024). Brand love can, in turn, influence consumer behavioral intentions and long-term attachment to the brand (Reimann *et al.*, 2012).

In line with this, the current study proposes an affective pathway in the celebrity endorsement process for events that begins with forming a sense of celebrity brand community to develop celebrity brand immersion, subsequently achieving affective attachment (e.g. celebrity brand love). As a result, this contributes to increasing event participation intentions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2b. Celebrity brand immersion and celebrity brand love jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.

Moreover, based on the CBR theory and attachment theory, this study posits that the affective pathway in the celebrity endorsement process involves followers forming a sense of celebrity brand community, engaging in celebrity brand co-creation, enhancing celebrity brand immersion, achieving affective attachment (celebrity brand love), and ultimately increasing event participation intentions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

- H2c.* Celebrity brand co-creation, celebrity brand immersion, and celebrity brand love jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.

2.6.4 Development of the cognitive-affective pathway in the celebrity endorsement process for events. Brand trust is a strong predictor of brand love (Marmat, 2023; Singh *et al.*, 2021), as it significantly influences brand passion, a key component of brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012). When brand trust is low, customers may feel vulnerable and become less receptive to the brand (Schoenbachler and Gordon, 2002). This dynamic mirrors interpersonal relationships, where trust in a partner shapes an individual's feelings toward them (Albert and Merunka, 2013). Similarly, followers who cultivate cognitive attachment, or brand trust, in a celebrity are likely to develop a deep emotional connection, or brand love, toward that celebrity. Thus, establishing brand trust is essential for fostering meaningful emotional bonds that drive loyalty and engagement.

As argued in previous hypotheses, the current study suggests that there are distinct cognitive pathways and affective pathways of enhancing the celebrity endorsement process among antecedents, components of celebrity attachment, and participation intentions. Given the established relationship between brand trust and brand love in the existing literature, this study also proposes the existence of a hybrid cognitive-affective pathway in the celebrity endorsement of events. In short, followers who feel a sense of belonging to specific celebrity brand communities actively engage in brand co-creation, which enhances brand immersion. This process helps establish celebrity brand trust, leading to a deep emotional connection that manifests as brand love for the celebrity. Ultimately, this strengthens brand trust and love and increases followers' intentions to participate in events endorsed by the celebrity. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H3a.* Celebrity brand co-creation, celebrity brand trust, and celebrity brand love jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.
- H3b.* Celebrity brand immersion, celebrity brand trust, and celebrity brand love jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.
- H3c.* Celebrity brand co-creation, celebrity brand immersion, celebrity brand trust and celebrity brand love jointly mediate the relationship between a sense of celebrity brand community and event participation intentions.

3. Methodology

This experimental research was conducted in Vietnam, where the event business industry has recently experienced significant growth. With rapid technological advancements and increased creativity, the industry has reached impressive milestones in labor quality, professionalism, and event scale. Various events now cater to diverse customer needs, making event organization a crucial aspect of brand promotion, cultural exchange, and business growth.

This study was conducted through two phases: preliminary research and formal research. The first phase outlines the study directions for the celebrity endorsement process for events,

identifying research gaps and developing research models. During this phase, a preliminary scale was introduced, consisting of six constructs and 31 observable variables adapted to the celebrity brand and event context. Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (refer to Table 3 for details on the sources and descriptions).

A qualitative pilot study was conducted through group discussions with experts in advertising and event management, and with professional researchers in brands and event marketing. These experts brought specialized knowledge, practical experience, and a vested interest in enhancing celebrity endorsement and event participation. To ensure content validity, they evaluated the relevance and significance of each observed variable for every construct using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "strongly irrelevant" and 5 represented "strongly relevant." With mean values exceeding 4.0, the experts confirmed the rationality and coherence of the scales. Feedback from these discussions led to revisions of specific wording, resulting in the final scale.

The final stage involved formal quantitative research designed to test the research model and hypotheses. Covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized to assess the model's alignment with reality. The questionnaire was translated from English to Vietnamese for local respondents. The questionnaire was translated from English to Vietnamese for local respondents and then translated back into English to ensure consistency. This study focused on Vietnamese participants aged 15 and older who followed domestic or international celebrities and were interested in various events in Vietnam. Screening questions, such as "How often do you attend the types of events listed below within a year?" and "Can you name a specific celebrity that you follow?" were employed to identify qualified participants.

Data collection utilized both online and paper-based surveys. For the paper-based approach, intercept personal and convenience sampling methods were employed to target a sample in Vietnam. Trained interviewers assisted participants in recalling a specific online celebrity and completing the questionnaire, which was distributed in schools, offices, companies, entertainment venues, and other locations where respondents felt comfortable and had ample time to participate. The online survey, conducted using a self-administered questionnaire on Google Docs, relied on convenience sampling and was shared through Facebook, Vietnam's leading social media platform. To maximize engagement, questionnaires were sent directly to respondents via messages on Facebook or fan pages. The formal questionnaire provided an overview and confirmed participants' eligibility as part of the target audience. Additionally, the survey required individual completion of each item, preventing submission if questions were left unanswered.

The survey was conducted over three months, from January to March 2024, yielding 759 valid questionnaires. The sample information is described in Tables 2 and 3. The ratio of the number of effective questionnaires to the number of observed items in this study was 24:1. Therefore, the final sample size was sufficient for obtaining stable results within the structural equation model, giving it statistical testing power. Data analysis followed a systematic approach, including sample analysis, measurement model evaluation, and structural model assessment using AMOS 24 software.

4. Results

4.1 Evaluation of the measurement models

The Cronbach's alpha values of SBC, CBC, CBI, CBT, CBL and EPI were 0.863, 0.867, 0.863, 0.879, 0.882 and 0.873, respectively. All 31 observed variables satisfied the requirements of corrected item-total correlation (>0.3).

This study performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the quality of its measurement models. The proposed-model CFA results were $\chi^2 = 1095.266$ ($p = 0.00$), $df = 419$, $\chi^2/df = 2.614$ (<3), CFI = 0.945 (>0.9), AGFI = 0.893 (>0.8) and RMSEA = 0.046

Table 2. Information of respondents

Items	Statistics (n = 759)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	209	27.5
Female	530	69.8
Other	20	2.6
<i>Age</i>		
15–18	273	36.0
19–22	372	49.0
23–26	16	2.1
27–30	13	1.7
31–34	17	2.2
35–38	12	1.6
39–42	10	1.3
43–46	16	2.1
47–50	12	1.6
51–54	13	1.7
>55 years old	5	0.7
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	616	81.2
Married and no children	16	2.1
Married and have children	66	8.7
Other	61	8.0
<i>Occupation</i>		
Student/pupil	644	84.8
Employee	22	2.9
Self-employed	37	4.9
Public servant	41	5.4
Retired	4	0.5
Other	11	1.4
<i>Annual income</i>		
Under 60 million VND	648	85.4
From 60–150 million VND	77	10.1
Over 150 million VND	34	4.5
<i>Region of residence</i>		
North Vietnam	7	0.9
Central Vietnam	747	98.4
South Vietnam	5	0.7
Source(s): Authors' own work		

(<0.05). All criteria met the recommended values in the measurement model. Therefore, the indicators were acceptable, so these models were suitable for the collected data.

The convergent validity results were supported by standardized loadings, construct reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). In this study, item reliability (standardized loadings) satisfied the requirement of convergent validity (>0.5). In addition, the CR of the six constructs exceeded the minimum recommended level (>0.7), and the AVE of the six constructs were over 0.5. These results indicated the measurement items' reliability and validity (Table 4).

This study examined the differences between constructs by using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results showed that discriminant validity was achieved when each factor's square of root AVE value was greater than the correlations among factors (Table 5).

Table 3. Characteristics of respondents' celebrity-following behavior

	Statistic	Percentage (%)
<i>Celebrity brand X that respondents are following</i>		
Domestic celebrity (Vietnam)	450	59.3
International celebrity	309	40.7
<i>The main occupation of celebrity X that the respondent is following</i>		
Actor/Film Director	71	9.4
Singer/Songwriter/Artist	281	37.0
Model/Stylist	123	16.2
Host (MC)	162	21.3
Writer/Poet/Critic/Playwright	57	7.5
Artisans	1	0.1
Painter/Architect	1	0.1
Businessman	9	1.2
Leader/Revolutionary	4	0.5
Scientist/Thinker	0	0
Other	50	6.6
<i>The frequency of following celebrity X</i>		
Never	0	0.0
Seldom	70	9.2
Sometimes	231	30.4
Frequent	298	39.3
Very often	160	21.1
<i>The channel to follow celebrity X (multiple responses may be chosen)</i>		
Personal pages of celebrity X on social networking platforms	469	61.8
Community of celebrity fans in groups and pages on social networking platforms	333	43.9
Television /radio /magazines	224	29.5
Other	33	4.3
Source(s): Authors' own work		

4.2 An assessment of the structural model

The test of model fit: The test of model fit results from CB-SEM analysis (Figure 2) showed $\chi^2 = 1233.130$ ($p = 0.00$), $df = 424$, $\chi^2/df = 2.908$ (<3), CFI = 0.934 (>0.9), AGFI = 0.883 (>0.8) and RMSEA = 0.05 (<0.08). Thus, the results indicated a good fit for the proposed structural model.

Hypothesis tests: This study applied the "indirect effect" tool developed by Gaskin and Lim (2018) to analyze the serial multiple mediation effect based on its evaluation criteria, including (1) whether the mediation effect's upper limit and lower limit contained 0 or not, and (2) whether the p -value was less than 0.05.

Hypotheses H1a, 1b, and 1c tested the development of cognitive pathways in the celebrity endorsement process for events through the jointly mediating mechanism of two antecedents (e.g., CBC and CBI) and cognitive celebrity attachment (e.g. CBT). As shown in Figure 2, SBC, CBC, and CBI have a positive relationship with each other, where $SBC \rightarrow CBC$, $SBC \rightarrow CBI$ and $CBC \rightarrow CBI$. Test results (Figure 2) show that CBT is positively influenced by CBC (SEs = 0.318; $p = 0.000$) and CBI (SEs = 0.356; $p = 0.000$). In addition, CBT was found to have a positive influence on EPI (SEs = 0.341; $p = 0.000$). As shown in Table 6, the p -value was greater than 0.05 and the mediation effect's upper limit and lower limit contained 0, thereby indicating that SBC has an influence and significantly affects the EPI through the combination of CBC and CBT (SEs = 0.133; $p = 0.000$), between CBI and CBT (SEs = 0.150; $p = 0.000$), and between CBC, CBI and CBT (SEs = 0.077; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c are all accepted.

Table 4. Results of convergent validity

Construct	Factor loadings	CR	AVE
<i>Sense of celebrity brand community (SBC)</i> (adapted from Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022)		0.864	0.515
SBC1 When I talk about [celebrity X's] brand community, I usually say "we" rather than "they"	0.649		
SBC2 I see myself as a part of [celebrity X's] brand community	0.758		
SBC3 [Celebrity X's] brand community's successes are my successes	0.737		
SBC4 When someone praises [celebrity X's] brand community, it feels like a personal compliment	0.758		
SBC5 When someone criticizes [celebrity X's] brand community, it feels like a personal insult	0.731		
SBC6 I am very interested in what others think about [celebrity X's] brand community	0.664		
<i>Celebrity brand co-creation (CBC)</i> (adapted from Acikgoz and Tasci, 2022)		0.868	0.523
CBC1 I often express my personal needs to [celebrity X]	0.751		
CBC2 I often make suggestions for [celebrity X] to develop better	0.769		
CBC3 I often participate in decisions about [celebrity X's] activities	0.691		
CBC4 I often find solutions to my problems together with [celebrity X]	0.725		
CBC5 I usually actively participate when [celebrity X] launches new activities	0.725		
CBC6 [Celebrity X] encourages their fan community to come together with solutions	0.672		
<i>Celebrity brand immersion (CBI)</i> (adapted from Jiang and Tu, 2023)		0.865	0.681
CBI1 I can eliminate all distractions and worries in life, work, etc. when interacting with [celebrity X]	0.826		
CBI2 I temporarily forgot my daily troubles when interacting with [celebrity X]	0.870		
CBI3 I was fascinated by the activities/events/festivals of [celebrity X]	0.777		
<i>Celebrity brand trust (CBT)</i> (adapted from Ho-Mai et al., 2024)		0.879	0.548
CBT1 I have confidence in the information provided by [celebrity X]	0.749		
CBT2 I think [celebrity X] is among the best in their endorsed area	0.693		
CBT3 [Celebrity X] shows a high commitment to the fans	0.760		
CBT4 [Celebrity X] can endorse the brand	0.726		
CBT5 [Celebrity X] has high integrity	0.745		
CBT6 [Celebrity X] is highly reliable	0.768		
<i>Celebrity brand love (CBL)</i> (adapted from Le et al., 2024)		0.883	0.558
CBL1 [Celebrity X] makes me feel good	0.739		
CBL2 [Celebrity X] is awesome	0.716		
CBL3 [Celebrity X] makes me very happy	0.836		
CBL4 I love [celebrity X]	0.729		
CBL5 [Celebrity X] is a pure delight	0.734		
CBL6 I am passionate about [celebrity X]	0.720		
<i>Event participation intentions (EPI)</i> (adapted from Ho-Mai et al., 2024)		0.874	0.633
EPI1 I would like to attend events recommended by [celebrity X]	0.780		
EPI2 I will attend events involving [celebrity X]	0.814		
EPI3 I trust events recommended or attended by [celebrity X]	0.799		
EPI4 I would introduce events recommended or provided by [celebrity X] to my friends	0.790		

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 5. Results of discriminant validity

	AVE/ R^2	SBC	CBC	CBI	CBT	CBL	EPI
SBC	0.515						
CBC	0.158	0.523					
CBI	0.226	0.130	0.681				
CBT	0.188	0.185	0.203	0.548			
CBL	0.315	0.263	0.301	0.387	0.558		
EPI	0.295	0.227	0.260	0.333	0.345	0.633	

Note(s): SBC: Sense of celebrity brand community; CBC: Celebrity brand co-creation; CBI: Celebrity brand immersion; CBT: Celebrity brand trust; CBL: Celebrity brand love; EPI: Event participation intentions; AVE: Average variance extracted; R^2 : Square of correlation
Source(s): Authors' own work

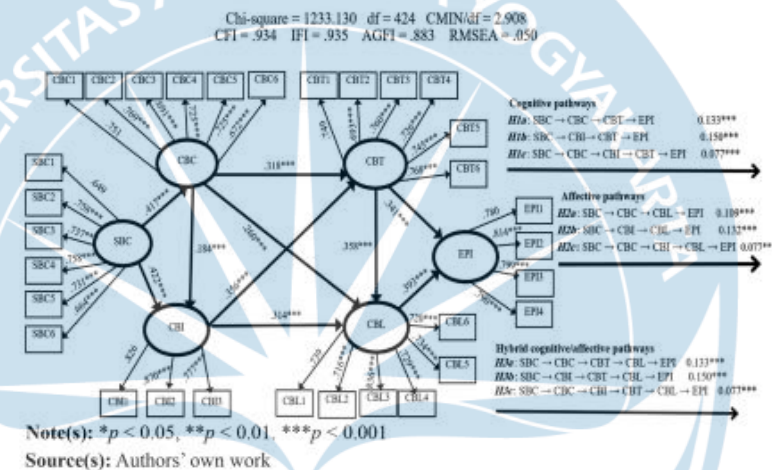


Figure 2. Research framework results

Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c tested the development of affective pathways in the celebrity endorsement process for events through the jointly mediating mechanism of two antecedents (e.g., CBC and CBI) and affective celebrity attachment (e.g., CBL). Test results (Figure 2) showed that CBL is positively influenced by CBC (SEs = 0.260; $p = 0.000$) and CBI (SEs = 0.314; $p = 0.000$). In addition, CBL was found to have a positive influence on EPI (SEs = 0.393; $p = 0.000$). As shown in Table 6, the p -value is less than 0.05, and the upper and lower bounds of the mediating effect do not contain the value 0, thereby indicating that the SBC significantly affects EPI through the combination of CBC and CBL (SEs = 0.109; $p = 0.000$), between CBI and CBL (SEs = 0.132; $p = 0.000$), and between CBC, CBI and CBL (SEs = 0.077; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, Hypotheses 5a–5c are all supported.

Hypotheses H3a, 3b, and 3c tested the hybrid cognitive-affective pathways of celebrity endorsement of events through the jointly mediating mechanism of two antecedent factors (e.g. CBC and CBI) in addition to cognitive and affective celebrity attachment (CBT and CBL). As shown in Figure 2, CBT was found to have a positive influence on CBL.

Table 6. Results of testing serial multiple mediating effects

Hypothesis path	SEs	Lower	Upper	Results
H1a: SBC → CBC → CBT → EPI	0.133***	0.028	0.078	Supported
H1b: SBC → CBI → CBT → EPI	0.150***	0.032	0.087	Supported
H1c: SBC → CBC → CBI → CBT → EPI	0.077***	0.005	0.017	Supported
H2a: SBC → CBC → CBL → EPI	0.109***	0.027	0.074	Supported
H2b: SBC → CBI → CBL → EPI	0.132***	0.035	0.089	Supported
H2c: SBC → CBC → CBI → CBL → EPI	0.077***	0.005	0.019	Supported
H3a: SBC → CBC → CBT → CBL → EPI	0.133***	0.013	0.030	Supported
H3b: SBC → CBI → CBT → BL → EPI	0.150***	0.014	0.035	Supported
H3c: SBC → CBC → CBI → CBT → CBL → EPI	0.077***	0.002	0.008	Supported

Note(s): SBC: Sense of celebrity brand community; CBC: Celebrity brand co-creation; CBI: Celebrity brand immersion; CBT: Celebrity brand trust; CBL: Celebrity brand love; EPI: Event participation intentions; SEs: Standardized estimates

***Denotes $p < 0.01$ **Denotes $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own work

(SEs = 0.358; $p = 0.000$). As shown in Table 6, the p -value is less than 0.05, and the upper and lower bounds of the mediating effect do not contain the value 0, thereby indicating that SBC has an influence on EPI through the combination of CBC, CBT and CBL (SEs = 0.133; $p = 0.000$), between CBI, CBT and CBL (SEs = 0.150; $p = 0.000$), and between CBC, CBI, CBT and CBL (SEs = 0.077; $p = 0.000$). Therefore, Hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c are all accepted.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Discussion

This study validated a serial mediation model to examine how celebrity attachment influences event attendees' intentions in the celebrity endorsement process, given the context of events. The model links antecedents (i.e. SBC, CBC and CBI) with cognitive attachment (i.e. CBT) and affective attachment (i.e. CBL), and ultimately with event participation intentions. The study yielded various findings.

Firstly, the study confirmed the cognitive pathway development in the process of celebrity endorsement of events through the jointly mediating role of (1) CBC – CBT, (2) CBI – CBT, and (3) CBC – CBI – CBT in the relationship between SBC → EPI. From there, this study identifies three specific cognitive pathways: (1) SBC → CBC → CBT → EPI; (2) SBC → CBI → CBT → EPI; and (3) SBC → CBC → CBI → CBT → EPI. As such, it is consistent with the CBR theory and attachment theory. Suppose followers form positive cognitions, emotions, and behavioral intentions toward the celebrity during the relationship-building process. In that case, this will create a higher level of cognitive attachment (celebrity brand trust), which will make an essential contribution to improving the effectiveness of their endorsement of the event.

Second, the study confirmed the development of affective pathways in the process of celebrity endorsement of events through the jointly mediating role of (1) CBC – CBL, (2) CBI – CBL, and (3) CCB – CBI – CBL in the relationship between SBC → EPI. From that, this study identifies three specific affective pathways: (1) SBC → CBC → CBL → EPI; (2) SBC → CBI → CBL → EPI; and (3) SBC → CBC → CBI → CBL → EPI. That is, this is consistent with the CBR theory and attachment theory. Specifically, the emotional path in the process of the celebrity endorsement of events has developed, starting from followers forming a sense of celebrity brand community to developing celebrity brand co-creation, increased celebrity brand immersion, and acquired emotional attachment (celebrity brand love); as a result, this has contributed to the increased intention to attend events endorsed by celebrities.

Finally, the study has confirmed the development of a cognitive-affective pathway in the process of celebrity endorsement of events through the serial mediating role of (1) CBC – CBT – CBL, (2) CBI – CBT – CBL, and (3) CBC – CBI – CBT – CBL in the relationship between SBC → EPI. From there, this study identifies three specific hybrid cognitive-affective paths: (1) SBC → CBC → CBT → CBL → EPI; (2) SBC → CBI → CBT → CBL → EPI; and (3) SBC → CBC → CBI → CBT → CBL → EPI. That is, this study has extended CBR theory and attachment theory to posit that not only do consumers form a cognitive attachment or affective attachment to celebrities, but celebrities can develop a path of association between cognition and affection so that followers can foster trust (cognition) and love (emotion) toward them. This can conquer the reservations of the most demanding followers, further strengthening the celebrity endorsement value and increasing the audience's intention to participate in the event. This implies that a follower has a combination of cognition and emotion toward a celebrity to decide whether or not to attend an event endorsed by that celebrity; first, they will have awareness and form trust in the celebrity, and then they must also have a preference for the celebrity and that event. If one of the two is missing, it will be difficult for them to decide to participate in the event.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Theoretical implications. This study contributes in various ways to the literature on celebrity endorsement in event marketing. First, the most significant contribution of this study is to validate a serial mediation model of celebrity endorsement of events. This model illustrates how celebrities, as human brands, can influence followers' participation intentions towards events through establishing cognitive, affective, and hybrid cognitive-affective celebrity attachment. Building upon [Ozer et al.'s \(2022\)](#) framework, this study emphasizes the necessity of a hierarchical effect chain encompassing cognition, affect, and a cognition-affect combination to optimize celebrity endorsement efficacy. The cognitive pathway illustrates how a sense of celebrity brand community, celebrity brand co-creation, and celebrity brand immersion foster cognitive attachment, thereby shaping event participation intentions. Similarly, the affective pathway illustrates how a sense of celebrity brand community, celebrity brand co-creation, and celebrity brand immersion cultivate affective attachment, influencing event participation intentions. Furthermore, integrating both cognition and affect in the combined pathway underscores their joint impact on cognitive and affective attachment, ultimately fostering intentions to participate in events endorsed by celebrities.

Second, the study adds to the event marketing literature by applying psychological theories (i.e. attachment theory) and the CBR theory to explore consumers' psychological dimensions and intentional conduct. Specifically, the study illustrates how celebrities function as interactive partners in follower-celebrity brand relationships ([Sun et al., 2021](#)), thus fostering emotional responses (e.g. immersion, love, etc.) from followers and ultimately driving consumers' participation intentions.

Third, the study expands the literature on celebrity attachment. Specifically, the study is among the few to account for the cognitive and emotional bonds consumers form with celebrity brands (i.e. celebrity brand trust and love). As modern consumers increasingly rely on emotional and mental cues in celebrity endorsements, this study provides empirical insights into the roles these components of celebrity attachment play in event marketing. Moreover, new antecedents of celebrity attachment and their interrelationships were explicitly validated in the event context, namely senses of celebrity brand community, celebrity brand co-creation, and celebrity brand immersion. Further, consistent with attachment theory, the current study illustrates how the interaction process between followers and celebrity brands contributes to the development of cognition, affect, and behavioral intentions.

Fourth, the study adds to the contextual gaps in event marketing literature. To elaborate, the current study offers a contextual dataset from Vietnam, a rapidly developing country in the Asian region where celebrity culture holds significant sway. Considering the prevailing

influence of celebrity endorsements in Asia (Fam *et al.*, 2023) and the lack of event marketing studies in this cultural context (Mair and Weber, 2019), this study provides theoretical insights into celebrity endorsements of events in Asia. Furthermore, the current research broadens the scope of existing literature on celebrity endorsements in event marketing by generalizing both the types of events and the types of celebrities involved.

5.2.2 Practical implications. The results of this study offer practical implications for both celebrity endorsers and event practitioners, helping to improve the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements and boost event participation intentions. These insights are especially relevant in contexts where celebrities influence followers in their decision-making process regarding event participation.

With regard to celebrities, this study showcases how celebrities can increase their endorsement value through enhancing their connection with followers. Specifically, most respondents follow celebrities through their personal profiles on social media platforms. Therefore, celebrities should regularly post high-quality content and interact closely with fans to maintain their follower base. Daily viewing and interaction will create a sense of closeness and stronger emotional bonds with fans. Additionally, celebrities should listen to and appreciate the feedback from fans, taking actions for improvement and engaging in interactions so that fans feel their contributions and opinions are acknowledged, making them part of the celebrity fan community. This fosters participation in the co-creation process and immersion in the brand to build and develop the celebrity's brand. Furthermore, celebrities should invest in building a personal brand style and strategy. Most respondents are quite young and tend to access information quickly, not only domestically but also internationally. Celebrities should choose reputable events that align with the image they are building, participating in meaningful activities to increase trust among fans. Therefore, leveraging mass media to promote their personal image is crucial for celebrities. When a celebrity matches the personality or desired lifestyle of their followers, or addresses their psychological needs, such followers tend to form emotional bonds, thereby trusting and placing confidence in that celebrity. The current findings indicate that both emotional and cognitive connections are crucial for strengthening celebrity attachment and increasing followers' intentions to participate in events.

For marketers and event organizers, this study guides them in selecting suitable authentic celebrities. Specifically, event organizing companies need to collect and analyze information on the media and public relations effects of celebrities from previous events they have participated in, basing their negotiations on the desires and directions of both parties so as to determine similarities and a basis for determining whether the celebrity is truly suitable for the event requirements and budget. Moreover, different celebrities have varying degrees of influence and attraction to different target groups. One critical aspect for event organizing companies is to clearly define the objectives, messages, and target audiences that the event aims to reach. Consequently, they should seek celebrities not only domestically but also internationally whose fan communities have similar characteristics to the event. Once the appropriate authentic celebrity is selected, leveraging social media to increase the audience's intention to attend the event is essential.

5.3 Limitations and future research

This study acknowledges its limitations and outlines future research directions. First, the experimental study was limited to Vietnam's event industry, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings due to regional differences and industrial standards. Consequently, the results and implications of the current study should be applied with caution in other contexts. It is also essential for future studies to validate these findings across diverse cultural settings and larger participant pools to enhance their applicability. Exploring celebrity endorsement for events from an international follower perspective could offer valuable insights.

Second, the methodology employed, which includes both paper-based and online surveys along with structural equation modeling, may limit the generalizability of its findings, especially due to response biases linked to self-reported data and its regional focus on Vietnam. Future research should consider these factors when interpreting results and may benefit from conducting longitudinal or mixed-method studies to improve generalizability.

Third, as research on the celebrity endorsement process for events evolves, there necessitates additional moderating variables. For instance, demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status, and occupation, as well as segmentation of events, could influence this endorsement process. Moreover, cultural elements like ethnocentric tendencies may shape how followers perceive and connect with different celebrities.

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