

Love me, love my endorsed brand: unveiling the impact of Generation Z fan's celebrity worship on online brand advocacy

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the interrelationship among consumers, celebrities and brands within social media environments. It proposes a theoretical framework based on an integrative approach that combines parasocial relationship theory and the meaning transfer model.

Design/methodology/approach – This study collected data from 342 Generation Z fans, and structural equation modeling was used for the analysis.

Findings – The results revealed that social media use strongly affects celebrity worship, but its impacts on brand love and online brand advocacy are weak. Celebrity worship significantly influences brand love; however, the relationship with online brand advocacy is nonsignificant, highlighting the crucial mediating role of brand love. The mediating effects of celebrity worship and brand love significantly strengthened the relationship between social media use and online brand advocacy.

Originality/value – By using an integrative approach, this study advances the understanding of the dynamics of consumer–brand relationships, revealing the serial mediating path that highlights the roles of celebrity worship and brand love.

Keywords Consumer–brand relationship, Fandom, Social media use, Celebrity worship, Brand love, Online brand advocacy, Generation Z

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The consumer–brand relationship is crucial for sustaining long-term brand success beyond mere transactions (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Fournier, 1998; Tuškej *et al.*, 2013). This relationship is often seen as a triad bond involving consumers establishing connections with brands and celebrities (Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010). The dynamics of these connections can be shaped by parasocial relationships theory, evident in social media interactions (Hoffner and Bond, 2022; Labrecque, 2014; Yuan *et al.*, 2016).

Social media platforms serve as meeting places where consumers with similar interests form communities, such as dedicated fandoms of artists and brands (Laffan *et al.*, 2022; Muniz and O'guinn, 2001). These communities actively engage and significantly influence consumer responses such as brand equity (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016), brand attitude (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016), brand love (Salem and Salem, 2021), brand engagement (Gómez *et al.*,

2019) and purchase intention (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). The influence of online communities significantly enhances the development of online brand advocacy (Wilk *et al.*, 2018). This advocacy is a valuable source of brand-related information for prospective consumers during their purchase decision-making and defending against negative brand perceptions (Wilk *et al.*, 2021; Wong and Hung, 2023). While understanding online brand advocacy is evolving, research on different contexts and brand elements remains inadequate (Wong and Hung, 2023).

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Ethical declaration: This research complies with ethical standards that have been approved by Mahidol University Central Institutional Review Board, protocol number: MU-CIRB 2023/118-0504.

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