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The Role of Brand Ambassadors in Shaping Brand Image and Driving Purchase Intentions: A Case Study in the Fashion Industry in Vietnam

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Abstract

This study delves into the significant role of brand ambassadors in shaping brand image and driving purchase intentions in the fashion industry. The validation process encompassed reliability assessments through Cronbach's Alpha, linear regression modeling, and T-tests. Data were gathered via structured questionnaires administered through direct interviews using convenience sampling, ensuring access and efficiency. Linear regression analysis was applied to the collected 279 observations. Results demonstrate that celebrity endorsement's credibility notably impacts brand image, and attractiveness plays a pivotal role in enhancing fashion corporate image. The congruence factor emerges as crucial in influencing brand ambassador efficacy. Additionally, credibility, attractiveness, and congruence significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions. A gender comparison showed differences in brand ambassador dimensions, with female consumers attributing higher scores. However, no significant difference in purchase intentions between genders was observed. The study underscores the importance of brand ambassadors in the fashion context and suggests avenues for future research to address the study's limitations.

Keywords: Brand ambassadors, brand image, purchase intentions, fashion industry, celebrity endorsement.

1. Introduction

Brand ambassadors have emerged as an increasingly vital communication tool for businesses, proving effective not only for large corporations but also for small enterprises. The term 'brand ambassador' is synonymous with other designations such as 'brand endorser' or 'celebrity endorsement'. Notably, the fashion industry has been at the forefront of enlisting prominent figures to serve as their emissaries. For instance, Nike entered a substantial 7-year, \$90 million contract with NBA sensation LeBron James (CNN Money, 2003), while Puma secured a partnership with Jamaican athlete Usain Bolt worth \$9 million annually (Badenhausen, 2012). More recently, even illustrious K-Pop group BLACKPINK has ventured into representing luxury fashion brands, with members Jisoo, Jennie, Rose, and Lisa each becoming the face of Dior, Chanel, Saint Laurent (YSL), and Celine respectively (Geddo, 2022). In the Vietnamese context, although the practice of luxury brands seeking representatives is not as widespread (Advertising Vietnam, 2021), a number of actresses have taken up roles as brand ambassadors

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for domestic fashion firms. For instance, in 2021, the well-known actress Ninh Duong Lan Ngoc became the representative for Sixdo (Sixdo, 2021), while Miss Vietnam Dang Thu Thao joined forces with Elise in the same capacity since 2021 (Tran, 2022). Using brand ambassadors to promote communication and branding activities is increasingly being applied by many brands, in order to increase customer attraction to the brand, contribute to building brand equity, and promote boost consumer intention towards the brand.

Despite a multitude of studies exploring the impact of brand ambassadors on brand image and purchase intentions (Ha, N. M., & Lam, N. H. (2019); Chin, P. N. et al. (2020); Brahim, C., Fatima Z. C., & Azaze-Azizi A. A. (2020); Aw, E. C.-X. et al. (2021)), relatively few have delved into this subject within the realm of the fashion industry. This is particularly relevant in the burgeoning economy of Vietnam, where celebrity endorsements have yet to garner significant scholarly attention. Therefore, this paper contributes to the understanding of how celebrity representation shapes brand image and purchase intent.

This study delves into the integral significance of four key indicators associated with brand ambassadors: credibility, expertise, attractiveness, and congruence. Understanding the pivotal role these factors play is paramount as they significantly enhance the impact of celebrity endorsements on both brand recall and consumer purchasing behavior. By investigating these elements, we aim to uncover insights that not only contribute to theoretical knowledge but also have practical implications for marketers and brand strategists. In essence, this study not only establishes a meaningful correlation between brand image and purchase intentions but also offers practical takeaways for industry professionals, positioning brand ambassadors as integral drivers in shaping consumer perceptions and behavior. As the fashion industry in Vietnam continues to evolve, our insights aim to inform strategic decisions that can positively impact brand success in this dynamic and competitive landscape.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Brand Ambassador

The utilization of brand ambassadors, while a costly endeavor, stands as a potent strategy adopted by companies to forge connections with their customer base and bolster sales figures. This approach, though not novel to both business proprietors and researchers, operates under a variety of terminologies, including 'brand endorser' or 'celebrity endorsement' (Wang and Hariandja, 2016). These individuals, recognized as the visage of the brand (Goutam, 2013), encompass notable personalities who publicly associate themselves with a product, service, or brand, thereby exemplifying a form of endorsement (Khatri, 2006). Fisher-Buttinger and Vallaster (2008) provided a comprehensive delineation in 2008, defining a brand ambassador as an individual who operates in representation of a brand, a role that can be undertaken by customers, celebrities, or employees.

In the modern digital milieu, the concept of brand endorsement has further burgeoned, encompassing an even more expansive array of roles. Lea-Greenwood (2017) elucidates five pivotal dimensions that encapsulate the essence of brand ambassadors: (1) Transference: This denotes the extent of support and willingness displayed by an individual to collaborate with a given brand; (2) Congruence: Referring to the compatibility of a selected celebrity with the brand's identity and ethos; (3) Credibility: This pertains to the degree of trust that consumers vest in the brand ambassador as a purveyor of information; (4) Attractiveness: This attribute encompasses a form of appeal that transcends physical appearance and resonates with consumers on a different level; (5) Power: Signifying the influence wielded by the brand

ambassador, capable of significantly impacting consumer purchasing behaviors.

As brand ambassadors operate as conduits between brands and their intended audience, their potency has escalated in the digital era, magnifying their significance in the realm of contemporary marketing strategies.

2.2. Brand Image

Definitions of brand image have been studied and developed since the 1950s (UKEsays, 2018). Scholars have studied and analyzed many factors affecting brand images, such as Country-of-Origin (Mandler et al., 2023; Hoang et al., 2022), brand positioning (Alzate et al., 2022; Mogaji et al., 2023), feelings (Quach et al., 2022), happiness after possessions (Zhang et al., 2022), brand attitudes (Ozdemir et al., 2023), brand awareness (Sürücü et al., 2019), brand perception (Vuong & Bui, 2023), and brand equity (Vuong & Bui, 2023; Truong & Nguyen, 2023). Moreover, brand image is the development of differentiated products that can stay in customers' minds and satisfy them simultaneously (Manhas et al., 2016). The components of the brand image include positioning, promise, and performance (Fill, C., 2013). The firm commitment to customers in brand-building stems from all departments, intermediaries, and suppliers (Ghodeswar, 2008). Brand image can support consumers in increasing their understanding of customer experience services and positively influence customers' perceived value (Hamzah et al., 2023). In addition, brand image has a crucial mediating role in marketing strategy (Huang, 2022) and positively related to a high-authenticity brand story (Huang, 2010). The haptic perception is understood as the active discovery of the characteristics of fast fashion products in the study of brand country-of-origin, which is a positive signal to local brands more than foreign brands in consumers' purchasing decisions (Liu et al., 2021). Thus, working together to build a country's brand image also plays a critical role in enhancing the firm's brand image. Building a better brand image requires high-involvement consumers for electronic word-of-mouth information (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2018). Brand image and loyalty will also increase in the eyes of consumers as fashion manufacturers produce eco-friendly goods (Jung et al., 2020). Therefore, to build the best brand image, the firm must have effective activities for consumers related to marketing campaigns, internal marketing, tangible products or services.

2.3 Purchase Intention

According to Bagozzi and Burnkrant (1979), buy intention is the subjective propensity of a consumer to pay for products or services. In the study in 2004, Spears and Singh confirmed that purchase intention is a buyer's deliberate effort to select products or services, which is formed when the impression or attitude presented to the consumer matches their expectations. Purchasing intent can predict purchasing behavior with precision. Given the significance of purchase intention, researchers have devoted considerable time and energy to studying the factors that influence consumers' purchase intentions, such as product information, trust, cultural differences, perceived quality, and perceived risk (Chang, Wildt, 1994; Bian, Forsythe, 2012; Hajli et al., 2017). Purchase Intention is the propensity of consumers to buy a brand or perform actions associated with purchases, as measured by the likelihood of consumers making purchases (Belch & Belch, 2008). Moreover, purchase intention is a type of decision-making that examines the consumer's motivation to purchase a particular brand (Shah et al., 2012). In the context of advertising, purchase intention is the process by which consumers decide to purchase a product or service as a result of advertisements transmitted via advertising media (Lee et al., 2017). Martins et al. (2019) have shown that an increase in purchase intention

correlates with an increase in the likelihood of making a purchase; therefore, if consumers have a positive purchase intention, then a positive engagement will promote that purchase. In summary, buy intention is a consumer's tendency or inclination to pay for goods or services, which may predict their purchasing behavior.

2.4 The relationship between Brand Ambassador and Brand Image

The dynamic interplay between a brand ambassador and the brand image is a subject of paramount significance in contemporary marketing discourse. This symbiotic relationship has been substantiated through empirical findings, with Wang and Hariandja (2016) elucidating a robust and favorable influence of brand ambassadors on brand image. Their research underscores that consumers harbor the belief that endorsers serve as pivotal conduits in encoding the brand's message into the consumer psyche, thereby shaping the perception of the brand itself. A parallel study by Mudzakir (2018), titled 'The influence of brand ambassador usage toward brand image of Oppo', corroborates these assertions. Within the realm of fashion, the impact of each brand ambassador indicator on brand image has prompted researchers to narrow their focus onto four key dimensions, namely credibility, specialty, attractiveness, and congruence.

Credibility, the bedrock of trust, is fostered when an ambassador aptly conveys pertinent knowledge or information about the brand, exuding integrity, honesty, and confidence across diverse media platforms (Tripp et al., 1994). Specialty, akin to expertise, hinges upon the ambassador's profound understanding of the brand or product, and this attribute holds sway over consumers' deliberations when contemplating a brand or product purchase (Amos et al., 2008; Magnini et al., 2008; Kim & Prideaux, 2014).

In a world where visual appeal carries significant weight, attractiveness transcends mere physical allure, instead encompassing a holistic attractiveness that can effectively advocate a product or advertisement (Amos et al., 2008; Han and Ki, 2010; Lord and Putrevu, 2009). The concept of congruence further underscores the importance of alignment between the celebrity ambassador and the brand's ethos. This resonance hinges upon the identification of shared characteristics between the ambassador and the product (Kamins, 1990; Misra & Beatty, 1990).

In light of these pivotal indicators, researchers posit a set of hypotheses to unravel the intricate nexus between brand ambassadors and brand image:

H1: *Brand ambassador's credibility positively impacts on brand image*

Credibility stands as a pivotal indicator wielding substantial influence over brand image. The credibility attributed to a celebrity resonates significantly with the brand, as elucidated by Spry et al. (2011). This assertion finds empirical support in the study conducted by Mudzakir (2018), wherein compelling evidence surfaced regarding the profound impact of the credibility indicator on OPPO's brand image, registering at an impressive 23.9% (Significance value of 0.000). This statistic underscores the unequivocal ability of celebrities to effectively persuade consumers about a brand through the embodiment of credibility.

H2: *Brand ambassador's specialty positively impacts on brand image*

Aaker and Myers (1987) underscore that a celebrity assumes the role of an authority on the brand or product, possessing an in-depth comprehension that proves remarkably compelling. Their mastery over the brand they endorse wields substantial persuasive power. Similarly, the findings of Speck et al. (1988) unveiled that a brand ambassador with exceptional specialization

fosters heightened recall of product-related information.

H3: *Brand ambassador's attractiveness positively impacts on brand image*

Attraction conveyed through a person's weight, height and facial beauty is the first impression perceived by others (Sheeraz et al., 2016). While attractiveness remains a widely recognized indicator within the realm of brand ambassadors, Mudzakir (2018) presents evidence challenging its significant influence on brand image. Despite its popularity, Mudzakir's study demonstrates that attractiveness does not wield a substantial impact on brand image. In contrast, the research conducted by Kim & Prideaux (2014) reveals a divergent perspective. Their investigation into the domain of hotel management establishes that attractiveness indeed constitutes one of three domains that exert influence on brand image.

H4: *Brand ambassador's congruence positively impacts on brand image*

As delineated by McCracken's transfer model (1989), the harmonious alignment between prominent individuals and products yields varying degrees of effectiveness within the domain of brand ambassadorship. This implies that certain celebrity endorsements outperform others in their impact. Moreover, the pivotal role of endorser-brand congruence in shaping brand image is underscored by Seno and Lukas (2007). Mudzakir's study (2018) reinforces this notion, substantiating that the contribution of brand congruence to brand image attains considerable significance.

2.5 Relationship between brand ambassador and consumer purchase intention

Social network influencers play a crucial role in marketing by introducing their audience to products. Stephen et al. (2017) investigated the causal relationship between endorser credibility and purchase intention of air transportation services offered by airlines that employ a celebrity endorsement strategy. In the meantime, the credibility of endorsers was evaluated as a second-order construct of the proposed model. According to the findings, all of the hypothesized constructs are found to have positive relationships. In addition to the significant positive influence of brand credibility, endorser credibility has a significant effect on attitude towards brand credibility, attitude towards brand, and purchase intention (Düsenberg et al., 2016; Phaik et al., 2020). Both the reputation of influencers and the purchase intent of customers are significantly impacted by factors such as the trustworthiness, information quality, and entertainment value of the content being promoted. The reliability and trustworthiness of an influencer also has a direct effect on customers' propensity to make a purchase (Saima & M. Altaf Khan, 2021). In addition, Elmira Chloe (2017) examined the influence of credibility and consumer purchasing intent with various categories of celebrities on Instagram. The results of the study indicate that credibility influences the purchasing decisions of young female users through Instagram. Also interested in the relationship between brand representatives and their influence on consumer behavior on social networking platforms, Karina and Hajer (2020) have examined this relationship on YouTube and Instagram in France. The outcome also demonstrates a positive relationship between perceived credibility and purchase intent. Therefore, in this study, the relationship between credibility and purchase intention is proposed as follows:

H5: *Brand ambassador's credibility has a positive effect on consumer's purchase intention.*

Brahim et al. (2020) studied the impact of social media influencer (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) on advertising effectiveness (attitude toward the product, attitude toward the advertisement, and purchase intent). The results demonstrated that source

credibility, attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness positively influence consumer attitudes toward advertisements and brands, and consequently their intent to purchase cosmetic products. Among the variables of celebrity endorse that have a positive influence on purchase intention (trustworthiness, attractiveness, congruence, and expertise), expertise (experience, knowledge, and skills) has the greatest impact on the purchase intention of Chinese consumers in Korea (Yu Hua Cui, Yu Ling Bai, 2020). In addition to the direct effect on purchase intention, it has been shown that celebrity match-up congruence with the brand/product, celebrity trustworthiness, and celebrity expertise have an indirect effect on purchase intention via brand attitude (Ha Nguyen Minh, Lam Nguyen Hung, 2019). Thus, the following relationship between specialty and purchase intention is proposed:

H6: *Brand ambassador's specialty has a positive effect on consumer's purchase intention.*

In addition to demonstrating that endorser attractiveness substantially increases consumer purchase intention, attractiveness also mediates the relationship between advertising disclosure and consumer purchase intention (Sharon Shavitt et al., 1994). Using a modified version of Ohanian's model, Daha et al. (2018) investigated the impact of celebrity brand endorsement (CB-endorsement) on the attitudes and intentions to buy of Nigerian millennials. The findings showed that the knowledge of a celebrity did not alter the intention of Generation Y consumers in Nigeria to buy the recommended product. The attractiveness and credibility of a celebrity, however, have substantial effects on consumer intent. In addition, while looking at the correlation between virtual influencers' attractiveness and buy intent on social networking platforms, we found that the attractiveness of virtual influencers was not directly related to purchase intent; instead, mimetic desire and brand affiliation moderated this link. Furthermore, the product-endorser fit moderated the conditional direct effect of virtual influencers' attractiveness on purchase intention, as well as the indirect effects via mimetic desire and brand attachment (Hyojung Kim, Minjung Park, 2023). Therefore, it is proposed that the following relationship exists between attractiveness and purchase intention:

H7: *Brand ambassador's attractiveness has a positive effect on consumer's purchase intention.*

Karla McCormick (2016) examined whether the presence of a congruent product-endorser match influenced the purchase intent of millennial consumers and contributed to positive attitudes toward the advertisement. The endorsement of a product's quality by an obscure celebrity has little effect on consumers' purchase intentions. In addition, Putri and Golan (2022) confirmed the relationship between congruence and purchase intent. Trustworthiness and compatibility have a significant impact on brand attitude and purchase intent. So, the relationship between congruence and purchase intention is proposed as follows:

H8: *Brand ambassador's congruence has a positive effect on consumer's purchase intention.*

2.6 The relationship between Brand Image and Purchase Intention

Having long studied brand image definitions in various contexts, scholars have combined and analysed brand image with many other factors concerning purchase intention. Brand image positively relates to the purchase intention through customers' perceptions (Aw et al., 2021). Environmentally friendly haute couture products increase the brand image's reputation, which drives purchase intention (Blasi et al., 2020). The brand image depends on which geographic area of the consumer. Indeed, Asian consumers more easily accept using counterfeit fashion rather than European and American consumers (Song et al., 2021), which could stem from dense population and the low income of households in Asia. Additionally, consumers in

Vietnam consider the Country-of-Origin image in their consumption intention towards imported goods (Hoang et al., 2022). Moreover, consumers use social networks more and more popular, so protecting users' privacy is increasingly important. Brand image is one factor that positively affects young people's intention to use smartphones (Rakib et al., 2022). Brand trust drives potential customers to engage on social media and positively influences consumer purchase intention (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022). The quality interaction between the brand image and the consumer encourages the purchase intention (Gutierrez et al., 2023). For products with high brand awareness, fake reviews on the internet will not affect customers' consumption intentions (Song et al., 2023). Therefore, there is no doubt that the important roles of consumer-based brand preference and consumer brand experience are in the consumption intention of customers (Yasri et al., 2020). Customers' perceived value of the brand is confirmed to have a positive relationship with purchase intention (Akkaya, 2021). Likewise, brand image is one of many factors strongly affecting brand perception, which stimulates brand loyalty and purchase intention in the fashion industry (Foroudi et al., 2018). Consequently, in this study, the following assumptions are suggested:

H9: *Brand image positively and directly impacts purchase intention.*

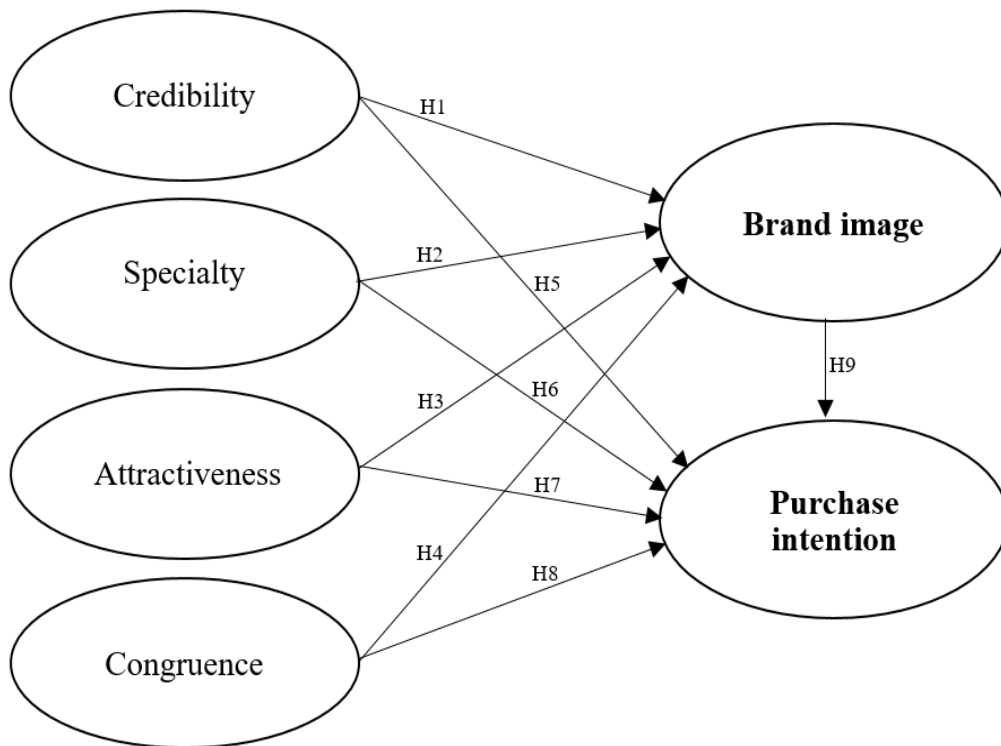


Figure 1: The conceptual framework

3. Research Methodology

The Credibility scale (Cre) includes 3 observed variables (Cre1-3) built on the basis of inheritance from Tripp et al. (1994). The Specialty (Spe) component is measured by 4 observed variables (Spe1-4) built based on the reference of Yu Hua Cui and Yu Ling Bai (2020). Four observed variables (Att1-4) are used to measure the Attractiveness component (Att) based on

Sheeraz et al. (2016), and Putri & Golan (2022). The Congruence component includes 3 observed variables: Child 1- Child 3 (Mudzakir, 2018). Brand image (BI) includes 3 observed variables (BI1-3) built on the basis of reference from Fill, C. (2013). Finally, the purchase intention (PI) component, includes 3 observed variables: PI1-3 (Bagozzi & Burnkrant, 1979; Belch and Belch, 2008). All the measurement scales were implemented using a 5-point Likert scale format, with level 1 indicating 'strongly disagree' and progressively increasing to level 5, representing 'strongly agree.' The sample was selected based on participants' willingness to provide information. Primary data is collected through sending a questionnaire link designed on the Google form platform to respondents. The validation process of the research model involved several steps, including assessing the reliability of the measurement scales using the Cronbach's Alpha technique. Linear regression model was used to analyze the correlation between variables in the research model. T-tests was used to test the difference in means for each component in the model between research sample groups by gender.

4. Research Results

4.1 Respondent Information

Table 1: Sample structure

Gender	Under 22 years old		22-30 years old		30 years old and up		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Male	61	21.86	56	20.07	6	2.15	123	44.09
Female	77	27.60	71	25.45	8	2.87	156	55.91
Total	138	49.46	127	45.52	14	5.02	279	100.00

The findings from Table 1 of the study reveal that the surveyed participants predominantly belonged to the age group of 30 and below, comprising a substantial majority of 265 individuals, accounting for a significant 95% of the sample. This age bracket holds a considerable presence within the survey sample, which is justifiable given their youthful nature, inclination towards novelty, contemporary trends, and specific interest in the latest developments endorsed by their idols. Furthermore, they possess the ability to readily access emerging technologies and swiftly assimilate information. Regarding gender, females exhibit a slightly higher representation than males within the target age groups; nevertheless, this disparity is not substantial.

4.2 The reliability of the scales

Table 2: Results of testing the reliability of measurement scales in the research model

Items	Code	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Credibility (Cre); Cronbach's Alpha= 0.89					
Brand ambassador X is a trustworthy person	Cre1	7.29	4.58	0.76	0.88
Brand ambassador X is an honest person	Cre2	7.33	4.22	0.85	0.80

Items	Code	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Brand ambassador X is honest when making statements about the brand/product in advertising	Cre3	7.28	4.19	0.77	0.87
Specialty (Spe); Cronbach's Alpha= 0.94					
Brand ambassador X has experience in consumption of the fashion product	Spe1	10.95	9.78	0.86	0.91
Brand ambassador X has a good knowledge in the fashion industry	Spe2	10.87	9.95	0.88	0.91
Brand ambassador X is the one can endorse the fashion product	Spe3	10.88	10.00	0.83	0.92
Brand ambassador X has skilled in using the fashion product	Spe4	10.73	10.00	0.83	0.92
Attractiveness (Att); Cronbach's Alpha= 0.94					
Brand ambassador X is an attractive person	Att1	11.48	9.09	0.84	0.93
Brand ambassador X is a luxury person	Att2	11.60	8.72	0.89	0.91
Brand ambassador X is an elegant person	Att3	11.51	8.80	0.87	0.92
Brand ambassador X is charming person	Att4	11.67	8.84	0.84	0.93
Congruence (Con); Cronbach's Alpha= 0.87					
Brand ambassador is really suites the brand	Con1	7.86	3.69	0.71	0.85
Brand ambassador's lifestyle fit with the representative brand	Con2	7.86	3.56	0.77	0.79
Brand ambassadors X has a large fan base that is the target customer of the representative brand	Con3	7.90	3.44	0.77	0.80
Brand image (BI); Cronbach's Alpha= 0.90					
Brand X has many attractive products	BI1	8.00	3.41	0.82	0.86
Brand X has a reasonable price	BI2	7.97	3.35	0.81	0.86
Brand X has a unique design	BI3	8.01	3.36	0.80	0.87
Purchase intention (PI); Cronbach's Alpha= 0.86					
I will buy products of the brand X (Brand ambassador X represent)	PI1	7.09	4.01	0.75	0.79
I will consider the intention to buy the product that the brand ambassador X represents	PI2	6.87	4.22	0.70	0.84
If there is a consideration, I will give priority to the brand represented by brand ambassador X	PI3	6.94	3.94	0.76	0.78

The research conducted by the authors reveals that among the six factor groups and corresponding 20 observed variables, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the factor groups range from 0.86 to 0.94, indicating a relatively good level of internal consistency.

The measurement scales employed in the study demonstrate satisfactory reliability. Furthermore, the research findings also indicate that all 20 observed variables exhibit inter-variable correlations ranging from 0.7 to 0.89 (greater than 0.3). As a result, all observed variables match the criteria for reliable measurement testing and will be included in the next analysis phase.

4.3 The correlation between brand ambassador and brand image

Table 3: Results of the regression analysis between BA-BI model

Variable	Coefficients	P Value	VIF
Credibility	0.21	0.000	2.34
Specialty	0.06	0.300	2.84
Attractiveness	0.25	0.000	2.34
Congruence	0.41	0.000	3.33
Adjusted R Square			0.67
Durbin Watson			2.00
P value			0.000

The table 3 revealed that three out of four indicators of brand ambassador have the positive impacts to brand image. These elements encompassing credibility, attractiveness, and congruence possess significant value 0%, therefore, hypotheses H1, H3, and H4 are accepted.

Specifically, celebrity endorsement's credibility significantly impacts the brand image in fashion industry. The P-value in 0 demonstrates that Vietnamese people highly consider the reputation and acquaintance of famous people and link it to brand recall. In fact, these days, consumers pay much attention on not only fame, allure of an actor, but also his or her acquaintance of brand and products. When a fashion band invite an ambassador with high understanding about the product, the brand will be positively and intellectually recalled. But the beta number of this indicator is 0.21 which is lower than Attractiveness and Congruence. It means that although fashion consumers care about the knowledge of a representative, it is not the factor makes a complete influence on brand image. This finding is match with Fitri (2018), Mukherjee (2009), Mudzakir (2018).

Likewise, attractiveness positively influences on a fashion corporate image. It is not hard to understand how strongly this indicator play its role in fashion. Consumers always appreciate celebrity with elegant appearance, beauty, and sometimes their manners. This obviously reveals from Beta (0.25) and T value (4.78). Subsequently, endorsers' attractiveness is transferred to brand image naturally. Although fashion industry has a high demand of this indicator, appealing factor actually influences every business. Specifically, Fitri (2018) studied and found that the attractiveness of celebrity endorsement in Instagram positively effects on brand image. Similarly, Carroll (2008) demonstrated that consumers usually deliver more good will responses to attractive representatives. Felix and Borges (2014) revealed the same findings when they implemented a research on the impacts of endorser attractiveness on two cosmetic brands L'Oreal and Baume & Mercier. Interestingly, in hospitality industry, a research done by Kim & Prideaux (2014) showed that many hotel customers care about the attractiveness of the ambassadors.

Congruence is the most important indicator which lead the influence of brand ambassador on brand image. Obviously, the values of this variant is the highest compare to three others. P value is 0 (<0.05), so congruence is positively impacts on brand image. Also, t is 6.47, and Beta

value is 4.41. It means that the factor of matching between endorser and brand significantly effects on brand recall of customers in fashion industry. This result is similar to findings of previous studies (Samuel, et al., 2014; Mudzakir, 2018; Choi and Rifon, 2012; Carroll, 2008; and Fitri, 2018; Mukherjee, 2009). Specifically, the study “It is a match: The Impact of Congruence between Celebrity Image and Consumer Ideal self on Endorsement Effectiveness” (Choi and Rifon, 2012) expressed that the match-up factor truly drives good attitudes of customers towards ads and the brand.

By contrast, specialty indicator possesses 30% of P-value which is much higher than 5%. Therefore, the H2 is rejected. Consumers pay much attentions about endorsers’ product knowledge, but they rarely care about endorsers’ qualifications. It could be explained that the objectives of this research are young people who will not stop buying a new T-shirt or jeans because a representative does not have a university degree. Carroll (2008) also found that audience’s recall and purchase intentions by employing celebrities is more effective that using an expert. Notably, this variant is playing a less important role in airline industry (Wang et al., 2017). But in hospitality, customers care about celebrity’s acquaintance (Kim & Prideaux, 2014) There are not many studies discover this fact, therefore, this is a remarkable finding of this paper.

4.4 The correlation between brand ambassador and purchase intention

Table 4: Results of the regression analysis between BA-PI model

Variable	Coefficients	P Value	VIF
Credibility	0.21	0.00	2.34
Specialty	0.03	0.67	2.84
Attractiveness	0.36	0.00	2.34
Congruence	0.21	0.01	3.33
Adjusted R Square			0.70
Durbin Watson			1.90
P value			0.000

The results in Table 4 indicate that among the four factors constituting brand ambassadors, three factors, namely credibility, attractiveness, and congruence, significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions. These factors exhibit a positive correlation with consumers' purchase intentions and account for 49% of the variance in purchase intentions. Therefore, hypotheses H5, H7, and H8 are accepted at a significant level of 1%.

In practice, the credibility of brand ambassadors plays a crucial role. When brand ambassadors establish a reputable and sincere image while sharing information about the brand and its products, consumers tend to trust and develop a preference for the brand based on their trust and liking for the brand ambassadors. Consequently, this generates purchase intentions without the need for extensive product and brand research. These findings align with the studies conducted by Düsenberg et al. (2016), Stephen et al. (2017), Elmira Chloe (2017), Phaik et al. (2020), Karina and Hajer (2020), Saima & M. Altaf Khan (2021).

Moreover, when brand ambassadors possess attractiveness and charm, they easily create a favorable impression on consumers, enhancing the effectiveness of marketing campaigns and influencing consumers' psychology, thereby leading to purchase intentions. These findings are similar with the findings of Sharon Shavitt et al. (1994), Daha et al. (2018), Hyojung Kim, Minjung Park (2023).

Brand ambassadors play a pivotal role as representatives in terms of image, communication,

and spokesperson for a brand. Therefore, brand ambassadors need to be individuals who possess influence over the public and meet specific criteria that align with the brand. Their role is to bring the image of the product/service closer to consumers, instilling trust and affection for the brand. This influences brand recognition and purchase intentions. Therefore, brand ambassadors need to have congruence in terms of association with the brand and be influential individuals over the target audience of the brand. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Karla McCormick (2016), Rohaizat and Hasan (2022).

On the other hand, the Specialty does not show statistical significance as the P-value is 67% (greater than 5%). Therefore, H6 is rejected. This can be attributed to the fact that Vietnamese youth sometimes do not pay significant attention to in-depth knowledge about brands and products, especially in the fashion industry. In reality, brand ambassadors in the fashion field are often not individuals with deep expertise in fashion but rather singers, actors, or successful individuals from other fields who have influence over the target audience of the brand.

4.5 The correlation between brand image and purchase intention

Table 5: Results of the regression analysis between BI-PI model

Variable	Coefficients	P Value	VIF
Brand Image	0.59	0.000	1.000
Adjusted R Square			0.35
Durbin Watson			1.99
P value			0.000

The table above describes the relationship between the independent (brand image) and the dependent (purchase intention) variables. Research results indicates a positive relationship at the 35% level with statistical significance at 1%, which can be explained that the brand image is just one of many factors of brand perception substantially impacting purchase intention. In addition, the regression analysis results between brand image and purchase intention have unstandardized coefficients of 0.64. This means that when the brand image changes by one unit, the purchase intention changes by 0.64 units, with a statistical significance of 1%. This proves a statistically significant positive correlation, which consistent with all previous cited studies (Gutierrez et al., 2023; Hoang et al., 2022; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2022; Rakib et al., 2022; Akkaya, 2021; Aw et al., 2021; Blasi et al., 2020; Foroudi et al., 2018). Hence, H9 is accepted in this research model. In reality, a strong brand image instills confidence in the product quality among consumers and reduces the risk of judging by price alone.

4.6. Analysis of mean differences by demographics

Table 6: Testing differences in mean values by gender

Components	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig. (2-tailed) of T-test for Equality of Means
Credibility	Male	123	3.47	1.07	0.10	0.01
	Female	156	3.79	0.95	0.08	
Attractiveness	Male	123	3.65	1.08	0.10	0.00
	Female	156	4.02	0.86	0.07	
Congruence	Male	123	3.73	1.06	0.10	0.00
	Female	156	4.10	0.75	0.06	
Brand image	Male	123	3.83	1.03	0.09	0.01

	Female	156	4.13	0.76	0.06	
Purchase intention	Male	123	3.44	1.05	0.09	0.55
	Female	156	3.51	0.91	0.07	

Research using the T-test was conducted to compare the differences in various dimensions of brand ambassadors between two gender groups - male and female. The results are presented in Table 6. Based on the average values, the findings indicate statistically significant differences in the dimensions of brand ambassadors, including credibility, attractiveness, congruence and brand image between the two gender groups. At a significance level of 1%, female consumers tend to evaluate the dimensions of brand ambassadors in the fashion industry with higher average scores compared to male consumers. However, regarding the purchase intention, at a significance level of 5%, there is no significant difference between the purchase intentions of male and female consumers.

5. Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical point of view, this study provides additional empirical support for the relationships discussed in the branding literature or consumer intention research. The paper confirmed and expanded empirical research on theories of brand ambassadors that strongly influence Brand Image and consumer intention for fashion products of Generation Z consumers in the South of Vietnam. The primary mission of brand ambassadors is to facilitate the firm to gain more customers and grow its sales. It explores the impact of brand ambassadors and brand image on consumer intention to consume. The brand ambassador is described in marketing materials as a celebrity or community influence profoundly understands the brand's products or services and must know the product's features, benefits, and values. Today's effective marketing strategies cannot ignore the brand ambassador because of the significant spread of information on the internet. Thus, when a famous or influential person introduces a specific product, consumers, especially fans of influencers, will undoubtedly increase their care for those products. This study contributes to academia and marketing strategy managers a comprehensive and necessary view of the impact of brand ambassadors on brand image and purchase intention from consumer survey data.

To thoroughly understand the brand ambassador, scholars must analyze many factors that affect it. Therefore, this paper explains the theory of other definitions such as online word of mouth, brand awareness, consumer behaviors, and the characteristics of Gen Z in purchase decisions. For instance, a brand ambassador can assist corporate increase brand awareness through online word of mouth among customers. According to the Engel Kollat Blackwell Model (Engel et al., 1968), the decision-making process has five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase. This study contributes to a clear explanation of the decision-making processes of Vietnamese consumers. At the same time, it also partly contributes to theories of consumer behavior such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), Motivation-Need Theory (Maslow, A., 1943), and Theory of Buyer Behavior (Howard, J.A. and Sheth, J.N., 1969). This study also assesses the level of trust of Vietnamese consumers in the role of brand promotion of famous people in Vietnam. On the contrary, the standard requirements to become brand ambassadors are increasing daily, so self-education to improve their understanding of consumer products in the market is increasingly important for celebrities.

6. Managerial Contributions

The paper emphasizes the importance of studying the influence of brand ambassadors and brand image on purchase intention so that marketers can develop strategies suitable for each type of consumer. Online trends influence consumer psychology in evaluating products, so marketing managers must work closely with brand ambassadors to respond promptly to trends and promote products. Currently, consumers' online shopping is becoming increasingly popular and quickly thanks partly to the support of online payments for fashion products and almost all products on the market. Additionally, since Gen Z is proficient in using technology to shop online easily, the promotion of products on the Internet platform is becoming more and more important in the purchasing decision of consumers. Thus, it is affluent to see celebrities promoting consumer products online. When consumers evaluate the performance of a brand ambassador, it is necessary to consider many factors, including influence on social media, the number of reached people, impact on sales, and contribution of ideas. This study benefits companies in better understanding the behavior of Gen Z consumers on the positive impact of brand ambassadors. Revenue from sales growth driven by brand ambassadors' activities must outweigh the cost of hiring ambassadors.

Consumers interested in specific brands follow that brand's activities on social media platforms. Therefore, the social media activities of brand ambassadors are often associated with activities on social networking platforms such as Tiktok, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, and so on. Nowadays, messaging on social media platforms is helping to make marketing campaigns more successful when associated with the support of celebrities. As a result, competitors compete with each other for brand influence in cyberspace to strengthen and develop relationships between consumers and specific brands. Moreover, fashion products can be divided into three categories: cheap, mid-range, and high-end. Finding a brand ambassador depends on what kind of products the company needs to promote. For example, influencers like YouTubers will be more suitable for fostering cheap goods if their digital products are familiar to low-income people. In the meantime, movie or music stars are better suited to promote high-fashion products because they still wear high-end clothing daily, and their understanding of the product is clear and insightful. In contrast, negative behaviors from social network users need to be strictly controlled on the brand's information pages. The ultimate goal to be achieved is to create solid trust in the loyal customers of a brand.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study delved into the pivotal role of brand ambassadors in shaping brand image and driving purchase intentions within the fashion industry, employing a 5-point Likert scale format for measurement. The validation process embraced several steps, including the assessment of measurement scale reliability using Cronbach's Alpha technique, linear regression modeling, and T-tests. The research method relied on direct interviews with participants through a pre-designed structured questionnaire, employing the convenience sampling method for participant selection. This approach facilitated efficient data collection while maintaining a robust sample size of 279 observations.

The research findings illuminate significant relationships and impacts within the realm of celebrity endorsement. The credibility of celebrity endorsers emerged as a key determinant of brand image enhancement in the fashion industry, while attractiveness played a pivotal role in positively influencing corporate image. Additionally, congruence surfaced as a critical factor

driving the impact of brand ambassadors on brand image.

The study highlighted that three factors - credibility, attractiveness, and congruence, significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions. These insights collectively underscore the substantial impact of celebrity endorsement on consumer behavior in the context of fashion.

Furthermore, gender-based analysis revealed notable disparities in the evaluation of brand ambassador dimensions between male and female consumers. Female consumers exhibited higher average scores in evaluating brand ambassador dimensions, including credibility, attractiveness, congruence, and brand image.

In the realm of purchase intentions, the study identified no significant gender-based differences. This outcome implies that while gender might influence the evaluation of brand ambassadors, it may have limited influence on purchase intentions, emphasizing a shared propensity for purchase decisions within the context of celebrity endorsement in the fashion sector.

In essence, this research underscores the pivotal role of brand ambassadors in shaping brand perceptions and influencing consumer behaviors within the fashion industry. The insights derived from the study offer valuable guidance for fashion brands seeking to harness the power of celebrity endorsements to strategically enhance brand image and drive purchase intentions.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Alongside the achieved research outcomes, this study is not without its limitations, which provide avenues for future research. One limitation lies in the utilization of a convenience sampling method for participant selection. While this approach facilitated data collection efficiency, it might have introduced a certain degree of sampling bias. Future studies could adopt more rigorous sampling techniques, such as stratified or random sampling, to enhance the generalizability of findings across diverse populations.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through structured questionnaires could introduce response bias or social desirability bias, potentially impacting the accuracy of results. To mitigate this limitation, future research could consider employing mixed-method approaches, integrating qualitative interviews or observations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, this study focused exclusively on the fashion industry, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other industries. Exploring the applicability of the research model in different sectors could provide valuable insights into the role of brand ambassadors across various contexts.

A future research direction could involve investigating the moderating effects of demographic variables, such as age, income, and cultural background, on the relationships identified in this study. Understanding how these factors might influence the impact of brand ambassadors on brand image and purchase intentions could provide a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior.

Lastly, an extension of this study could involve a longitudinal design to assess the long-term effects of celebrity endorsements on brand image and purchase intentions. This could provide insights into the sustainability of the impact and whether consumer perceptions and behaviors

change over time.

In conclusion, while this study sheds light on the critical role of brand ambassadors in shaping brand image and purchase intentions within the fashion industry, the identified limitations suggest a rich array of possibilities for future research. Addressing these limitations and exploring new dimensions can further enrich our understanding of the dynamics between celebrity endorsements, brand perception, and consumer behavior.

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