



Print ISSN: 1738-3110 / Online ISSN 2093-7717
 JDS website: <http://accesson.kr/jds>
<http://doi.org/10.15722/jds.23.03.202503.101>

Coach Park Hang-seo's Celebrity Endorser Characteristics and Their Impacts on Korean Product Image and Affective and Behavioral Commitment: A Case in Vietnam Distribution Market

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Received: January 27, 2025. Revised: February 16, 2025. Accepted: March 05, 2025.

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the impact of celebrity (coach Park Hang-seo) endorser characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, expertise, similarity, and credibility) on Korean product image and on affective and behavioral commitments in the context of the Vietnamese distribution market. **Research design, data, and methodology:** Data were collected from 379 respondents and analyzed with SPSS 28.0 and SmartPLS 4.0. **Results:** The findings reveal that (1) attractiveness and expertise positively influence Korean product image, while similarity and attractiveness does not; (2) both attractiveness and expertise positively influence affective commitment, with similarity and attractiveness having no significant effect; (3) product image positively influences affective and behavioral commitment; (4) affective commitment positively influences behavioral commitment; (5) gender moderates the relationships between trustworthiness and affective commitment, as well as expertise and product image. **Conclusions:** The findings support Celebrity Endorsement Theory, Source Attractiveness Model, and Source Credibility Model, emphasizing the importance of celebrity endorser characteristics in distribution strategies to enhance product image, affective commitment, and behavioral commitment. The study also addresses a significant gap in research by highlighting the role of gender in celebrity endorsement effectiveness. In addition, the findings suggest that targeting specific consumer groups based on celebrity endorser characteristics can optimize distribution strategies.

Keywords : Celebrity endorser characteristics, product image, affective commitment, behavioral commitment

JEL Classification Code: D91, F10, M31

1. Introduction

As the role of athletes and coaches in sports distribution marketing is increasingly recognized, celebrity advertising plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, with vivid advertisements significantly influencing consumer behavior (Choi et al., 2005). The effectiveness of celebrity

endorsements is particularly pronounced in a distribution setting, where visual and emotional cues are key drivers of consumer decision-making (Schimmelpfennig & Hunt, 2020). The advent of social media has further amplified the impact of celebrity endorsements, making them increasingly relevant in contemporary distribution marketing strategies (Geng et al., 2020). The integration of celebrities into

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advertising campaigns is widely known as a global marketing strategy for enhancing product and brand image (Kim et al., 2018; White et al., 2009).

Celebrity Endorsement Theory explains that endorsements have a positive influence on consumer evaluations and behaviors (Choi & Rifon, 2012). Such endorsements improve brand image (Chan et al., 2013), encourage purchases, and foster loyalty in the distribution sector (Lee et al., 2020). In Vietnam, the Korean Wave has facilitated the enhancement of brand image through celebrity endorsements, leveraging cultural identification and emotional resonance (Singh & Banerjee, 2018).

Product image represents how consumers psychologically perceive a product (Keller, 1993; Ogba & Tan, 2009). Coach Park Hang-seo's endorsement has improved Korea's country and product image among Vietnamese consumers, especially where retail and distribution decisions are key. Celebrity endorsements build credibility and boost customer satisfaction, leading to repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth (Jun et al., 2023). Attractive celebrities enhance brand, product, and country images (Sirgy, 1982), supporting the Self-Reference Theory, which highlights the importance of aligning a consumer's self-image with a celebrity's attributes (Marshall & Deuskar, 2008). As a cultural link between Korea and Vietnam, Coach Park Hang-seo stands out not only as a successful coach of Vietnam's national football team but also as a prominent representative of Korea to the Vietnamese. According to Jeong (2019), 98.5% of Vietnamese respondents recognized Korea due to Park Hang-seo's influence, with 73.8% expressing a favorable view of Korea—an increase attributed to his tenure with the team. His success supports Singh and Banerjee's (2018) argument that cultural identification and emotional resonance through celebrity endorsements can effectively enhance a nation's image.

Whether they are active athletes or retired professionals turned coaches, these figures are appealing endorsers because of their expertise, credibility, and inspirational qualities. Studies show that they enhance marketing persuasiveness by fostering trust and emotional resonance (Erdogan, 1999; Arai et al., 2014). For example, NBA coach Phil Jackson and Real Madrid's Zinedine Zidane not only excelled in coaching but also positively influenced brand and product perceptions through endorsements. Similarly, David Beckham's shift from athlete to cultural ambassador highlights the broad impact of sports celebrities across industries (Kim et al., 2018). Thus, sports retail and distribution strategies gain from utilizing celebrity athlete endorsements.

Recent research has also highlighted gender differences in advertising effectiveness, especially in the context of sports celebrity endorsements. Studies reveal significant differences in how male and female consumers perceive

endorsers and interpret advertising messages (Choi & Rifon, 2012). Male consumers prioritize endorsers' expertise and athletic performance, while female consumers are more influenced by trustworthiness and emotional resonance (Arai et al., 2014; Saini & Parayitam, 2020). Furthermore, gender role stereotypes depicted in distribution advertisements can significantly affect purchasing intentions (Koay & Lim, 2024). In sports retail & distribution, the unequal media attention and stereotypical portrayals of male and female athletes further contribute to these gender differences (Schartel Dunn & Nisbett, 2023). These findings provide a theoretical foundation for understanding gender dynamics in sports celebrity advertising and underscore the need for tailored marketing strategies. Despite the growing interest in sports celebrity endorsements, research focusing on soccer coaches remains limited (Bardocz-Bencsik, Begović, & Dóczi, 2021; Schartel Dunn & Nisbett, 2023).

This study centers on Coach Park Hang-seo in Vietnam, examining how celebrity attributes—attractiveness, expertise, similarity, and credibility—affect product image, affective commitment, and behavioral commitment in retail & distribution contexts. By integrating Celebrity Endorsement Theory (McCracken, 1989), the Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990), and the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire, 1985), this study highlights the mechanisms through which celebrity endorsements shape consumer perceptions. By constructing a comprehensive model, this research addresses existing gaps in understanding gender differences in endorsement effectiveness and offers practical strategies for leveraging celebrity endorsements in distribution contexts. In addition, the results of this study can help improve or establish distribution strategies that can help shape consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior by leveraging the attributes of celebrities like Coach Park Hang-seo.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theories: Celebrity Endorsement Theory, Source Attractiveness Model, and Source Credibility Model

Celebrity Endorsement Theory suggests that celebrities boost brand and product images through their social influence and public image (McCracken, 1989; Tian et al., 2022). McCracken (1989) emphasizes that the power of celebrity endorsement comes from the cultural symbolism tied to celebrities, where their traits are transferred to the brand, creating perceptions and emotional connections with consumers. Studies show that celebrity endorsements significantly affect brand awareness, image building, and consumer purchase decisions (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Erdogan, 1999). In Vietnam's retail and distribution market, Coach

Park Hang-seo, as a recognized public figure, is vital in shaping the image of Korean products and enhancing consumers' emotional ties through his role as an advertising model.

The Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990; Yoo & Jin, 2018) highlights how an advertising model's expertise and trustworthiness greatly influence consumer trust. Expertise is the model's knowledge and skills relevant to the field, while trustworthiness represents their honesty and reliability. Research indicates that trustworthy ad models boost consumer trust in products and support positive brand evaluations (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Priyankara et al., 2017). In this context, Coach Park Hang-seo, a notable figure in his field, has built Vietnamese consumers' trust in Korean products through his coaching experience and achievements, enhancing the image of Korean products in Vietnam's retail and distribution market.

The frameworks provide a robust foundation for this study. The Source Attractiveness Model explains how the attractiveness and similarity of advertising models influence consumer behavior through emotional resonance, while the Source Credibility Model highlights the critical roles of expertise and trustworthiness in enhancing consumer trust and brand image. Related studies indicate that these two models can be effectively applied to improve advertising outcomes (Erdogan, 1999; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This study analyzes Coach Park Hang-seo's attributes as an advertising model and explores how he enhances Vietnamese distribution consumers' emotional and behavioral commitment to Korean products while also examining the application of these models in cross-cultural markets.

Furthermore, celebrity endorsements play significant roles in building emotional connection which is crucial in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors. Such emotional connections arise when consumers relate to the celebrity's values, personality, or lifestyle, sparking positive emotions and forming an attachment to the brand. This bond can result in increased brand loyalty and a more robust emotional link to the endorsed product or service (Thomson et al., 2005). In culturally diverse markets such as Vietnam, where a consumer's emotional connection with a celebrity can help bridge cultural differences, the celebrity's image plays an essential role in nurturing emotional connections through feelings of familiarity and trust. The warm and approachable image of Coach Park Hang-seo can foster emotional connection or bonding with consumers, making them feel like they are relating to someone they trust. This connection, in turn, enhances their behavioral commitment to the brand.

2.2.1. Attractiveness

Attractiveness is commonly defined as the ability to capture the attention of others, reflected in an individual's

external image that elicits favorable responses and attitudes (Morrow & Wilson, 1990). It is a crucial factor in shaping consumer attitudes toward advertising, significantly influencing the formation of purchasing intentions (Gilal et al., 2020; Sallam & Wahid, 2012). When consumers perceive celebrity advertising models as having appealing qualities, they are more likely to connect with these models and adopt their attitudes, behaviors, interests, or preferences. This concept is well explained by McCracken's (1989) Meaning Transfer Model, which highlights how celebrities transfer their symbolic meanings to the products they endorse. Moreover, research indicates a notable difference in perception: attractive individuals are often associated with positive personality traits, while unattractive individuals are viewed negatively (Sim et al., 2015).

2.2.2. Credibility

Credibility in the context of celebrity advertising models refers to the perceived honesty, integrity, and dependability of the celebrity by the target audience. It encompasses the likelihood that the model will fulfill the promises made by the associated brand (Arai et al., 2014; Ohanian, 1990). Credibility is a key determinant of trust, reflecting qualities that can influence consumer beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors (Liu & Brock, 2011). Research has shown that brand credibility not only impacts consumers' brand choices but also moderates their sensitivity to price (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Wang et al., 2017). Hovland (1953) emphasized that credibility involves consumers' belief in the model's relevant skills, knowledge, and experience, as well as their ability to provide information in an objective and unbiased manner, with core dimensions being truthfulness and expertise. According to the Source Credibility Model (Gong & Li, 2017), a celebrity endorser perceived as knowledgeable and trustworthy is more effective in influencing consumers than one lacking these qualities.

2.2.3. Expertise

Expertise in celebrity advertising models refers to the critical knowledge, experience, or skills required to successfully promote a product (Priyankara et al., 2017). A strong alignment between a celebrity's perceived expertise and the product they endorse has been shown to boost purchase intentions by increasing consumer confidence in the product's quality (Kim et al., 2018). Daneshvary and Schwer (2000) further highlight that expertise is a vital trait for influencers to achieve success, recognition, and credibility, making them reliable sources of information for their followers. Similarly, McCracken (1989) defines expertise as specific skills, knowledge, or abilities relevant to the endorsed brand, underscoring its role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions.

Similarly, McCormick (2016) found that celebrity influence has a powerful impact on the millennial market.

2.2.4. Similarity

Similarity refers to the quality that fosters a sense of affinity toward individuals who share common traits or characteristics. The stronger this perceived similarity, the more effective communication becomes, leading to a more impactful delivery of information by the message source (Coulter & Coulter, 2003). Shared interests and lifestyles between consumers and celebrities foster deeper interpersonal connections (Erdogan, 1999; Dwivedi & McDonald, 2016). Research has shown that when consumers perceive that a message or source is similar to theirs in terms of age, gender, lifestyle, and background, they develop a favorable attitude toward it, are persuaded by the message or source, and have a higher intention to purchase (Pentina et al., 2018). People naturally gravitate toward those they perceive as similar significantly affecting communication dynamics (Kwak & Kim, 2004). Ho et al. (2020) found that celebrity endorsements greatly impact young consumers' intentions to purchase local fashion brands in Vietnam, with perceived similarity playing a key role in shaping their buying decisions. This sense of similarity is especially important in celebrity endorsements, where sponsors who share demographic traits with the target audience are often viewed as more authentic and persuasive (Kamins & Gupta, 1994).

2.3. Product Image

Product images have been integral to marketing since the 1950s, referring to the psychological characteristics of a product, including its attributes, functions, and overall meaning (Workman, 1998; Brakus & Zhang, 2014). They are also known as trademark images, reflecting the audience's perceptions of a specific product or brand. For example, in the television industry, the product image focuses on specific features and functionality, while the brand image conveys the overall perception and emotional appeal of a company's branded TV (Keller, 1993). A product combines both tangible and intangible elements—such as packaging, color, design, price, the manufacturer's reputation, retail image, and service—positioning itself as a provider that meets consumers' needs and preferences (Kotler, 2003).

In the context of distribution tourism, when a celebrity promotes a destination in advertisements, fans who strongly identify with the celebrity are more likely to form a positive image of the destination and respond favorably to the message (Lee & Jeong, 2023).

2.4. Affective and Behavioral Commitment

2.4.1. Affective Commitment

Affective commitment is a psychological construct characterized by a strong desire to maintain a connection, fostering loyalty, a sense of belonging, and enjoyment with another entity (Bansal et al., 2004; Lai, 2015). In marketing, affective commitment reflects the extent to which individuals are motivated to maintain a relational bond with a particular brand or organization (Geyskens et al., 1996; Aurier & N'goala, 2010). This dimension of commitment significantly influences trust, intimacy, positive word-of-mouth communication, and loyalty (Liu & Mattila, 2015), helping to build strong consumer relationships (Fournier, 1998). A customer's affective commitment to a brand not only enhances external perceptions (Harrison-Walker, 2001) but also encourages positive word-of-mouth behavior. Moreover, it has a stronger impact on loyalty than mere customer satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2006). In addition, Reydet and Carsana (2017) found that affective commitment is a determinant of attitudinal loyalty in retail banking context.

Affective commitment is vital in fostering behavioral commitment (Hwang et al., 2021) and loyalty (Kim, 2018) by strengthening consumer attachment to a brand. When emotional connection or bonds are established, consumers are more inclined to make sacrifices and exert effort, even in the absence of immediate rewards.

2.4.2. Behavioral Commitment

Behavioral commitment is defined as the consumers' strong willingness to maintain their relationship with a brand, even when it necessitates sacrifice and sustained effort (Mercade et al., 2018). While affective commitment reflects a positive emotional connection, behavioral commitment has a more direct and powerful impact on behavioral loyalty. It plays a crucial role in driving brand-support behaviors and brand advocacy, even in the absence of immediate purchase intentions (Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004). Behavioral commitment is characterized by the willingness to continue a transactional relationship based on evaluations of gains and losses, including factors like price advantages, profits, and switching costs (Meyer & Allen, 1984). This form of commitment also involves active engagement, requiring the allocation of resources to maintain the relationship (Sharma et al., 2006).

2.5. Influence of Coach Park Hang-seo in Vietnam

Coach Park Hang-seo and the Vietnamese national football team have garnered significant attention, not only within Vietnam but also in various international publications. Coach Park has further contributed to this discourse by

authoring a book that delves into the impact of the Vietnamese national football team on the populace, presenting it as a subject of scholarly investigation (Yoo et al., 2018a; Yoo et al., 2018b). His influence has notably enhanced the perception of Korea and Koreans among the Vietnamese population (Jeong, 2019). A survey conducted by 'Hankook Ilbo' and 'The Korea Times' aimed at assessing changes in Vietnam's perception of Korea following the 'Park Hang-seo craze' revealed that 98.5% of 1,000 Vietnamese respondents were aware of Park Hang-seo, with 73.8% expressing a favorable view towards Korea. This marks a substantial improvement from the initial survey in December 2017, where 61% of respondents reported feeling a cultural affinity with Korean culture, affirming a notable enhancement in Korea's image within a year (Jeong, 2019).

2.6. Hypotheses

2.6.1 Relationship between Celebrity Endorser Characteristics and Product Image

According to Ohanian (1990), a celebrity's role in endorsing a product is believed to serve a dual purpose: positively influencing both the product's overall image and its sales performance. Additionally, the perceived comparative distinctiveness of the endorsed product relative to other brands in the market is a noteworthy aspect of this dynamic. For this study, though coach Park Hang-seo does not represent a particular brands or product, his influence can be viewed as a celebrity advocate for Korean products in retail & distribution.

Studies on the impact of social media influencers on the brand image of cosmetics in the Indonesian market have revealed that celebrity endorsements positively influence brand perception (Isyanto et al., 2020). Similarly, Chan et al. (2021) analyzed various characteristics of celebrity endorsers—such as credibility, attractiveness, familiarity, and product congruence—and found that these factors significantly enhance brand image. Together, these findings highlight the crucial role of well-aligned celebrity endorsements in strengthening a brand's image and appeal to consumers, and facilitating success in retail and distribution channels.

Lou and Yuan (2019) illuminated that the advertising value of influencers, encompassing trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, along with informational value and similarity, bestows credibility upon influencer-branded content. Research indicates that the attractiveness of an individual positively influences the perceived image of a product (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Lien et al., 2012). According to the Source Credibility Model, physically appealing celebrities have a stronger influence on shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviors compared to less attractive ones (Gong & Li, 2017). Furthermore, it has been

suggested that an attractive person may exhibit a better impression within the interpersonal dynamics of distribution compared to an individual perceived as less attractive (Reingen & Kernan, 1993).

Additionally, Ohanian (1991) asserted that, beyond attractiveness and sincerity, the expertise of a well-known figure is crucial in gauging and persuading consumers' purchase intentions. The demonstrated significance of a celebrity's expertise, rooted in professional knowledge and experience, underscores its pivotal role in shaping consumers' perspective and attitude, including purchase intentions (Ohanian, 1991).

Based on previous studies, we hypothesize that:

- H1:** Attractiveness (H1a), Expertise (H1b), Similarity (H1c), and Trustworthiness (H1d) of celebrity endorser will positively influence product image.
- H2:** Attractiveness (H2a), Expertise (H2b), Similarity (H2c), and Trustworthiness (H2d) of celebrity endorser will positively influence affective commitment.

2.6.2. Relationship between Product Image and Commitment

Commitment is an important concept frequently used in management and marketing, reflecting consistent engagement in certain activities such as purchasing products to maintain relationships with a particular brand or product. Numerous researchers have demonstrated the association between product image and consumer will. For example, Richard and Zhang (2012) stated that product images determine the likelihood that consumers will engage with products, especially those characterized by unique and differentiated features (e.g., design, trademark, color, and quality) will further strengthen the engagement and commitment of loyal consumers compared to low-cost product images. In particular, product image plays a crucial role in influencing consumer commitment within retail & distribution contexts, as the distinctiveness of a product can enhance its appeal and customer retention in these channels (Atwal et al., 2012). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

- H3:** Product image will positively influence affective commitment.
- H4:** Product images will positively influence behavioral commitment.

2.6.3. Relationship between Affective Commitment and Behavioral Commitment

Affective commitment is a crucial factor that significantly influences trust and intimacy, thereby fostering a strong relationship with consumers (Fournier, 1998; Liu & Mattila, 2015). A customer's affective commitment to a brand or company influence others' perceptions (Harrison-

Walker, 2001), and has a positive effect on word-of-mouth behavior (Johnson et al., 2006). On the other hand, behavioral commitment plays a key role in encouraging brand support and advocacy, even when it does not result in purchase behavior (Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004).

Affective commitment refers to desire and emotion, while behavioral commitment relates to current behavior, commitment, and satisfaction (Becker, 1960; Gundlach et al. 1995; Kell & Motowidlo, 2012). Affective commitment affects behavioral commitment, and an increase in affective commitment due to the provision of core quality—comprising high-level products and services—may serve as a transition barrier to enhance behavioral commitment and encourage continued patronage (Lee et al., 2008). Hwang et al. (2021) explained whether consumer's current actual behavior, commitment, and sacrifice will be short-term or continuous depending on affective or behavioral commitment. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H5: Affective commitment will positively influence behavioral commitment.

2.7. Moderating Role of Gender

Gender serves as a crucial segmentation variable, as males and females exhibit distinct values, perspectives, actions, and inclinations. The differing socialization processes of males and females result in unique social behaviors (Li et al., 2024; Lin & Wang, 2020). According to Social Role Theory, males typically display traits associated with masculinity, such as greater self-confidence, risk-taking, and a pragmatic, performance-oriented approach, while females tend to be more risk-averse, resource-conscious, and socially oriented, valuing interpersonal and affective aspects (Zhou et al., 2014; Eagly & Wood, 1991). Gender is recognized as a significant differentiating factor, both academically and practically. Studies confirm these gender differences in areas such as relationship marketing, social media use, mobile commerce, and pro-environmental behavior (Lim et al., 2021). Reducing the gender gap is expected to drive business growth (Liu et al., 2019).

Gender plays a crucial role in moderating the perception of celebrity endorsements in advertising. Research shows that gender significantly influences how celebrity trust and credibility are viewed (Saini, 2020). In sports, gender affects the effectiveness of various aspects of an athlete's appeal: success and personality have a greater impact for male athletes, while athlete-product similarity is less influential (Frank & Mitsumoto, 2023).

Moreover, gender acts as a moderating variable in the relationship between expertise, attractiveness, and cognitive commitment towards influencers (Li et al., 2024). Singh (2022) explored the role of celebrity credibility in building

trust and loyalty towards financial service providers, highlighting the gender differences in the effectiveness of various types of celebrities as endorsers. Aligning with the broader literature, recent studies suggest that gender moderates the relationship between celebrity attributes and product image, with marketing actions such as celebrity endorsements playing a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and addressing gender-based stereotypes (Koay & Lim, 2024). Understanding these gender-based differences is essential for marketers and advertisers aiming to optimize the impact of their campaigns and effectively reach diverse consumer segments. Therefore, we hypothesize the following.

H6: Gender will moderate the relationships between celebrity endorser characteristics (attractiveness, credibility, expertise, and similarity) and product image, and affective commitment.

Based on the hypotheses, we propose the model in Figure 1.

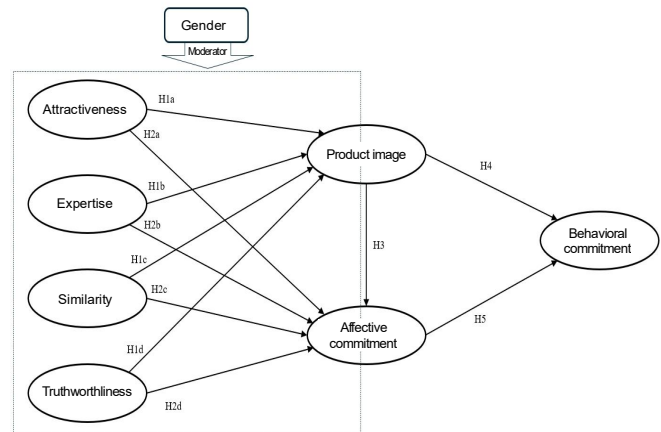


Figure 1: Proposed Model

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and Data Collection

To assess the wording, ambiguity, and potential biases of the items, a pre-test was conducted with 20 fans of Coach Park Hang-seo. Feedback from this pre-test was used to refine the questionnaire. In addition, two bilingual reviewers fluent in both English and Vietnamese evaluated the modified items for appropriateness, readability, and clarity, leading to minor adjustments based on their review results. Data were collected from 410 Vietnamese residents who consented to participate in the survey, facilitated by an

online survey company. However, 31 responses were excluded due to concerns regarding insincerity, resulting in a final sample of 379 responses. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirement of 385 for a 95% confidence level and 5% sampling error. The data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS 4.0 programs, employing a simple random sampling method.

3.2. Measures

All constructs were measured using multiple items based on previous studies that employed a 5-point Likert scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree) (see Table 2). The four celebrity attributes were assessed using modified items from prior research: attractiveness (8 items, Lee & Chung, 1997 (2 items); Ohanian, 1990 (5 items)), expertise (5 items, Ohanian, 1990), similarity (4 items, Coulter & Coulter, 2003; Doney & Cannon, 1997), trustworthiness (5 items, Ohanian, 1990). Product image was measured using 6 items adopted from Wang et al. (2012). Affective commitment (3 items) and behavioral commitment (2 items) were measured using items modified and adopted from Gutiérrez et al. (2004) and Hwang et al. (2021).

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Characteristics of the Sample

As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of slightly more male (53.9%) than female (46.1%) respondents. The largest age group was individuals in their 20s (36.8%), followed by the 30s (30.7%) and 40s (21.1%). The sample also included a slightly higher proportion of married individuals (53.9%) compared to single individuals (46.1%). The average monthly income reported was 16-20M VND (31.2%). In terms of occupation, students comprised the largest group (29.2%), followed by management/office workers (15.6%) and engineering/production professionals (12.3%).

Table 1: Profiles of Respondents

| Demographics | Frequency | % |
|--------------|-----------|------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 214 | 53.9 |
| Female | 183 | 46.1 |
| Age | | |
| Below 20 | 45 | 11.3 |
| 21-25 | 89 | 22.4 |
| 26-30 | 57 | 14.4 |
| 31-35 | 70 | 17.6 |

| Demographics | Frequency | % |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------|
| 36-40 | 52 | 13.1 |
| 41-45 | 49 | 12.3 |
| 46-50 | 35 | 8.8 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Unmarried | 183 | 46.1 |
| Married | 214 | 53.9 |
| Average Monthly income | | |
| Below 5M VND | 72 | 18.1 |
| 6~9M VND | 69 | 17.4 |
| 10~15M VND | 68 | 17.1 |
| 16~20M VND | 124 | 31.2 |
| Over 20M VND | 64 | 16.1 |
| Occupation | | |
| Students | 116 | 29.2 |
| Management/Office worker | 62 | 15.6 |
| Sales/service | 44 | 11.1 |
| Engineering/production | 49 | 12.3 |
| Official | 43 | 10.8 |
| Specialist(lawyer, accountant ...) | 30 | 7.6 |
| Self-employed | 34 | 8.6 |
| Others | 19 | 4.8 |

4.2. Measurement Model

Trustworthiness and validity assessments were conducted using a measurement model with SmartPLS 4.0 program (Ha & Yoo, 2024; Wang et al., 2022). As indicated in Table 2, the values for Cronbach's α and composite reliability exceeded the standard threshold of 0.7, confirming the internal consistency and convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model. The factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the 0.5 cut-off point, confirming convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 shows that the square root of AVE was greater than the correlation coefficients, providing evidence of discriminant validity. Furthermore, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios, which reflect the heterogeneity and homogeneity of the correlation coefficients, were below 0.9 threshold, further confirming discriminant validity. Normality was established, as the kurtosis (-0.877 to 1.954) and skewness (-1.161 to -0.049) values fell below the absolute thresholds of 9.0 and 2.0, respectively.

Table 2: Measurement Model Analysis

| Constructs and items | Standardized factor loadings | Cronbach's alpha | Composite reliability | AVE ^a |
|---|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Attractiveness | | 0.930 | 0.945 | 0.741 |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is attractive | 0.844 | - | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is classy | 0.790 | | | |
| I have a good feeling for Coach Park-Hang seo | 0.887 | | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is intimate | 0.908 | | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is charming | 0.889 | | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is glamorous [#] | | | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is sexy [#] | | | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is elegant | 0.842 | | | |
| Expertise | | 0.926 | 0.948 | 0.819 |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is expert | 0.910 | | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is knowledgeable | 0.911 | | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is skilled | 0.910 | | | |
| Coach Park-Hang seo is experienced person | 0.889 | | | |
| Similarity | | 0.919 | 0.942 | 0.803 |
| Coach Park Hang-seo has something in common with me | 0.887 | | | |
| Coach Park Hang-seo has similarities with me. | 0.924 | | | |
| Coach Park Hang-seo's mindset is similar to mine | 0.913 | | | |
| Coach Park Hang-seo's lifestyle is similar to mine | 0.858 | | | |
| Trustworthiness | | 0.937 | 0.960 | 0.888 |
| I think Coach Park Hang-seo is honest. | 0.913 | | | |
| Coach Park Hang-seo is reliable | 0.963 | | | |
| I think Coach Park Hang-seo is diligent | 0.950 | | | |
| Coach Park Hang-seo is sincere [#] | | | | |
| Coach Park Hang-seo is reliable [#] | | | | |
| Product Image | | 0.893 | 0.926 | 0.757 |
| Korean products were well made. I think it has a great craftsmanship | 0.881 | | | |
| I think Korean products are generally of higher quality than those made in other countries. | 0.856 | | | |
| I think Korean products have a high level of technology | 0.870 | | | |
| I think Korean products have good color and design. [#] | | | | |
| I think Korean products are generally very reliable | 0.874 | | | |
| I think Korean products generally have great value compared to the purchase cost. [#] | | | | |
| Affective commitment | | 0.875 | 0.923 | 0.800 |
| I am affectively attached to Korean products. | 0.894 | | | |
| Korean products are personally meaningful to me. | 0.889 | | | |
| I feel a strong sense of unity with Korean products. | 0.901 | | | |
| Behavioral commitment | | 0.838 | 0.925 | 0.860 |
| Among the products I have used in the past one year, the percentage of Korean products purchased is high. | 0.933 | | | |
| Among the products I purchased over the past one year, the proportion of the amount I spent on purchasing Korean products is high | 0.922 | | | |
| ^a Average variance extracted | | | | |
| [#] Items are deleted during the measurement model analysis. | | | | |

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker Criterion/HTMT

| Constructs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Attractiveness | 0.861 | | | | | | |
| 2. Expertise | 0.447/0.484 | 0.905 | | | | | |
| 3. Similarity | 0.148/0.155 | 0.121/0.129 | 0.896 | | | | |

| Constructs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 4. Trustworthiness | 0.599/0.643 | 0.580/0.623 | 0.126/0.122 | 0.943 | | | |
| 5. Product image | 0.302/0.331 | 0.285/0.311 | 0.110/0.121 | 0.321/0.348 | 0.870 | | |
| 6. Affective commitment | 0.401/0.436 | 0.383/0.425 | 0.124/0.133 | 0.327/0.359 | 0.423/0.477 | 0.895 | |
| 7. Behavioral commitment | 0.277/0.308 | 0.279/0.316 | 0.042/0.074 | 0.227/0.255 | 0.391/0.450 | 0.602/0.703 | 0.927 |

The diagonal elements (in bold) represent the square root of the variance shared between the constructs and their measures (AVE). The off-diagonal elements indicate the correlations among the constructs. For discriminant validity, the diagonal elements should be greater than the off-diagonal ones. All coefficients are significant at the $p = 0.001$ level.

4.3. Common method Bias Assessment

To address common method bias, both procedural and statistical approaches were employed, following the methodology outlined by Wang et al. (2022). Three procedural techniques were utilized to mitigate potential biases. The first technique involved conducting a pre-test, during which we modified wording, phrases, and sentences to reduce ambiguity and improve clarity. The second technique consisted of informing respondents about the purpose of the study to increase their awareness and engagement. The third technique entailed altering the order of the independent variables, mediators, and dependent variables to prevent respondents from deducing the relationships among them.

For the statistical assessment, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined against the threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015; Wang et al., 2022). The VIF values obtained in our analysis ranged from 1.825 to 2.997, all of which were below 3.3. Consequently, common method bias was not considered a significant concern for this study.

4.4. Structural Model Assessment

The structural model fit was evaluated using SmartPLS 4.0 based on several key criteria (Wang et al., 2022). First, all VIF values were below 3.3, indicating that multicollinearity among constructs was not an issue. Second, as shown in Table 4, the structural model demonstrated reliable predictive power, with the variance explained (R^2)

values exceeding 10%. Third, the cross-validated redundancy Stone–Geisser's Q^2 values were greater than zero, confirming the model's predictive relevance (see Table 4). Finally, the model fit was deemed satisfactory, as the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value was below the 0.085 threshold.

5. Hypotheses Testing

5.1. Main Effect test

As shown in Table 5 (Model 1), the results indicate that attractiveness ($\beta = 0.145, p < 0.05$), expertise ($\beta = 0.124, p < 0.05$), and trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.155, p < 0.05$) positively influence product image, supporting H1a, H1b, and H1d. However, similarity does not influence on product image ($\beta = 0.054, p > 0.05$), not supporting H1c. The findings further reveal that both attractiveness ($\beta = 0.231, p < 0.01$) and expertise ($\beta = 0.208, p < 0.01$) positively influence affective commitment, supporting H2a and H2b. Conversely, similarity ($\beta = 0.035, p > 0.05$) and trustworthiness ($\beta = -0.033, p > 0.05$) do not significantly influence on affective commitment, failing to support H1c and H1d. Additionally, the findings show that product image positively influences both affective ($\beta = 0.301, p < 0.01$) and behavioral ($\beta = 0.166, p < 0.01$) commitment, supporting H3 and H4. Lastly, affective commitment positively influences behavioral commitment ($\beta = 0.532, p < 0.01$) commitment, supporting H5.

Table 4 Structural Estimates (PLS)

| | Paths | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|-----|--|----------|-------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| | | Estimate | t | p | Estimate | t | p |
| | Main effects | | | | | | |
| H1a | Attractiveness → Product image | 0.145 | 2.529 | 0.012 * | 0.171 | 2.337 | 0.019 * |
| H1b | Expertise → Product image | 0.124 | 1.977 | 0.049 * | 0.243 | 2.627 | 0.009 ** |
| H1c | Similarity → Product image | 0.054 | 0.975 | 0.330 | 0.114 | 1.545 | 0.122 |
| H1d | Trustworthiness → Product image | 0.155 | 2.199 | 0.028 * | -0.097 | 0.926 | 0.355 |
| H2a | Attractiveness → Affective commitment | 0.231 | 4.124 | 0.000 ** | 0.241 | 3.248 | 0.001 ** |
| H2b | Expertise → Affective commitment | 0.208 | 3.749 | 0.000 ** | 0.234 | 2.962 | 0.003 ** |
| H2c | Similarity → Affective commitment | 0.035 | 0.763 | 0.446 | 0.029 | 0.449 | 0.653 |
| H2d | Trustworthiness → Affective commitment | -0.033 | 0.516 | 0.606 | -0.109 | 1.162 | 0.245 |

| | Paths | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|----------------------------|---|----------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------------|----------|
| | | Estimate | t | p | Estimate | t | p |
| H3 | Product image → Affective commitment | 0.301 | 6.285 | 0.000 ** | 0.294 | 5.850 | 0.000 ** |
| H4 | Product image → Behavioral commitment | 0.166 | 3.599 | 0.000 ** | 0.166 | 3.577 | 0.000 ** |
| H5 | Affective commitment → Behavioral commitment | 0.532 | 12.117 | 0.000 ** | 0.532 | 12.316 | 0.000 ** |
| Interaction effects | | | | | | | |
| | Gender → Product image | | | | -0.129 | 1.310 | 0.190 |
| | Gender → Affective commitment | | | | 0.061 | 0.690 | 0.490 |
| | Gender x Trustworthiness → Product image | | | | 0.431 | 2.939 | 0.003 ** |
| | Gender x Trustworthiness → Affective commitment | | | | 0.176 | 1.287 | 0.198 |
| | Gender x Expertise → Product image | | | | -0.254 | 2.090 | 0.037 * |
| | Gender x Expertise → Affective commitment | | | | -0.068 | 0.596 | 0.551 |
| | Gender x Attractiveness → Product image | | | | -0.093 | 0.719 | 0.472 |
| | Gender x Attractiveness → Affective commitment | | | | -0.069 | 0.601 | 0.548 |
| | Gender x Similarity → Product image | | | | -0.097 | 0.940 | 0.347 |
| | Gender x Similarity → Affective commitment | | | | 0.038 | 0.417 | 0.677 |
| | | R ² | Q ² | | R ² | Q ² | |
| | Product image | 0.135 | 0.112 | | 0.163 | 0.108 | |
| | Affective commitment | 0.293 | 0.195 | | 0.297 | 0.185 | |
| | Behavioral commitment | 0.385 | 0.095 | | 0.386 | 0.096 | |
| | RMSEA | 0.051 | | | 0.050 | | |

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01; Gender (0 = Male, 1 = Female)

5.2. Interaction Effect Analysis of Gender

We examined the moderating effect of gender in the relationship between celebrity attributes and product image and affective commitment with SmartPLS 4.0. As shown in Table 4 (see Model 2), the impact of trustworthiness on product image was stronger for female consumers than male consumers. However, the influence of expertise on product image was more pronounced for male consumers.

These findings suggest that trustworthiness has a stronger positive effect on product image for female consumers, while expertise is more influential for male consumers. This differential impact can be explained through Social Role Theory, which suggests that male consumers tend to value attributes such as competence, expertise, and performance orientation, aligning with their pragmatic and goal-directed socialization (Eagly & Wood, 1991). Therefore, male consumers are more likely to be influenced by endorsers who exhibit high levels of expertise, as this resonates with their emphasis on knowledge, skills, and authority.

In contrast, female consumers often prioritize traits such as trustworthiness and affective trustworthiness, reflecting their greater focus on interpersonal and affective aspects in social and consumer interactions (Zhou et al., 2014). Thus, trustworthiness becomes a more critical attribute for female consumers when forming perceptions about a product endorsed by a celebrity. The differing impacts of trustworthiness and expertise on product image for male and

female consumers reflect the underlying gender differences in cognitive processing and value orientation, as suggested by Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 1991).

These insights imply that marketers should adopt gender-specific strategies when designing endorsement campaigns. For products targeting female audiences, emphasizing the trustworthiness of celebrity endorsers—highlighting their honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness—could enhance the product's appeal and strengthen consumer perceptions. Conversely, for products aimed at male consumers, leveraging celebrity endorsers who are perceived as experts in their field or who possess a high level of skill and competence may be more effective in shaping a positive product image.

6. Discussion and Implications

This study aims to establish effective celebrity distribution strategies by examining the relationships among celebrity attributes (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, similarity), Korean product image, and both affective and behavioral commitment in the Vietnamese distribution market. The findings of this study are summarized as follows:

First, among the four sub-variables of celebrity endorser characteristics, all four factors—attractiveness, expertise, similarity, and trustworthiness—were found to have a significant effect on product image. Second, while

attractiveness was shown to have a significant effect on affective commitment, the other three factors—expertise, similarity, and trustworthiness—did not demonstrate a significant impact. Third, product image positively influenced affective commitment after exposure to Coach Park Hang-seo, although it did not significantly affect behavioral commitment. Fourth, affective commitment was found to significantly influence behavioral commitment. These results align with previous studies in 2008, indicating that an increase in affective commitment correlates with a higher frequency and ratio of consumer product usage. This suggests that greater spending leads to a stronger desire to continue using the product.

The findings of this study provide distribution implications that by leveraging the impact of celebrity endorser attributes on product image, distributioners can strengthen consumers' affective commitment, thereby increasing repeat purchases and brand loyalty.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study integrates three major theories—Celebrity Endorsement Theory, the Source Attractiveness Model, and the Source Credibility Model—to present a comprehensive theoretical framework that analyzes the impact of celebrity attributes on product image, affective commitment, and behavioral commitment within distribution contexts.

First, Celebrity Endorsement Theory (McCracken, 1989) emphasizes the process through which the personal attributes and cultural meanings of a celebrity are transferred to a brand or product via advertising. Using Coach Park Hang-seo as a case study, this study demonstrates how celebrity endorsements enhance the image of Korean products through his widespread popularity and symbolic attributes. In distribution settings, such endorsements foster emotional connections between the target market and the perceived value of the product, further validating the theory's applicability in cross-cultural advertising. Previous research has shown that celebrity endorsements significantly increase brand awareness, strengthen affective connections between consumers and brands, and influence purchasing decisions (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Erdogan, 1999). In particular, in-store environments benefit from such endorsements, as they provide an immediate and persuasive influence on consumer decision-making.

Second, the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire, 1985) highlights the influence of a celebrity's attractiveness and similarity on consumer attitudes. This study empirically confirms that Coach Park Hang-seo's attractiveness positively impacts consumers' affective commitment, while his similarity to Vietnamese consumers plays a crucial role in strengthening their association with Korean products.

These findings support the model's core assertion that physical attractiveness and shared traits effectively foster emotional empathy. Additionally, other studies have reported that a celebrity's attractiveness significantly enhances advertising attention and persuasiveness, while cultural and lifestyle similarities greatly contribute to consumers' acceptance of advertisements (Osei, 2019). In distribution environments, these attributes enhance consumer interest in products and drive purchase decisions by increasing the emotional appeal of advertisements displayed in stores or on digital platforms.

Third, the Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990) emphasizes the critical role of a celebrity's expertise and trustworthiness in influencing consumer trust and product perception. This study demonstrates that Coach Park Hang-seo's expertise and trustworthy image significantly enhance Vietnamese consumers' trust in and perception of Korean products. These findings reinforce the model's core perspective that credible advertising models promote consumer trust and brand association. Supporting studies by Goldsmith et al. (2000) and Priyankara et al. (2017) further highlight the significant impact of a model's expertise and trustworthiness on consumers' purchase intentions and brand loyalty. In distribution contexts, where trust is often a decisive factor—especially for unfamiliar brands—credible celebrity endorsements significantly enhance the perceived value of products, increase foot traffic, and boost conversion rates.

By integrating these three theories, this study presents a comprehensive framework that connects various characteristics of advertising models to product-related outcomes (e.g., product image) and consumer behavioral responses (e.g., affective and behavioral commitment) within distribution contexts. This integrated approach deepens the understanding of the dynamic mechanisms of celebrity endorsements, particularly in distribution environments where visual and emotional stimuli play a significant role in influencing consumer behavior. For example, in-store advertising featuring celebrity endorsements can immediately capture consumer attention, evoke emotional engagement, and guide purchasing decisions.

Finally, this study addresses a research gap by exploring the application of sports celebrity endorsements in cross-cultural distribution markets. The findings demonstrate the effectiveness of utilizing sports figures to enhance brand image and national product perception while showcasing the potential for combining cultural frameworks with marketing strategies. In the distribution context, these results offer practical implications for designing compelling advertisements and managing consumer experiences, ultimately providing distributioners with effective tools to differentiate their offerings and enhance customer loyalty.

6.2. Managerial Implications

This study provides valuable insights for marketers and brand managers, offering empirical evidence for designing more targeted and culturally adaptive celebrity endorsement strategies in the Vietnamese distribution market. The findings reveal that Coach Park Hang-seo's attractiveness has a significant positive impact on the image of Korean products and affective commitment, while his expertise and trustworthiness have a more pronounced influence on product image. This suggests that distribution marketing campaigns targeting different objectives should emphasize different celebrity attributes. For instance, in promoting Korean products in distribution stores, a greater focus can be placed on celebrities' expertise and trustworthiness, while campaigns for product categories requiring stronger affective connections with consumers (such as food and cosmetics) should highlight their attractiveness.

The findings indicate that affective commitment has a significant positive effect on behavioral commitment, and product image indirectly influences behavioral commitment through affective commitment. This suggests that distribution strategies should prioritize enhancing consumers' emotional connection with the brand to drive purchasing behavior. For example, in-store promotions and digital advertising can leverage celebrities' approachable image to establish stronger affective connections with consumers, thereby strengthening their purchase intentions and brand loyalty. Retailers & distributors could further enhance the shopping experience by creating visual merchandising or promotional events featuring these celebrities' image to evoke emotional resonance at the point of sale.

The study shows that the high quality and technological image of Korean products are the main factors recognized by consumers in distribution environments. This positive product image not only enhances consumers' affective commitment but also indirectly drives behavioral commitment. Therefore, distribution campaigns should associate Coach Park Hang-seo or other celebrities with the "technological leadership" and "high quality" image of Korean products through in-store displays, promotional signage, and online advertising, thus strengthening consumer trust in the brand and reinforcing the premium positioning of Korean products within distribution outlets.

Significant gender differences in preferences for celebrity attributes were observed in distribution contexts: female consumers are more inclined towards endorsers' trustworthiness and affective resonance, while male consumers focus more on their expertise. Based on this result, advertising campaigns targeting female consumers (e.g., food or cosmetics) should highlight celebrities' warmth and family-oriented image through store-level

promotions and personalized digital campaigns. Conversely, campaigns targeting male consumers (e.g., technology or financial services) should emphasize their professional background and career achievements, aligning these attributes with the distribution environment to create tailored customer experiences.

Practical examples from this study highlight successful distribution strategies. For instance, Bibigo's use of Coach Park Hang-seo's family-oriented traits effectively gained female consumers' trust in grocery distribution chains, while Shinhan Bank's emphasis on his professional image attracted male consumers to its financial service offerings. Distributionors can integrate these approaches to design precise marketing plans based on product categories and target consumer segments. For example, grocery distributionors could emphasize affective appeal by promoting celebrities' approachable traits for holiday campaigns, while technology or electronics distributionors could underscore their expertise and professional image in product demonstrations or sales events.

Although certain campaigns, such as Lotte Mart's promotion, failed to significantly boost short-term sales, they notably strengthened female consumers' affective attachment, which enhanced long-term loyalty to Korean products. This finding underscores the importance of distribution campaigns that focus not only on immediate sales outcomes but also on fostering long-term loyalty by leveraging emotional resonance and delivering enduring brand value. could adopt loyalty programs or community-based initiatives that align with the celebrity's image to build a deeper emotional connection with consumers.

By integrating these findings, distributors can formulate more targeted marketing strategies to fully utilize the advantages of celebrity endorsements in the distribution context. These strategies can enhance the brand image and market performance of Korean products not only in the Vietnamese market but also in other global distribution markets. For instance, using culturally resonant in-store experiences, visual merchandising, and digital-to-physical marketing campaigns can amplify the impact of celebrity endorsements, driving consumer engagement and repeat purchases.

6.3. Limitations and Further Research Directions

The limitations and future research directions of this study are as follows. First, this study measured celebrity attributes using four dimensions—attractiveness, similarity, expertise, and credibility. However, future research should consider additional attributes such as likeability (Mishra et al., 2015) and personality (Pradhan et al., 2016) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of celebrity effects on consumer evaluations and responses. Despite this limitation,

the findings of this study contribute to the literature by demonstrating that attractiveness and expertise significantly impact product image and affective commitment, thus reinforcing and extending existing theories like the Source Attractiveness and Source Credibility Models.

Second, since the survey focused exclusively on Korean products endorsed by Coach Park Hang-seo, it may be challenging to generalize the results to all product categories. Future studies should explore other product types advertised by Coach Park Hang-seo to examine whether similar patterns of influence persist across different product contexts. Nevertheless, this study addresses a notable research gap by focusing on a sports coach—a relatively underexplored figure in endorsement literature—thereby enriching the understanding of celebrity endorsements beyond traditional domains dominated by athletes or entertainers.

Third, the sample for this study was limited to Hanoi and its surrounding areas, and it did not differentiate between respondents who are soccer enthusiasts and those who are not. Future research should expand the geographical scope and categorize respondents based on their interest in soccer to explore potential moderating effects. However, the current study provides valuable insights by highlighting the cross-cultural and gender-specific impacts of celebrity endorsements in a concentrated market, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on consumer behavior in emerging markets.

By addressing these limitations and demonstrating how the findings contribute to the existing literature, this study underscores the unique role of Coach Park Hang-seo as a cross-cultural celebrity endorser and offers actionable insights for both academia and practice.

[Conflicts of Interest Statement]

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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