




“Endorser attributes, customer experience, and brand advocacy in the Vietnamese personal care market”

AUTHORS	Thuy Duong Pham Huong Thi Lan Le Hai Ninh Nguyen  
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Thuy Duong Pham, Ph.D. Candidate,
National Economics University (NEU),
Vietnam.

Huong Thi Lan Le, Dr., Associate
Professor, National Economics
University (NEU), Vietnam.

Hai Ninh Nguyen, Dr., Associate
Professor, School of International
Business and Economics, Department
of Marketing and Communications,
Foreign Trade University, Vietnam.
(Corresponding author)



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Thuy Duong Pham (Vietnam), Huong Thi Lan Le (Vietnam), Hai Ninh Nguyen (Vietnam)

ENDORSER ATTRIBUTES, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE, AND BRAND ADVOCACY IN THE VIETNAMESE PERSONAL CARE MARKET

Abstract

As influencer marketing intensifies within the hyper-competitive personal care industry, selecting the optimal brand endorser ranging from high-profile celebrities to niche social media influencers has become a critical strategy for fostering sustainable consumer loyalty. Grounded in the Source Credibility Model and Match-Up Hypothesis, this study empirically investigates the impact of four key endorser attributes (attractiveness, trustworthiness, popularity, and brand-endorser congruency) on brand advocacy, while examining the mediating mechanism of customer experience. Primary data were collected from April to June 2025 through a mixed-mode survey targeting consumers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City who had recently purchased endorsed personal care products. Using a convenience sampling method across major shopping centers and relevant online beauty communities, the study analyzed 231 valid responses via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that brand-endorser congruency exerts a direct positive influence on brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.01$). Conversely, attractiveness ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.01$), trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.224$, $p < 0.001$), and popularity ($\beta = 0.173$, $p < 0.05$) impact advocacy solely through the mediation of customer experience. The structural model demonstrates substantial explanatory power, accounting for 61.2% of the variance in brand advocacy. These findings imply that in the Vietnamese market, the strategic alignment between the endorser's persona and the brand's image is more decisive for advocacy than fame or physical appeal alone, underscoring the necessity of creating meaningful customer experiences over superficial endorsements to transform passive followers into active brand advocates.

Keywords

brand endorsers, customer experience, brand advocacy, congruency

JEL Classification

M31, M37

INTRODUCTION

In the face of intensifying market competition and rapidly evolving consumer behaviors, firms are increasingly constrained in their ability to rely solely on product refinement or price adjustments to sustain competitiveness, as earlier studies have suggested (De Veirman et al., 2017). The challenges associated with economic downturns and accelerated shifts toward online shopping further reinforce the need for strategies that simultaneously elevate customer experience and leverage the persuasive impact of brand endorsers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencers drawn from diverse domains such as entertainment, sports, professional expertise, and social media content creation have become critical actors in amplifying brand communication and shaping consumer purchase decisions (Jin et al., 2019). While many firms continue to prioritize high-profile personalities, the decision to select an endorser involves more than choosing a wellknown figure. Misalignment between an endorser's public persona and the brand's

intended identity may elicit negative consumer reactions that weaken credibility and reduce marketplace resonance (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Conversely, endorsers who demonstrate credibility, domain knowledge, and relational engagement with audiences tend to foster deeper trust and strengthen longterm loyalty (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

These dynamics become even more salient when considered alongside the rising centrality of customer experience, which shapes both immediate brand perceptions and sustained loyalty trajectories (Foroudi et al., 2018; Wibowo et al., 2021). Customer experience increasingly encompasses a broad range of interactions, including digital touchpoints, branded events, and postpurchase engagement activities that collectively influence consumers well beyond the moment of transaction (Harrigan et al., 2017). When these interactions are seamless and personalized, they not only increase the likelihood of repeated patronage but also serve as a foundation for the highest form of loyalty, namely brand advocacy (Zhang, 2024; Rusnaini et al., 2024). Brand advocacy reflects a heightened level of commitment in which consumers voluntarily recommend, defend, and elevate a brand within their interpersonal and digital networks (Khan et al., 2022). Such behavior expands the reach of wordofmouth and reduces marketing expenditure because advocacy stems from voluntary, selfreinforcing consumer enthusiasm (Christodoulides et al., 2015).

Despite these significant benefits, the cultivation of brand advocacy remains a complex and multifaceted process. Zaidun et al. (2021) emphasize that advocacy arises from the convergence of multiple psychological and experiential influences rather than from a single antecedent. Jin et al. (2019) further argue that the attributes of endorsers, when combined with meaningful customer experiences, may guide consumers along a trajectory that begins with brand awareness and culminates in advocacy. These patterns have gained distinctive relevance within the personal care sector, a domain experiencing rapid global expansion driven by heightened concerns for health, appearance, and lifestyle (Sviderska & Kukhta, 2023). In this environment, the strategic use of endorsers has become a critical instrument for message delivery and brand differentiation (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Vietnamese consumers illustrate these dynamics clearly, as younger customers depend heavily on social media reviews and influencer recommendations (Dataportal, 2025), whereas older consumers gravitate toward endorsements from experts and dermatologists (B&Company, 2024).

Despite the acknowledged importance of these factors, a critical scientific problem remains: while the individual impacts of endorser traits and customer experience are well-documented, the mechanism of their interplay in driving brand advocacy, particularly in emerging markets like Vietnam is not yet fully understood. Firms that combine credible endorsers with intentionally designed customer experiences are theoretically better positioned to compete effectively, yet empirical evidence explaining how specific endorser attributes translate into advocacy through the lens of customer experience remains fragmented. Addressing this theoretical gap is essential to understand how organizations may transform satisfied buyers into active brand promoters in an increasingly saturated and competitive market environment.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Brand endorsement serves as a pivotal strategy in shaping consumer perceptions, influencing purchase decisions, and enhancing brand loyalty by serving as both communicators and symbolic representatives of brand values. Traditionally,

the effectiveness of an endorser has been examined through established theoretical lenses. The Source Credibility Model, for instance, identifies expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness as pivotal dimensions through which endorsers gain consumer acceptance (Ohanian, 1990), while the Source Attractiveness Model highlights physical appeal, likability, and perceived similarity with the audience as essential influencers (McGuire, 1985; Lee et al., 2024). Expanding this logic, the

Match-Up Hypothesis asserts that endorsement effectiveness improves when the endorser's image is congruent with the brand's values, thereby enhancing message believability (Kamins, 1990; Simon & Cambefort, 2025). Further integration is found in the TEARS Model, which includes Respect and Similarity alongside other established traits, offering a comprehensive framework for assessing endorsement quality (Shimp, 2000; Barari et al., 2025). In contemporary digital marketing, the definition of brand endorsers has evolved to encompass not only celebrities but also micro-influencers, industry experts, and social media creators (Verma et al., 2024). Unlike traditional spokespeople, these digital endorsers cultivate trust through sustained interaction and personalized narratives (Leban & Voyer, 2020). In such competitive markets, the selection of endorsers must account not only for their popularity but also for their ability to foster meaningful customer experiences and strengthen brand credibility (Putri & Roostika, 2021).

Central to this evolving dynamic is the concept of Customer Experience (CX). While earlier conceptions of customer experience were confined to product usage or in-store service encounters, the emergence of digital marketing has significantly broadened this scope to include influencer collaborations, social media engagement, virtual brand events, and personalized content streams (Harrigan et al., 2017; Zhang, 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that specific endorser traits drive this experience; for instance, attractive endorsers have been found to enhance perceived product effectiveness and interaction levels, particularly in beauty markets (Schouten et al., 2021; Bai et al., 2024). Similarly, trustworthiness and authenticity are critical, as consumers are more inclined to accept brand messages and engage in long-term relationships when they perceive the endorser as honest and transparent (Christodoulides et al., 2015; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). When consumers engage positively with endorsers, whether through interactive Q&A sessions, tutorial videos, or behind-the-scenes brand narratives, they are more likely to develop brand loyalty (Alharbi et al., 2022). Moreover, tailored initiatives such as influencer-driven content serve to solidify the relational bond between brand and consumer (Lourenco et

al., 2024). Accordingly, organizations must prioritize authenticity and relevance by ensuring that endorsers deliver credible insights, resonate with the brand's identity, and cultivate high-value interactions (Kalam et al., 2024).

The ultimate objective of these endorsement strategies is to cultivate Brand Advocacy, which represents the highest form of consumer loyalty. Unlike passive forms of loyalty, brand advocacy entails intentional behaviors such as voluntary word-of-mouth, resistance to negative brand portrayals, and the organic amplification of brand messages across interpersonal networks and digital communities (Khan et al., 2022; Sweeney et al., 2020). Zaidun et al. (2021) assert that no single determinant is sufficient to generate advocacy; instead, it arises from the convergence of emotional connection, brand credibility, and prior experiences with endorsers. Furthermore, Rusnaini et al. (2024) argue that while customers may trust an endorser, they often require deeper engagement to evolve into brand advocates. In influencer-driven contexts, partnerships with culturally relevant Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and domain experts are found to elevate brand recall, intensify loyalty, and promote advocacy behaviors (Luong et al., 2023). Therefore, as customer experience and endorser credibility gain prominence, brands must invest in sustained influencer relationships and transparent communications to foster long-term consumer advocacy (Jin et al., 2019).

These theoretical relationships are particularly salient in Vietnam's personal care market, which has demonstrated sustained growth with a market value reaching approximately \$2.4 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2023). The expanding middle class, heightened consumer awareness of personal grooming, and the proliferation of e-commerce platforms (Euromonitor International, 2023) fuel this upward trajectory. Le (2023) reports that more than 60% of Vietnamese consumers engage in daily skincare routines. Alongside this, the influence of K-beauty and social media has transformed purchasing behavior, with online transactions accounting for over 73% of personal care sales (Vietnam Briefing, 2023). Nevertheless, concerns regard-

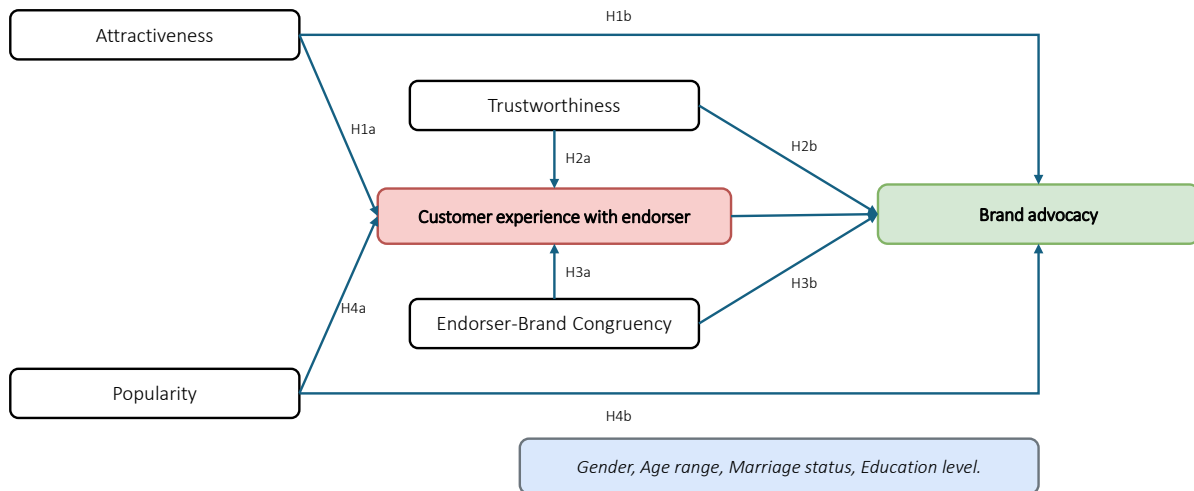


Figure 1. Proposed research model

ing counterfeit products and inconsistent quality have prompted consumers to gravitate toward official brand stores and verified platforms (Kesner, 2023). In response, brands increasingly rely on a mix of macro- and micro-influencers to build trust, as 80% of Vietnamese consumers reportedly place greater trust in KOL recommendations compared to traditional advertising (Euromonitor International, 2023). While celebrity endorsements remain relevant, brands are increasingly favoring micro- and nano-KOLs due to their higher audience engagement and improved conversion rates (Statista, 2023). Furthermore, the adoption of digital transformation strategies, such as AI-generated influencers and personalized trial experiences, resonates particularly well with Gen Z consumers (Bain & Company, 2023). Moving forward, platforms such as TikTok and livestream shopping will remain central, where endorsers serve as active catalysts of purchase behavior (Impact, 2024).

In summary, the existing literature highlights the individual importance of endorser attributes and customer experience but has not fully elucidated the mechanism by which they synergistically drive brand advocacy. Given the confluence of theoretical insights and contextual dynamics in Vietnam’s personal care sector, the literature strongly suggests that endorser characteristics and customer experience jointly shape brand advocacy. Addressing this gap, the present study develops and tests a conceptual

framework that investigates the mediating role of customer experience in the relationship between endorser attributes and brand advocacy.

Based on the theoretical landscape discussed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1a: The attractiveness of the brand endorser positively influences customer experience.*
- H1b: The attractiveness of the brand endorser positively influences brand advocacy.*
- H2a: The trustworthiness of the brand endorser positively influences customer experience.*
- H2b: The trustworthiness of the brand endorser positively influences brand advocacy.*
- H3a: Brand-endorser congruency positively influences customer experience.*
- H3b: Brand-endorser congruency positively influences brand advocacy.*
- H4a: The popularity of the brand endorser positively influences customer experience.*
- H4b: The popularity of the brand endorser positively influences brand advocacy.*
- H5: Customer experience mediates the relationship between brand endorser characteristics and brand advocacy behavior.*

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research design and procedure

A quantitative research design was adopted to examine the structural relationships among brand endorser characteristics, customer experience, and brand advocacy behavior. The study utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), an approach widely recognized in marketing research for its capacity to estimate both direct and indirect effects in complex models, especially those incorporating mediating variables (Hair et al., 2017). PLS-SEM is particularly suited for datasets with non-normal distributions and moderate sample sizes, making it an appropriate choice for this research context (Henseler et al., 2015).

The research procedure followed a systematic algorithm:

- Instrument development: constructing the questionnaire based on validated scales from prior literature.
- Data collection: implementing a mixed-mode survey (online and offline) in key metropolitan areas.
- Data screening: filtering responses based on experience with endorsed products and checking for data quality.
- Data analysis: assessing the measurement and structural models using SmartPLS software.

2.2. Sampling and data collection

Data collection was conducted between April and June 2025 in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. These two major cities were selected as they represent the largest economic hubs in Vietnam with the highest concentration of personal care consumers and digital media users. To ensure a representative and diverse sample, a dual-mode convenience sampling strategy was employed (Lou & Yuan, 2019):

- Offline: 100 paper-based surveys were distributed at prominent shopping centers (BigC, Lotte, and Aeon Mall) to reach general consumers.

- Online: 200 surveys were disseminated via Google Forms in beauty-related Facebook communities and skincare review forums to capture digitally active segments.

To ensure respondent relevance, a screening question was presented at the beginning: “Have you purchased a personal care product endorsed by a brand ambassador in the last 6 months?” Only those answering “yes” proceeded. After eliminating invalid responses (e.g., straight-lining or incomplete data), 231 valid responses were retained. This sample size exceeds the minimum threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2017) (ten times the number of structural paths).

2.3. Respondent profile

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. The sample was predominantly female (77.1%), reflecting the typical consumer base of the personal care industry. The age distribution was skewed toward younger cohorts, with 38.5% aged 18–23 and 29.0% aged 24–35, consistent with the high engagement of Gen Z and Millennials in influencer marketing.

Table 1. Demographical analysis

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	178	77.1
	Male	53	22.9
Age group	18-23 years	89	38.5
	24-35 years	67	29.0
	36-45 years	35	15.2
	Above 45 years	40	17.3
Educational level	High school	31	13.4
	Undergraduate	113	48.9
	Postgraduate	87	37.7
Marital status	Single	102	44.2
	Married	129	55.8

2.4. Measurement instruments

The questionnaire was developed by adapting established scales from previous studies to ensure content validity and reliability. The use of standard, previously tested questionnaires is justified to maintain consistency with existing theoretical frameworks and to allow for cross-study comparison.

- **Endorser Characteristics:** Items for attractiveness, trustworthiness, popularity, and congruency were adapted from Putri and Roostika (2021), Bai et al. (2024), Kim and Wang (2024), Jin et al. (2019), Verma et al. (2024), and Kalam et al. (2024).
- **Customer Experience:** measured using items adapted from Wibowo et al. (2021), and Kim and Wang (2024) to capture interaction quality.
- **Brand Advocacy:** adopted from Zaidun et al. (2021), Alharbi et al. (2022), and Irawan and Cheng (2025).

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The full measurement scales are provided in the Appendix.

2.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the study. All participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study’s academic purpose prior to providing consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, as no personally identifiable information (PII) was collected. Participants retained the right to withdraw from the survey at any stage without consequence.

3. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data analysis process followed a rigorous multi-step approach. First, the reliability and validity of the measurement constructs were assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), ensuring internal consistency and con-

struct validity. Following this, the structural model analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4 to test the proposed relationships. The hypotheses were evaluated by examining path coefficients, t-values, and p-values, alongside a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to validate the significance of the findings (Hair et al., 2017).

3.1. Assessment of measurement model

The assessment of the measurement model was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs used in this study. The evaluation included an analysis of factor loadings, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. To assess item reliability, the outer loadings of each indicator were examined. As Hair et al. (2017) suggested, acceptable outer loadings should be greater than 0.7 to ensure that the observed variables significantly contribute to their respective latent constructs. As shown in Table 2, all retained items satisfied this criterion, although a few items (BA1, P2, T3, and C3) were excluded due to low factor loadings. Their removal ensured that the remaining indicators adequately represented their underlying constructs.

Internal consistency reliability was examined through Cronbach’s Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR), with values above 0.7 indicating acceptable reliability levels (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As presented in Table 2, all constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency, as CA values ranged from 0.734 to 0.855 and CR values exceeded 0.8 across all constructs. Furthermore, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated to assess convergent validity. The AVE values ranged from 0.652 to 0.757,

To establish discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion was employed

Table 2. Consistency Reliability and convergent validity

Constructs	Outer loadings	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Attractiveness (A)	0.767 – 0.863	0.831	0.887	0.663
Brand Advocacy (BA)	0.817 – 0.840	0.775	0.869	0.689
Congruency (C)	0.776 – 0.839	0.734	0.849	0.652
Customer Experience (CE)	0.803 – 0.857	0.855	0.902	0.698
Popularity (P)	0.824 – 0.872	0.815	0.890	0.730
Trustworthiness (T)	0.827 – 0.895	0.840	0.903	0.757

(Henseler et al., 2015). According to this criterion, HTMT values below 0.85 indicate that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another. The values presented in Table 3 demonstrate that all HTMT ratios remained under the acceptable threshold, thereby confirming sufficient discriminant validity.

Table 3. HTMT

	A	BA	C	CE	P
A					
BA	0.272				
C	0.396	0.474			
CE	0.525	0.566	0.648		
P	0.329	0.281	0.598	0.560	
T	0.388	0.184	0.372	0.446	0.276

3.2. Assessment of structural model

Having confirmed the adequacy of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated to determine its validity and explanatory capacity.

- **Model Fit and Collinearity:** the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) served as a model fit indicator. Following the threshold of 0.08 recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), the model demonstrated a good fit with an SRMR value of 0.055. Multicollinearity was evaluated through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values to ensure that the independent variables did not exhibit problematic inter-correlations. As shown in Table 5, all VIF scores ranged from 1.2 to 1.7, falling below the threshold of 5 (Becker et al., 2015), indicating that multicollinearity did not pose a concern.
- **Explanatory Power (R^2) and Effect Size (f^2):** the coefficient of determination (R^2) measured the proportion of variance in the dependent variables. The R^2 value for Customer Experience (CE) was 0.425, indicating a moderate level of explanatory power, while the R^2 for Brand Advocacy (BA) was 0.237 (Table 4). Effect sizes (f^2) were also assessed to determine the strength of individual predictors. As detailed in Table 6, Congruency exerted a moderate effect on Customer Experience ($f^2 = 0.100$), while Customer Experience had the strongest influence on Brand Advocacy ($f^2 = 0.115$).

- **Predictive Relevance (Q^2):** To assess predictive relevance, the Q^2 values were examined. The model's Q^2 for Customer Experience was 0.285 and for Brand Advocacy was 0.153 (Table 4). Since both values are above zero, the model possesses predictive capability beyond chance (Geisser, 1974).

Table 4. Structural model result

Constructs	R^2	Q^2	SRMR
Customer Experience (CE)	0.425	0.285	0.055
Brand Advocacy (BA)	0.237	0.153	

Table 5. Multicollinearity testing

	A	BA	C	CE	P	T
A		1.302		1.201		
BA						
C		1.514		1.376		
CE		1.738				
P		1.406		1.311		
T		1.227		1.179		

Table 6. Effect size (f^2)

	A	BA	C	CE	P	T
A		0.001		0.084		
BA						
C		0.030		0.100		
CE		0.115				
P		0.001		0.072		
T		0.003		0.041		

Hypothesis Testing (Direct Effects): the bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 resamples was conducted to validate the structural relationships (Egbert & Plonsky, 2021). As illustrated in Figure 2 and Table 7, the results reveal mixed outcomes. Attractiveness significantly influences customer experience ($\beta = 0.240$, $t = 4.711$, $p = 0.000$), showing that a visually appealing endorser enhances engagement. However, its direct impact on brand advocacy is negligible ($\beta = 0.027$, $t = 0.471$, $p = 0.638$), suggesting that physical appeal alone does not drive loyalty. Brand-endorser congruency significantly impacts both customer experience ($\beta = 0.282$, $t = 5.529$, $p = 0.000$) and brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 2.651$, $p = 0.008$), implying that endorsers aligning with brand identity foster stronger consumer relationships. Customer experience is a strong predictor of brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.390$, $t = 5.617$, $p = 0.000$), reinforcing that positive interactions enhance consumer loyalty. Popularity positively affects customer experience ($\beta = 0.234$, $t =$

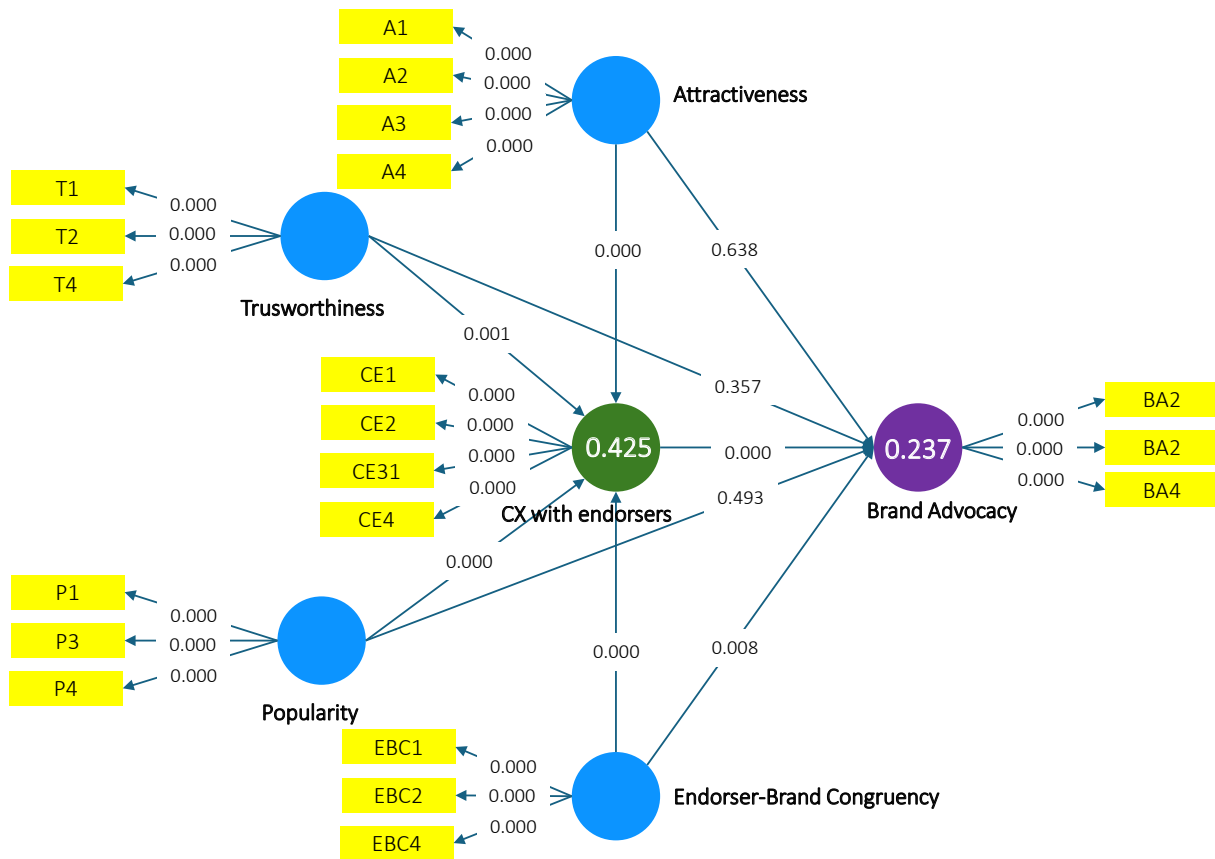


Figure 2. Structural model assessment result

Table 7. Bootstrapping result

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	t-statistics (O/STDEV)	p-values	Hypothesis testing
A → BA	0.027	0.028	0.471	0.638	Rejected
A → CE	0.240	0.242	4.711	0.000	Accepted
C → BA	0.187	0.189	2.651	0.008	Accepted
C → CE	0.282	0.281	5.529	0.000	Accepted
CE → BA	0.390	0.390	5.617	0.000	Accepted
P → BA	-0.037	-0.035	0.685	0.493	Rejected
P → CE	0.234	0.235	4.074	0.000	Accepted
T → BA	-0.055	-0.056	0.921	0.357	Rejected
T → CE	0.167	0.169	3.272	0.001	Accepted

4.074, $p = 0.000$), but its effect on brand advocacy is insignificant ($\beta = -0.037$, $t = 0.685$, $p = 0.493$). Similarly, Trustworthiness significantly enhances customer experience ($\beta = 0.167$, $t = 3.272$, $p = 0.001$) but does not directly influence brand advocacy ($\beta = -0.055$, $t = 0.921$, $p = 0.357$).

- Mediation Analysis: the mediation analysis evaluated whether Customer Experience (CE) serves as a critical pathway. As presented in Table 8, the results confirmed that CE significantly

mediates the relationship between all endorser characteristics and brand advocacy. Specifically, Congruency ($\beta = 0.110$, $t = 3.933$, $p = 0.000$), Popularity ($\beta = 0.091$, $t = 3.306$, $p = 0.001$), Trustworthiness ($\beta = 0.065$, $t = 2.749$, $p = 0.006$), and Attractiveness ($\beta = 0.094$, $t = 3.489$, $p = 0.000$) all exerted significant indirect effects on advocacy through the customer experience mechanism. This underscores the pivotal role of CE in transforming endorser traits into advocacy behaviors.

Table 8. Mediation analysis results

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	t-statistics (O/STDEV)	p-values	Hypothesis testing
EBC → CE → BA	0.110	0.110	3.933	0.000	Accepted
P → CE → BA	0.091	0.091	3.306	0.001	Accepted
T → CE → BA	0.065	0.066	2.749	0.006	Accepted
A → CE → BA	0.094	0.095	3.489	0.000	Accepted

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary objective of this study was to examine the interplay between endorser characteristics and brand advocacy through the mediating lens of customer experience. The empirical results provide a nuanced understanding of how endorsement operates in the Vietnamese personal care market, revealing that while endorser traits are essential; their route to advocacy is primarily governed by their interaction with customer experience.

4.1. Discussion of findings

A critical aspect of the observed interplay is that Brand-Endorser Congruency acts as the sole attribute exerting a direct and significant influence on brand advocacy. This result strongly validates the Match-Up Hypothesis (Kamins, 1990), suggesting that consumers in emerging markets are discerning; they look beyond mere celebrity status to evaluate the logical fit between the endorser and the product. This aligns with Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), who argued that perceived fit enhances credibility and reduces skepticism. However, it contrasts with earlier views that prioritized physical attractiveness as the primary driver of persuasion in beauty categories.

Furthermore, the study elucidates the indirect nature of this interplay, identifying Customer Experience as a vital mediator. The analysis shows that Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Popularity do not directly drive advocacy but instead function as antecedents that enhance the customer experience. This finding extends the work of Zhang (2024) and Rusnaini et al. (2024) who posited that experience is a prerequisite for loyalty. Unlike Schimmelpfennig and Hunt (2020), whose meta-analysis emphasized the direct power of individual traits, current findings suggest that in a digitally saturated market like

Vietnam, these traits serve primarily to attract and engage consumers. The quality of the subsequent interaction the “experience” converts this attention into active advocacy. This distinction is particularly relevant for Popularity. While popular endorsers successfully capture attention (driving experience), popularity alone fails to secure advocacy. This supports the contention of Verma et al. (2024) that high visibility does not equate to high loyalty. Similarly, Trustworthiness requires an experiential platform to translate into advocacy; consumers must “experience” the endorser’s reliability through consistent and authentic content to become advocates, supporting the shift toward relational influencer marketing (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

4.2. Theoretical contributions

The present study advances endorsement theory by introducing an integrated framework that situates Customer Experience as the central mechanism within the interplay of endorser traits and advocacy. First, it refines the Source Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990) by demonstrating that credibility dimensions are necessary but insufficient conditions for advocacy; they must be activated through meaningful experiences. Second, it reinforces the Match-Up Hypothesis in an Asian context, confirming that “fit” is a more powerful direct driver of loyalty than “fame” (Kamins, 1990). Third, by linking the TEARS Model (Shimp, 2000) with experiential marketing, the study responds to the call for research on how digital interactions shape consumer behavior in emerging economies, offering a model where technical attributes and experiential value co-create brand equity.

4.3. Managerial implications

For marketing practitioners in the personal care industry, understanding this interplay offers three strategic imperatives:

- Prioritize “fit” over “fame”: Since congruency is the strongest driver, brands should select endorsers whose lifestyle and values mirror the brand identity. A micro-influencer with high congruency may generate more advocacy than a misaligned superstar.
- Design Holistic Experiences: Managers must realize that paying an endorser is only the beginning. The investment must be directed toward creating interactive experiences, such as live-stream tutorials and authentic storytelling, that leverage the endorser’s traits. For instance, an attractive endorser should be utilized in high-visual content, while a trustworthy expert should lead educational segments.
- Multi-Tiered Strategy: Given that popularity drives experience but not direct advocacy, brands should employ a mix of macro-influencers (to widen the experience funnel) and niche KOLs (to deepen congruency).

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the interplay between endorser characteristics and brand advocacy within the Vietnamese personal care market, specifically examining the mediating mechanism of customer experience. The empirical findings highlight a distinct dichotomy: while Brand-Endorser Congruency serves as the sole direct driver of advocacy, other critical attributes, Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Popularity, influence advocacy only indirectly through the enhancement of Customer Experience. Consequently, it is concluded that endorsement effectiveness in a digital-first emerging market depends less on celebrity allure alone and more on the strategic alignment between the endorser’s persona and the brand, reinforced by meaningful consumer interactions.

Despite these contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged to guide future inquiry. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretations, suggesting that future research should adopt longitudinal approaches to track how this interplay evolves over time. Second, the reliance on convenience sampling in two major cities may limit generalizability to rural populations. Future studies could expand the model to include variables such as emotional brand attachment or ethical alignment to further decode the complex mechanism of brand advocacy.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Hai Ninh Nguyen.

Data curation: Thuy Duong Pham.

Formal analysis: Thuy Duong Pham.

Investigation: Thuy Duong Pham.

Methodology: Hai Ninh Nguyen.

Project administration: Hai Ninh Nguyen, Huong Thi Lan Le.

Resources: Huong Thi Lan Le.

Software: Hai Ninh Nguyen, Thuy Duong Pham.

Supervision: Huong Thi Lan Le.

Validation: Thuy Duong Pham, Huong Thi Lan Le.

Visualization: Thuy Duong Pham, Huong Thi Lan Le.

Writing – original draft: Hai Ninh Nguyen, Thuy Duong Pham, Huong Thi Lan Le.

Writing – review & editing: Hai Ninh Nguyen, Thuy Duong Pham, Huong Thi Lan Le.

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APPENDIX A. MEASUREMENT SCALE

Table A1. Attractiveness – A

Code	Statement
A1	The brand endorser has an attractive appearance
A2	The endorser’s style aligns with modern trends
A3	The endorser immediately captures my attention
A4	I am drawn to the endorser’s image in advertisements

Table A2. Trustworthiness – T

Code	Statement
T1	I believe the brand endorser is trustworthy
T2	The endorser has expertise in the products they promote
T3	I believe the endorser uses the products they endorse
T4	The endorser demonstrates professional ethics in brand endorsement

Table A3. Endorser-Brand Congruency – EBC

Code	Statement
EBC1	The endorser’s style matches the brand’s identity
EBC2	The brand aligns with the endorser’s personal image
EBC3	I perceive a natural connection between the endorser and the brand
EBC4	The partnership between the endorser and the brand makes sense

Table A4. Popularity – P

Code	Statement
P1	The endorser has a broad influence on social media
P2	The endorser is a well-known figure in the industry
P3	I frequently see the endorser in various media
P4	The endorser is widely followed and admired by consumers

Table A5. Customer Experience with Endorser – CE

Code	Statement
CE1	I feel comfortable following the endorser’s content
CE2	The endorser provides useful information about the product
CE3	I enjoy how the endorser interacts with their followers
CE4	The endorser influences how I perceive the brand

Table A6. Brand Advocacy – BA

Code	Statement
BA1	I am willing to recommend this brand to others
BA2	I defend this brand when it receives negative feedback
BA3	I frequently mention this brand in my conversations
BA4	I share content about this brand on social media