Consumer Happiness Toward Celebrity Endorsement:
Attitude Toward the Brands

Paula Rodrigues
Universidade Lusíada, COMEGI, Portugal
E-mail: pcristinalopesrodrigues@gmail.com

Ana Sousa
Universidade de Aveiro, GOVCOPP, Portugal
E-Mail: ferreira.antunes.ana@gmail.com

Anna Carolina Boechat
UNIDCOM/ IADE (Universidade Europeia), Portugal
E-mail: annacarolinaboechat@gmail.com

Ana Pinto Borges
ISAG—European Business School, CICET, COMEGI, Portugal
E-mail: anaborges@isag.pt

ABSTRACT

This study analysed how celebrity worship and closeness influence consumer attitudes toward a brand and their impact on consumer happiness in the fashion industry. The study utilized a sample of 157 Portuguese consumers and applied partial least squares (PLS) analysis to test the conceptual model hypothesis. The findings indicate that celebrity worship and perceived closeness positively impact consumer attitudes toward the brand, positively influencing consumer happiness. These results highlight the significance of implementing effective celebrity endorsement strategies for marketing practitioners in the fashion industry and provide valuable insights for academics. By emphasizing the role of emotional engagement in enhancing consumer happiness, the study offers valuable comprehension for marketing practitioners aiming to strengthen brand happiness and for academics exploring the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of celebrity culture has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary society, and the concept of celebrity worship has garnered significant attention from researchers in recent years. The concept refers to developing intense devotional feelings toward a celebrity, characterized by solid loyalty and a willingness to devote personal resources to venerate them. While previous research has identified various factors contributing to celebrity worship, little is known about how this phenomenon influences consumer attitudes toward endorsed brands and generates feelings of happiness.

A culture of celebrity is a phenomenon that began in the late twentieth century, profoundly influencing the social world. The typical one-sided relationship between an individual and a celebrity has been regarded as typical and unsurprising (Brown, 2015; Stever, 2017), and "attachment to celebrities as a normal part of development in the areas of intimacy and identity (Greene & Adams-Price, 1990; Larson, 1995; Stever, 2011)" (Brooks, 2021, p. 864). When this attachment becomes extreme, it is described as *celebrity worship,* "the process of expressing devotion, commitment, and love to a mediated persona both during and after media consumption or participation in a media event, which begins with the development of intense devotional feelings toward the persona and is characterized by a strong loyalty to the persona and willingness to give one's time, finances and personal freedoms to venerate the persona" (Brown, 2015, p. 276). According to the literature (Brooks, 2021), several aspects contribute to celebrity worship: demographic factors, personality, religiosity, behavioral and cognitive factors, relationship with others, and psychological well-being. It is also recognized that celebrity endorsement can affect consumers' purchasing behaviors (Malik & Guptha, 2014; Wang, Cheng, & Chu, 2013), being one of the relevant strategies used by many brands to increase the acceptance and profitability of the products (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000), brand trust (Qiu, Chen, & Lee, 2021), brand equity (Parmar & Mann, 2021), and happiness (Lee, Bright, & Eastin, 2021).

Celebrity endorsement is a widely used marketing strategy to increase brand acceptance, profitability, and consumer trust. Studies have demonstrated its influence on consumer purchasing behaviors and brand equity. Nevertheless, how the degree of closeness between a celebrity and their fans and the intensity of celebrity worship influence consumer attitudes toward the brands they endorse remains uncertain.

To fill this research gap, this study investigates how celebrity worship and closeness influence consumer attitudes toward endorsed brands and generate feelings

of happiness. Building upon prior research on celebrity worship, brand endorsement, and happiness, this study will employ a theoretical framework based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) to explore the relationships between celebrity worship, brand endorsement, and consumer attitudes and behavior. By analyzing the attitudes and behavior of consumers who exhibit varying levels of celebrity worship and closeness to their idols, this study seeks to provide insights into the complex interplay between celebrity worship, brand endorsement, and consumer behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Celebrity Worship and Celebrity Closeness to the Person

The current and ascendant democratization of access to information technology and the Internet, which began more precisely in the early 2000s, has transformed how individuals interact with each other, companies, and their brands. Since then, people with diverse thoughts, lifestyles, and consumption behaviors have easily engaged in social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, to exchange opinions and search for recommendations on the most diverse subjects, creating some connection with online influencers (Curran, 2012; Papacharissi, 2009).

Social networking sites highly potentialize this sense of closeness to an influencer or a celebrity since it allows celebrities to share their lives with the audience (Kim & Kim, 2020). By posting pictures, news, announcements, and professional and personal information, famous individuals strengthen their relationships with fans (Huang & Gong, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2020), helping to create the illusion of "knowing" the celebrities (Gong & Li, 2017).

Closer contact with a celebrity brings fans a sense of identification and commitment, fulfilling some psychological needs (Kim & Kim, 2020). It also brings a sense of intimacy or creates the illusion of friendship (Gong & Li, 2017). This intimate connection is framed by the theory of parasocial interaction, which gained notoriety with Horton and Wohl (1956). In short, the parasocial relationship is one-sided (Zhang, Zhang, & Li, 2021), i.e., the communication is not mutual because the spectator creates an illusion of closeness with the celebrity (Kim & Kim, 2020). In other words, parasocial theory erases the boundary between reality and imagination, creating a sense of closeness that does not exist in real life (Rihl & Wegener, 2019).

The sense of closeness to a celebrity can also be explained by the Absorption Addiction model by McCutcheon, Zsila, and Demetrovics (2021) (Houran, 2022). This perspective postulates that individuals with a poor identity structure are likelier to admire celebrities, absorbing their characteristics to enhance their identities (Zsila, Orosz, McCutcheon, & Demetrovics, 2021). This powerful attachment goes beyond common sense (Parmar & Mann, 2021), leading to addictive behaviors (G. Brooks,

Drenten, & Piskorski, 2021). The feeling of willingness to do anything for the celebrity can be seen through, for example, collecting personal objects of the favorite target (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013), leading thus to purchasing processes.

Recently, we have witnessed a phenomenon of a closer online attachment of media users to celebrity personae who look up to them as sources of inspiration in creating their own identity (Brooks, 2021; Dwivedi, Johnson, & McDonald, 2015). When this involvement develops into an intense and extreme idolization, we talk about the concept of celebrity worship.

This type of subculture highlights well-known celebrities through an intense and collective fascination (Omenugha, Uzuegbunam, & Ndolo, 2016). It represents an emotional attachment, an enthusiasm towards a famous person (Zsila et al., 2021), and a parasocial or one-sided relationship (Gong & Li, 2017). Worshippers' fascination with a public figure represents their love and attachment for a famous individual (Parmar & Mann, 2021), consisting of an obsessional involvement (Brooks, 2021). According to Brown (2015), celebrity worship is a connection a user develops with an influencer that comprises devotion, commitment, loyalty, love, and willingness to spend time and money to revere the persona across the consumption processes in a specific media event. Furthermore, it signifies an illusory sense of closeness and intimacy, given that it represents a one-way relationship during social media consumption (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

McCutcheon et al. (2021) defined three stages of celebrity worship: entertainment/social, intense/personal, and borderline/pathological (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013), representing thus a Celebrity Attitude Scale (McCutcheon et al., 2021), which is frequently used to analyze celebrity worship behaviors (S. K. Brooks, 2021). The first level represents a healthy and non-pathological interest of an individual toward a celebrity (Yeap, 2022), which can be measured by how much a worshipper is drawn to know more about the celebrity through watching, reading, or learning (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013). The second level, more intense and personal, signals public, vital, and compulsive affections from an individual to a celebrity (Yeap, 2022), representing compulsive feelings (McCutcheon et al., 2021). The third level, on its turn, symbolizes a pathology when the worshipper feels a particular link with the famous person (Yeap, 2022), consolidating an extreme expression of feelings (McCutcheon et al., 2021) with adverse psychological outcomes (Chen et al., 2022). Nonetheless, it seems that the addictive mechanism inherent to celebrity worship and closeness to the person stimulates purchase intentions, influencing consumption attitudes positively toward the brand (Singh & Banerjee, 2019) and increasing brand equity (Parmar & Mann, 2021).

The devotional process created by celebrity worship can also be represented through loyalty or a willingness to invest time and money (Brooks, 2021). It helps to

modify consumers' perception of an endorsed message, create positive brand associations and extensions, impact compulsive buying (Parmar & Mann, 2021), develop emotional bonds (Zsila et al., 2021), stimulate mimicking processes of celebrities' way of thinking as well as their images and behavior, enhance problematic internet use, and promote more attractive advertising campaigns (Huang & Gong, 2022).

When there is an intense interaction between celebrities and individuals – even though considering the one-sided aspect – there can be more e-WOM regarding impulsive buying processes (Zafar, Qiu, Li, Wang, & Shahzad, 2021), buying intention, and trustworthiness perception (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019), for example.

Celebrity Endorsement – Attitude toward the Brand

It is crucial to analyze these new behavioral online consumption patterns in marketing to perceive how celebrity worship is translated into traditional celebrity endorsement (Ang & Chan, 2018). Celebrity endorsement is conceptualized as a marketing strategy that transforms celebrities into influential communicators and the image of a particular brand (Schlecht, 2003); it represents a partnership between a celebrity and an entity/brand in order to promote the latter (Ciornea, Souca, & Business, 2022). Through endorsements, celebrities leverage their public image (Schnittka, Hofmann, Johnen, Erfgen, & Rezvani, 2023) to transfer their status and personality into the brand context, enhancing their image (Kumar & Parasakti 2021).

Celebrity endorsement is a powerful marketing tool (Madinga, Maziriri, Mototo, & Chuchu, 2021) widely used over the years and by organizations worldwide (Ciornea et al., 2022). Madinga et al. (2021) highlight that brands spend a considerable amount of their budget on celebrity endorsers, intending to receive ROI (Return on Investment). By assuming the role of brand ambassadors (Gopal, 2021), spokespersons, or opinion experts (Hung, 2014), celebrities create a high level of connection with a brand, matching both personalities (Azizan, Hafit, Zainudin, Mohd, & Kamaruddin, 2022) – becoming, ultimately, as known in the current marketing literature, human brands. It is a widely used strategy nowadays, an example of human brands that increase corporate financial profits and highly leverage brand equity. Cristiano Ronaldo endorsing Herbalife or Nike and Justin Bieber endorsing Calvin Klein (Azizan et al., 2022) are two examples that can be found nowadays considering this marketing resource.

As presented by Bennett, Anaza, and Andonova (2022), celebrities can endorse a brand, product, or service in different ways, "including the explicit mode, where the celebrity endorser makes a statement (I endorse this product); the implicit mode (I use this product); the imperative mode (you should use this product); the copresent mode (mere appearance with a product); and a range of roles such as that of an expert or a

long-term association with a brand or a combination of any of these modes or roles" (Bennett et al., 2022, p. 155).

The logic behind this marketing activity is that a brand communicator with whom consumers can relate is much more efficient than a brand that communicates anonymously (Yöreş, 2017; Zamudio, 2016). Consumers prefer brands and products they can relate to in terms of personality, ways of living and being, principles, ethics, and being congruent with or connected to the self (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017), thus representing and incorporating human characteristics. One of the best ways to humanize brands is through celebrity endorsement and human branding. A highly worshipped persona can be strategically employed for brand positioning by aligning the human brand's characteristics with the product's attributes (Parmar & Mann, 2021).

Gopal (2021) recalls Kelman's research (1961) to reinforce the idea of celebrities as a source in the communication process due to their credibility, attractiveness, and power. On the other hand, expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness are the elements of the source highlighted by Ohanian (1990) to explain the effect of traditional celebrities' attributes, enhancing credibility as a main character of a successful endorsement process (Ciornea et al., 2022). Besides this Source Credibility Model, the Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1989) also helps to clarify the celebrity endorsement process once it proposes that the celebrity embodies meaning and then transfers it to a product, service, or brand, impacting the message to the consumer (Gopal, 2021). Hung (2014) contributes to this framework by adding the source attractiveness (e.g., Ohanian, 1990), the image congruence (Biswas, Biswas, & Das, 2006), and the likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) as other paradigms that can also explain the dynamic between celebrities and consumers through endorsement.

There is a common sense among marketing professionals that celebrity endorsement increases acceptance and profitability of the products/services associated with the brand (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000; Malik & Sudhakar, 2014) through constructs like brand trust (Qiu et al., 2021), brand equity (Parmar & Mann, 2021), and happiness (Lee et al., 2021); it can also help to catch consumers' attention to a certain product (Girdhar & Jha, 2020), to enhance purchase intentions, evoke more incredible positive ad and object attitude (Schnittka et al., 2023), better brand associations (Jun et al., 2023), brand loyalty (Hung, 2014), and brand power (Kumar, Paul, & Starčević, 2021), between other benefits presented in the literature regarding this topic. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Celebrity worship has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.
H2: Celebrity closeness has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand.

Happiness

Happiness is an emotional state that can emerge from various situations, with its intensity varying (Mansoor & Paul, 2022), resulting in an individual's positive attitude and mood (Kumar et al., 2021). This concept can be associated with terms such as life satisfaction, subjective well-being, affection (Jaunky, Jeetoo, & Rampersad, 2020), pleasure, and harmony (Niedermeier, Albrecht, & Jahn, 2019), being also something that can be socially constituted (Ouellette, 2019) and seen as an interpretation of life in a positive manner (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018).

Jaunky et al. (2020) analyzed the relationship between consumerism and happiness, noting that consumption is a relevant part of happiness in people's lives. The authors suggest that individuals with higher happiness tend to spend more, incorporating purchasing activities as a component of their overall sense of fulfillment and lifestyle. Consumer happiness can be seen, thus, as a short emotional state that is subjective and varies in intensity, induced by purchases and consumption events (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018).

Kumar et al. (2021) developed an exciting approach to address the relationship between brands and happiness, presenting distinct interpretations of happiness according to different disciplines. Drawing from neoclassical economic theory, they emphasize the closeness between consumers and brands (Kumar et al., 2021), thereby elevating the latter's significance. According to Nobre et al. (2022), brand experiences can induce happiness through consumption activities that promote emotional fulfillment. Brand-provided experiences mediate consumption and consumer happiness (Jiao, Lu, & Chen, 2022).

In the same reasoning line, Razmus, Grabner-Kräuter, Kostyra, and Zawadzka (2022) identified that brand engagement could enhance consumers' happiness levels since feelings of happiness are more frequent when consumers are engaged. Because consumers want to feel happy (Niedermeier et al., 2019), brands are trying to attract them as much as possible by linking their image to the concept of happiness, investing in happiness through purchase, consumption, and advertising (Schnebelen & Bruhn, 2018). Regarding marketing and advertising strategies, the literature emphasizes global brands that are strongly linking their images to the happiness idea: Coca-Cola (with the "Open Happiness" global campaign) and McDonald's (with the "Happy Meal") are well-known examples (Jiao et al., 2022; Yoshida, Gordon, & James, 2021).

Connecting these assumptions with the celebrity topic, a legitimate question that emerges from exploring marketing strategies sustained on online celebrities is: How does social media use impact consumer happiness? A study by Lee et al. (2021) analyses North American youngsters from Generation Z's (18–24 years) behavior. It shows that social media use may be driven by the Fear of Missing Out ("pervasive apprehension

that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (Lee et al., 2021, p. 1). The authors conclude that this dependency on social media influencers negatively correlates with happiness. However, the engagement with them, at a later stage, improves that construct once some level of psychological deficiency is satisfied through the consumption of products that users identify.

Amplifying this perspective of consumer happiness, online experience, and celebrities, we highlight Kumar et al.'s viewpoint (2021), which indicates that people spend money on things because they are willing to receive something in return. This assumption suggests that in the context of brand celebrities' consumption, enhancing the connection between celebrities and their fans can be achieved through purchasing celebrity-endorsed products (Kim & Kim, 2020). In other words, purchasing experiences that evolve celebrities and fans are very likely to occur in online environments, enhancing both brand celebrities' performances and fans'/consumers' happiness.

Thus, the positive attitude and engagement toward the brand generated by, for example, celebrity endorsement and heightened by celebrity worship can positively influence consumer happiness. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Attitude toward the brand has a positive effect on consumer happiness.

Figure 1 *Research Model*
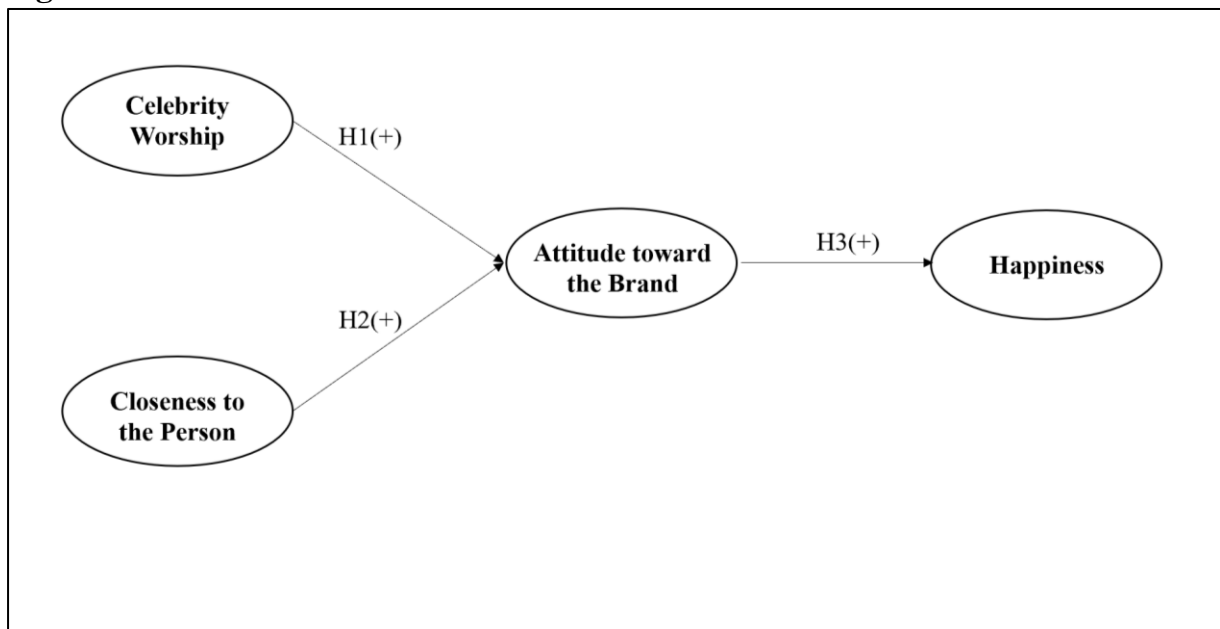
Source: self-made

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Measures

Data were collected through a self-administrated online questionnaire distributed among a convenience sample in May 2022 in Portugal. The survey was distributed on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and no incentives were provided for recruiting participants. In total, 176 questionnaires were completed. The first section describes the respondent's demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and education. The second section assesses whether the respondent is a social media user, which social network is preferred, whether they follow influencers or celebrities, and their favorite one. In this phase, the respondents who answered negatively "Indicate your favorite Influencer or "Celebrity," were removed, corresponding to 19 questionnaires. The final sample is composed of 157 questionnaires. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. Most respondents are female (81.5%) and between 26 and 30 (37.6%). When the respondent was asked about their preferred Influencer, the most popular were Helena Coelho (10.1%), Alice Trewinnard (4.4%), followed by Catarina Gouveia (3.7%). Helena Coelho is a Portuguese digital influencer promoting health awareness and empowering young women (Women's Health, 2020). Alice Trewinnard is a Portuguese-British influencer who has succeeded on social media, gaining recognition for her "Golden Locks" project. She shares her expertise on hairstyles and hair tips through her Facebook and Instagram blogs (NiT, 2018). Catarina Gouveia is a Portuguese digital influencer and actress known for her social media and television work. She has gained prominence for sharing fashion, beauty, lifestyle, and travel content on her social networks, such as Instagram and YouTube (Instagram, 2023). Mariana Machado is a Portuguese digital influencer known for her work in fashion and the partnerships she has developed with national and international fashion brands (NiT, 2020).

Table 1 *Sample Characteristics*

Variable	Freq. (%)	Variable	Freq. (%)
Gender		*Education*	
Male	18.5	Secondary	15.9
Female	81.5	Undergraduate degree	51.0
		Post-graduate degree	33.1
Age		*Favorite Influencer*	
16 – 20	3.8	Helena Coelho	10.1
21 – 25	24.8	Alice Trewinnard	4.4
26 – 30	37.6	Catarina Gouveia	3.7
31 – 35	19.7	Mariana Machado	3.2
> +35	14.0	Others	78.6
Total = 157			

Source: self-made

The third section measures the respondent's level of celebrity worship (three items) and attitude toward the brand/celebrity endorsement (three items) adapted from Hung (2014) scale, closeness to the person with eight items adapted from S.-c. Huang, Broniarczyk, Zhang, and Beruchashvili (2015) scale, and happiness with three items from Cavanaugh, Bettman, and Luce (2015) scale. All constructs were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)."

To avoid common method bias, some procedures were considered, such as the questions were written in order to avoid ambiguity (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2000), the items were randomized (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011; Weijters, Geuens, & Schillewaert, 2009), and we conducted Harman's one- factor test. The result indicated that a single constrained factor explained 41.84% ($< 50\%$ cut-off point) of the total variance, which suggested that the instrument was free from significant standard method bias effects. We also assessed the degree of multicollinearity among the model variables, which was examined through the variance inflation factor (VIF). As per Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, and Ringle (2019), recommendations, VIF values in this study range from 1.228 to 1.574, which is well

below the suggested threshold of 3 or lower. Thus, common bias is unlikely to be a serious concern.

Data Analysis

To test the hypotheses, the partial least squares (PLS) path analytical technique was used (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). The PLS method was executed in two steps. First, we assessed the reliability and validity of the model, and then the structural model was evaluated (Chin, 2010). To test the statistical significance of the path coefficients, we followed the Hair et al. (2019) guidelines and used a bootstrapping procedure with 157 cases and 5000 bootstrap samples. To assess the reliability and validity of the model, we analyzed the internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Results are shown in Table 2. We measured the construct's reliability through Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA) (Henseler, Hubona, & Ray, 2016) and composite reliability (CR). Composite reliability demonstrates sufficient internal consistency, with all values exceeding 0.7, as recommended by (Gefen, Rigdon, & Straub, 2011). Regarding convergent validity, a single item from the construct closeness to the person showed an indicator loading below the threshold of 0.7. Therefore, it was removed. All latent variables showed adequate convergent reliability; their AVE values exceeded 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

Table 2 *Estimates of the Measurement Model Parameters*

Constructs/Items	Loadings	Mean	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA)	CR (AVE)
Celebrity worship (Hung, 2014)			0.688	0.800 (0.573)
I enjoy watching, reading, or listening to my favorite Influencer	0.810	4.04		
My friends and I like to discuss what my favorite Influencer has been doing	0.741	2.89		
The successes of my favorite Influencer are also my successes	0.726	2.19		
Closeness to the person (Huang et al., 2015)			0.925	0.939 (0.688)
My favorite Influencer and I have many things in common	0.751	2.76		
As a friend, I like my favorite Influencer	0.746	2.61		
My favorite Influencer is the kind of person I would like to have as a roommate	0.855	2.83		
My favourite Influencer is someone I would like to be closer to	0.894	3.09		
My favourite Influencer is the type of person I would like to know better	0.879	3.35		
My favourite Influencer is someone I would like to have as a close friend	0.836	2.83		
I would like to meet and socialize with my favourite Influencers more often	0.834	3.20		
Attitude toward the brand (Hung, 2014)			0.848	0.901 (0.753)
I am confident in the brands endorsed by my favourite Influencer	0.914	3.77		
I think my favourite Influencer has delicate taste in the brands he supports	0.892	3.77		
I am willing to buy the brands supported by my favourite Influencer	0.791	3.27		
Happiness (Cavanaugh et al., 2015)			0.792	0.880 (0.710)
Happy	0.886	2.09		
Joy	0.882	2.10		
Euphoria	0.754	1.43		

Source: self-made

Lastly, the model also passed the test for discriminant validity (Table 3), as the squared AVE values were more extensive than the correlations shared by the respective paired constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Jörg Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015) also propose the correlations' heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio to evaluate discriminant validity. Jörg Henseler et al. (2015) suggest a threshold value 0.85 for structural models with conceptually distinct constructs.

Table 3 *Discriminant Validity Assessment*

	Fornell-Larker criterion				Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)			
	1.	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**	**1.**	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**
1. Attitude toward the brand	**0.868**							
2. Celebrity Endorsement	0.407	**0.757**			0.514			
3. Closeness to the person	0.462	0.557	**0.829**		0.520	0.691		
4. Happiness	0.358	0.374	0.426	**0.843**	0.441	0.517	0.501	

Notes: Diagonal elements in bold are the square root of AVE, which is the shared variance within a construct. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs. Diagonal values should be more significant than off-diagonal values to have discriminant validity.
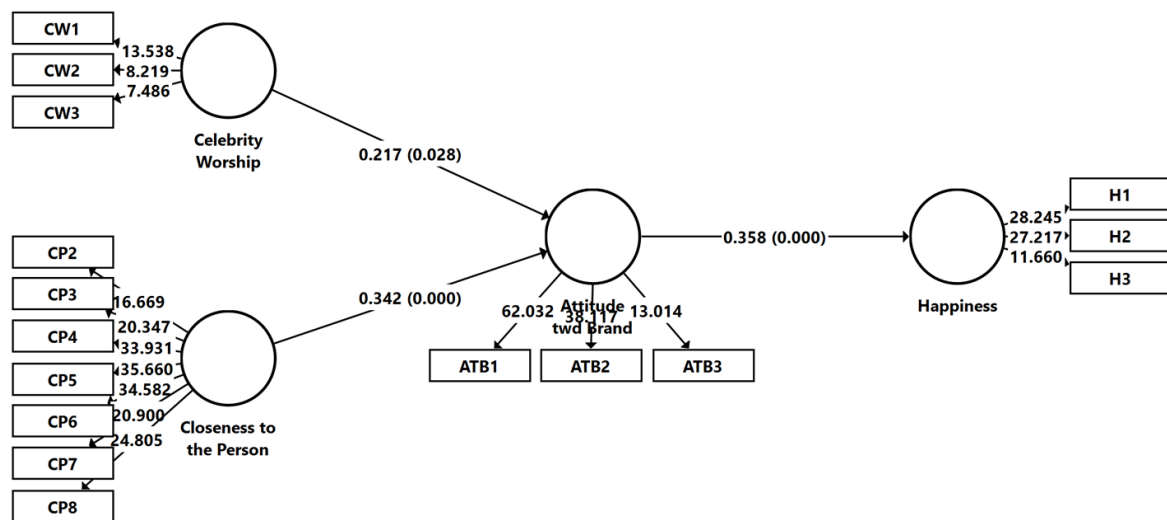
Source: self-made

RESULTS

The hypotheses were tested by running the structural model (figure 2). All the path coefficients were significant at the 0.001 or 0.05 levels supporting H1 ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.05$), H2 ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$), and H3 ($\beta = 0.358$, $p < 0.001$). The R^2, also called an in-sample predictive power (Rigdon, 2012), ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values suggesting a greater explanatory power. This study shows that the constructs explain 24.6% of the variance in attitude toward the brand and 12.8% in consumers' happiness.

Table 4 *Results of Structural Equation Model Test*

	Hypotheses			Path Coeff (β)	t-statistic	Confidence Interval (95%)	Supported
H1	Celebrity worship	→	Attitude toward the brand	0.217*	2.164	[0.006; 0.399]	Yes
H2	Closeness to the person	→	Attitude toward the brand	0.342***	4.544	[0.192; 0.484]	Yes
H3	Attitude toward the brand	→	Happiness	0.358***	4.710	[0.193; 0.490]	Yes

* p<0.1; *** p<0.001

Source: self-made

Figure 2 *Structural Model*

Source: self-made

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide important insights into the relationships between various constructs and consumer behavior. The model's significant path coefficients and strong predictive power confirm the validity of the three hypotheses, demonstrating that celebrity worship and closeness to the person significantly influence consumers' brand attitudes and happiness. The finding that closeness to the person has the most substantial impact on consumers' attitudes toward the brand is consistent with previous research that emphasizes how contact with celebrities connects fans to a sense of identification and commitment, fulfilling psychological needs (Kim & Kim, 2020). Moreover, it also enhances a sense of intimacy or creates the illusion of friendship (Gong & Li, 2017).

The results also emphasize the importance of celebrity worship in shaping consumers' attitudes toward the brand. The devotional process created by celebrity worship helps modify consumers' perception of an endorsed message, promoting positive brand associations and extensions, leading to a more positive attitude toward the brand's endorsement by the influencers (Parmar & Mann, 2021).

Finally, the finding that the model explains only a moderate amount of variance in attitudes toward the brand and consumers' happiness suggests that other factors not included in the model may also influence these outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Several celebrities are essential influencers in consumers' buying processes, creating awareness, raising people's interest in the brands they endorse, and facilitating product association.

Our study's findings indicate that celebrity worship and closeness to the individual directly and significantly impact consumers' attitudes toward the endorsed brands. Consequently, this supports the utility of celebrity worship as a measure for establishing a robust brand and its extension strategies. Results are also consistent with those of Daneshvary and Schwer (2000), Malik and Guptha (2014), and Lee et al. (2021).

Celebrities have become significant influencers in consumers' buying behavior, as they can raise brand awareness and foster product association. This study highlights that celebrity worship and closeness to the person directly and positively impact consumers' attitudes toward the endorsed brands, which is valuable information for marketing practitioners looking to create strong brands and extend their market reach.

This study underscores the growing influence of celebrities as critical drivers in consumers' purchasing decisions, as they can enhance brand visibility and establish strong product associations. By examining the effects of celebrity worship and closeness, we have revealed a direct and favorable influence on consumers' attitudes toward endorsed brands. These findings hold substantial implications for marketing professionals seeking to cultivate powerful brands and expand their market presence.

The insights garnered from this study offer significant contributions to both the academic and practical realms of marketing. They provide valuable clarity regarding celebrities' pivotal role as influencers and their profound impact on consumers' perceptions of endorsed brands. With this knowledge, marketers can strategically leverage the power of celebrity endorsements to optimize their branding strategies and effectively connect with their target audience.

Moreover, the findings emphasize the need for marketers to cultivate a deep understanding of consumers' relationships with celebrities and the mechanisms that underpin their influence. By recognizing the importance of celebrity worship and fostering a sense of closeness to the celebrity figure, marketers can craft compelling campaigns that resonate with consumers on a more personal and emotional level.

In sum, this study illuminates the significant role of celebrities as influencers in shaping consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward endorsed brands. Its implications extend to marketing practitioners, enabling them to devise more effective branding strategies and cultivate more robust connections with their target market. By continually refining our understanding of celebrity endorsements' complexities, we can unlock new opportunities for enhancing brand success in an increasingly influential landscape.

Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this study offer important insights for academics and marketing practitioners. This study adds to the literature on celebrity endorsement by examining the effects of both celebrity worship and closeness on consumers' attitudes towards the endorsed brands and feelings of happiness. This study stands out as one of the first to examine the combined effects of celebrity worship and perceived closeness to celebrities on consumers' attitudes toward endorsed brands and their overall happiness. Our results might help researchers better analyze the role of a celebrity as an influencer and its impact on consumers' perceptions of the endorsed brands. The study provides empirical evidence for the importance of these constructs in shaping consumer behavior, which can help researchers better understand celebrities' role as influencers.

The findings also contribute to the development of the theory of parasocial interaction, which suggests that individuals form one-sided relationships with media personalities.

Moreover, the study highlights the significance of behavioral and cognitive factors, relationships with others, and psychological well-being in celebrity worship and endorsement, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Managerial Implications

Brands are one of the most critical assets of a firm. The findings of this study have practical implications for marketing practitioners, who can use the insights to select highly recognized and worshipped celebrities to enhance brand commitment among potential consumers and improve brand evaluations with actual consumers. Therefore, marketing practitioners could consider this study's findings, recognizing that celebrity worship and personal connection are significant factors that influence consumers' attitudes towards endorsed brands and their feelings of happiness. Moreover, marketers can use these results to target consumers better by strategically selecting highly known and worshipped celebrities to enhance a commitment to potential consumers and improve brand evaluations with actual consumers.

The findings of this study demonstrate the significant role of celebrity worship and closeness in shaping consumers' attitudes toward endorsed brands and their feelings of happiness. In addition, the study suggests that marketers should focus on creating emotional connections with consumers through celebrity endorsements that evoke positive feelings of happiness. As a result, marketing practitioners should consider incorporating these variables into their branding strategies. Choosing trendy and revered celebrities allows marketers to enhance brand evaluations among consumers and increase the likelihood of fostering strong brand loyalty. Additionally, by targeting consumers who exhibit high levels of celebrity worship and closeness, marketers can

enhance brand loyalty and satisfaction, translating into increased profitability and growth for the firm. Marketers can also leverage the results to target specific segments of consumers based on their demographics, personality traits, and other factors influencing celebrity worship and endorsements.

Overall, this study provides important insights for marketing practitioners seeking to optimize their brand strategies by leveraging the power of celebrity endorsements and consumer psychology.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has identified several limitations, which present valuable opportunities for future research. Firstly, one of the limitations is the lack of generalizability of the results. The study's relatively small sample size primarily contributes to this. To enhance generalizability, future research should incorporate larger and more diverse samples encompassing a broader range of demographics, including a more balanced representation of gender, various socio-economic backgrounds, and cultural contexts.

Secondly, the study employed a cross-sectional design, restricting the ability to establish causal relationships between variables. Future research could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to provide a more robust understanding of the causal mechanisms underlying the relationships under examination.

Another limitation is reliance on self-reported measures, which are susceptible to social desirability bias. This bias occurs when participants provide responses that align with societal expectations or what they perceive as desirable. Future studies should consider employing additional objective measures or alternative methodologies to mitigate the influence of social desirability bias, such as observational data or physiological measures.

Furthermore, future research should expand the conceptual model by incorporating influencers from various domains beyond lifestyle. For instance, exploring the impact of sports personalities as influencers and leveraging their charisma as celebrity endorsers to promote well-known brands would be an exciting avenue. This expansion would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of different types of impact on consumers' attitudes toward brands.

Additionally, the study focused solely on the influence of celebrity worship and closeness on consumers' attitudes toward endorsed brands and their happiness. Future research could investigate the moderating effects of age, gender, and different generations on the relationship between celebrity worship, closeness, and consumers' attitudes. It would help uncover potential variations and nuances in the impact of these constructs across different demographic groups.

Lastly, future research could examine other relevant variables influencing these constructs. For example, investigating the role of brand personality, advertising strategies, or social influence on consumers' attitudes toward endorsed brands and their happiness would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to these relationships.

Overall, addressing these limitations and conducting further research in these suggested directions will contribute to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the topics under investigation and enhance the applicability and generalizability of the findings.

Conflict of interests

None

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Dr. Paula Rodrigues holds a Ph.D. in Management, in Faculty of Economics at the University of Porto, Portugal. She is an Associate Professor in Brand Management at the School of Economics and Management, Universidade Lusíada - Norte, Portugal and coordinator of Marketing line of COMEGI (Research Centre in Organizations, Markets and Industrial Management). Since 1995, she teaches Brand Management, Consumer Behaviour, Econometrics, Statistic and Quantitative Methods at the Universidade Lusíada - Norte. She has published several scientific papers, chapters, and books. Her on-going research projects concern consumer-brand relationships in the field of luxury, tourism and hospitality and consumer goods. ORCID: 0000-0003-2967-2583

Dr. Ana Sousa is a Post-Doctoral Fellowship at COMEGI, of the University Lusíada and an Associate Researcher at GOVCOPP of the University of Aveiro. She holds a PhD in Marketing and Strategy from the University of Minho, Portugal. She holds a Master in Marketing and Business Administration and a Degree in Business Management from ISAG - European Business School, and a Degree in Psychology from the University of Porto. Her research interests are Country Image, Place Branding, Consumer Behaviour, Cultural Heritage and International Marketing.

Ana Pinto Borges holds PhD degree in Economics, Faculty of Economics, University of Porto. Coordinating Professor at ISAG - European Business School. Scientific Coordinator of Research Center in Business Sciences and Tourism (CICET – FCVC). Author of more than 40 publications of papers and book chapters in indexed international scientific journals. She also publishes books of international distribution, namely "Building Consumer-Brand Relationship in Luxury Brand Management" and "New Techniques for Brand Management in the Healthcare Sector". Participation in presentations in various national and international congresses and member of the Scientific Committees in academic events. Editor and one of the founding members of the European Journal of Applied Business and Management (EJABM). Former Accenture consultant in the financial area. Economist at the Health Regulatory Entity since 2010.