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by Arancibia, S., May, D.E., Tremma, O. and Zhao, S.

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Understanding young urban Chinese consumers' preferences for food goods endorsed by celebrities: a behavioural approach

Sara Arancibia[a], Daniel E. May[b*], Ourania Tremma[c] and Suzie Zhao[b]

[a]Diego Portales University, Faculty of Engineering and Sciences, Av. Ejército 441, Santiago, Chile; sara.arancibia@udp.cl

[b]Harper Adams University, Harper Business School, Shrewsbury Road, TF10 8NB, Newport, Shropshire, United Kingdom; dmay@harper-adams.ac.uk

[c]University College Dublin, School of Agriculture and Food Science, Belfield, D04 V1W8, Dublin, Ireland; ourania.tremma@ucd.ie

*Corresponding author

Abstract

The investigation of the influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer purchasing behaviour has garnered sustained scholarly interest over an extended period. Early research primarily concentrated on the effects of celebrity attributes on consumer decisions, a foundation that continues to underpin contemporary studies. More recently, attention has shifted towards understanding consumer motivations through a socio-psychological lens. However, the integration of celebrity attributes with socio-psychological drivers to elucidate their combined impact remains relatively underexplored within the food industry. This article aims to advance this area of inquiry by examining young Chinese consumers in urban areas through a comprehensive approach that synthesises these dimensions. Findings indicate that celebrity attributes constitute a primary determinant of consumer behaviour, further reinforced by socio-psychological factors, providing valuable implications for marketing strategies.

Keywords: Chinese consumers; Celebrity endorsement; Celebrity attributes; Theory of planned behaviour; Purchasing behaviour.

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1. Introduction

The issue of endorsed celebrities in marketing has been studied over a long period of time. The aim of these studies is to determine the effectiveness of added value marketing strategies that are linked to celebrities whose abilities are exalted and admired (Carrillat, & Ilicic, 2019). Earlier works focused on the characteristics of celebrities in explaining their influence on consumers' behaviour. For example, source models argue that a celebrity who exhibits both expertness and trustworthiness is considered credible, and therefore more persuasive (Hovland, & Weiss, 1951). Likewise, celebrities who are known to, liked by, and similar to the consumer are attractive and, therefore, more influential (Byrne, Whitehead, & Breen, 2003; McGuire, 1985). It is argued that marketing endorsed by celebrities who have these attributes is more persuasive in delivering a desired message (McCracken, 1989). Other earlier ideas such as the match-up hypothesis and the transfer model (McCracken, 1986) state that endorsed celebrities are more effective when there is congruence between the endorser and the endorsed product/brand (Campbell, & Warren 2012; Kamins, 1990). For example, campaigns of luxury goods would be more effective if they are endorsed by celebrities. In contrast, goods associated with practical uses (e.g. cleansing pumps) should be endorsed by people considered as experts (Seiler, & Kucza 2017).

While all these approaches have been supported by numerous academic works (Baker, & Churchill, 1977; Braunstein, & Zhang 2005; Caballero, & Pride 1984; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Hunter, Burger, & Davidsson, 2008; Kahle, & Homer 1985; Mookda *et al*., 2020; Till, & Busler, 2000), they do not provide the only explanations for the influence of endorsed celebrities on consumers' behaviour, with more recent contributions examining the role of consumers' attributes (de Acedo Lizárraga *et al*., 2007; Lakshmi, Niharika Aparanjini, & Lahari, 2017; Qalati *et al*., 2019). In this context, a large body of research points a strong link between consumers' purchasing behaviour and their socio-psychological characteristics such as motivation, self-esteem, social benefits, need for recognition and status, and the influence of friends and family's opinions (Jain, Naved, & Mishra, 2015; Wei, & Jung, 2017). However, in the food sector, this has yet to be fully explored with several existing works focusing mainly on the characteristics of celebrities rather than the psychology of consumers (Calvo-Porral, Rivaroli, & Orosa-González, 2021; Parayitam, Kakumani, & Muddangala, 2020; Park *et al*., 2022; Zhou *et al*., 2019). While recent attempts have been made to study the psychological aspect of the problem (Szymkowiak, & Antoniak, 2024), the link between socio-psychological drivers of behaviour and celebrity endorsement in the food industry is still underdeveloped.

In China, consumers' perceptions of celebrities are deeply shaped by the country's unique market dynamics and cultural traditions. China's market is vast—with 1.4 billion people and a GDP exceeding $18 trillion in 2022—making it one of the world's largest and most influential consumer markets (Xu, 2012). Rapid

economic growth, urbanisation, and modernisation have transformed China from a rural, low-consumption society into a global economic with massive purchasing power and dominant e-commerce platforms (Bai, Chen, and Shi, 2011; Li, 2017).

Yet, China is far from homogeneous: it consists of seven major geographic regions, each with distinct consumption habits, brand loyalties, and openness to new products (Cui and Liu, 2000; Duojie, 2022). This regional diversity means that celebrities may be perceived differently across the country—for example, embodying modernisation and global trends in coastal cities, while representing social stability and traditional values in inland regions. Likewise, consumer demographics vary widely: while some urbanites in prosperous eastern cities drive luxury consumption, consumers in less affluent regions are more price-sensitive and pragmatic. These differences are further reflected in regional trends, with wealthier, cosmopolitan cities such as Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang setting the pace in fashion and technology, while consumers in the Northeast and Northwest focus on affordability and value (OECD, 2013; Chrétien-Ichikawa, 2015). Such nuances underscore both China's cultural complexity and the evolving expectations of its consumers, for whom celebrities often serve as bridges between tradition and modernity, as well as between local and global identities.

China's cultural complexity manifests in consumer behaviour in several ways. First, collectivism and family values strongly shape purchasing decisions, as consumers often prioritise the family unit over individual preferences. Benefits to the family and social status typically resonate more than individualistic appeals (Lui et al., 2010; Gong et al., 2021). Second, Chinese consumers are both aspirational (for example, in their consumption of foreign brands and luxury goods) and tradition-oriented, and successful brands adeptly blend modern innovation with cultural motifs and narratives (Godart & Zhao, 2014; Perry, Ye, & Barnes, 2020; Jun & Hatta, 2025). Third, while younger consumers remain influenced by family, peers, and nationalism, they are also more individualistic and materialistic. They tend to be tech-savvy, early adopters, and trendsetters who are highly receptive to experiential marketing (Yang, 2014; Hossain et al., 2024; Tie, Hou, & Lei, 2025). Fourth, Chinese consumers attribute historical and political meanings to both local and foreign brands, reflecting national identity and future aspirations (Mayer and Pawlik, 2023). Finally, products are evaluated not only on functionality and price but also on cultural and social symbolism—such as status, tradition, and heritage. Brands conveying status, authenticity, or a connection with Chinese heritage gain stronger traction (Lee et al., 2021; Ravasi, Rindova, & Stigliani, 2011; Liu & Zhao, 2024).

In terms of celebrities, academic research has shown that Chinese consumers are significantly more receptive to celebrity endorsements than their Western counterparts. This heightened receptivity is attributed to

several factors. First, Chinese consumers view celebrity endorsements as more informative, valuing the celebrity's reputation and perceiving them as credible experts whose image aligns with local product values. Second, China's enormous and digitally engaged consumer market amplifies the impact of these endorsements through social media channels. Finally, celebrity endorsements convey social status, reflecting the collectivistic and normative social influences prevalent in Chinese society (Peng and Wang, 2023; Cheng et al., 2024; Hossain et al., 2024; Jun, 2024; Zou, 2024).

The objective of this study is to contribute to research on celebrities from a Chinese consumer's socio-psychological perspective, particularly by exploring the influence of celebrities endorsing food products in China. To this end, the theory of planned behaviour developed by Icek Ajzen (1985, 1991) was adopted. Although this theory has been applied in studies on Chinese consumer behaviour (Jain et al., 2015; Ko & Jin, 2017; Yang & Paladino, 2015), its application to celebrity endorsements in the Chinese food sector has only emerged in the last decade.

Findings from these studies indicate that the influence of celebrity endorsements on food purchasing in China is context-dependent and varies by product type. For example, Fan, Wu, and Yang (2022) identified a positive relationship between the likability of celebrities endorsing fast-food products and consumers' attitudes, with all components of the theory of planned behaviour (attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control) significantly shaping consumer behaviour. Similarly, Ding et al. (2022) reported analogous results for seafood products. In contrast, Zhu (2018) found that only attitudes influenced Chinese consumers' intention to purchase organic food. Likewise, Qi and Ploeger (2021) observed that subjective norms did not significantly affect consumers' intention to buy green food. However, these findings are not universally generalisable, as He and Sui (2024) demonstrated that all components of the theory of planned behaviour influenced green food consumption among Chinese college students. Therefore, our study contributes to this discourse by examining the relationship between celebrity endorsements and young Chinese consumers' food purchasing behaviour more broadly, rather than restricting the analysis to particular food categories. Furthermore, this research advances the literature by not only investigating the impact of celebrity attributes on consumer purchasing behaviour—as is commonly done in prior studies—but also by incorporating sociopsychological drivers, an area that remains relatively underexplored within the food industry context. This study concentrates on young Chinese consumers, as they constitute the demographic group exhibiting the most significant engagement with online platforms and celebrity endorsement strategies (Gong & Huang, 2022; Peng & Wang, 2023).

2. Hypotheses Development

As explained in the previous section, this research is based on the theory of planned behaviour, developed by Ajzen (1985). According to this theory, intention is a good predictor of behaviour. Intention is determined by an individual's positive or negative beliefs that can be considered as attitudes (i.e. positive or negative attitude towards a behaviour), subjective norms (i.e. the influence of important referent individuals or institutions when approving or disapproving of a particular behaviour), and perceived behavioural control (i.e. an individual's conviction that he or she will successfully execute a behaviour leading to a particular outcome). The theory postulates that the balance of the beliefs related to attitudes, subjective control and perceived behavioural control are what determines a positive or negative intention towards a particular behaviour.

In relation to this theory, it is important to clarify that the current investigation is explanatory and not predictive. That is, actual purchasing behaviour is already known implying that intention is not relevant in this context. Therefore, the aim is to identify the drivers of behaviour related to attitudes, subjective norms and perceive behavioural control that explain the actual purchasing behaviour observed in the respondents to the questionnaire employed in this study. This behaviour corresponds to the action of buying food goods that are endorsed by celebrities (BEH). In relation to attitudes, three types of attitudes that can influence consumers' behaviour are considered: attitudes towards the food product endorsed by a celebrity (AG); attitudes towards the endorsed celebrity as a whole, reflecting consumers' overall preference or liking for that celebrity (denoted as ACa); and attitudes towards specific characteristics or traits of the endorsed celebrity, such as their trustworthiness or expertise (denoted as ACb). This distinction aims to clarify whether Chinese consumers' purchasing behaviour is influenced more by their general preference for the celebrity (ACa), by particular attributes of the celebrity (ACb), or by their attitudes toward the food product itself (AG).

It is important to note that preference for celebrities and perceptions of celebrity characteristics may conceptually overlap. However, many studies treat preference and perceptions as related yet distinct constructs, each reflecting different psychological processes. For instance, perceptions of celebrity attributes—such as charisma, credibility, and attractiveness—are often used to explain or predict preference or endorsement effectiveness, indicating a hierarchical or causal relationship rather than redundancy. Freire et al. (2018) analysed celebrity endorsement effectiveness by distinguishing consumers' attitudes toward the celebrity endorser (perceptions of attributes) from their subsequent preferences and endorsement outcomes. This distinction highlights a hierarchy where celebrity attributes influence preference formation and endorsement impact, supporting the view that these constructs are related but conceptually distinct. Similar perspectives are

found in other studies, including Jun et al. (2023), Cheng et al. (2024), and Jain et al. (2024), which link endorser attributes to consumer preferences and outcomes without treating them as redundant.

In accordance with the assumptions of the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985; Deng *et al*., 2016; Ko and Jin. 2017), the following hypotheses are proposed.

H1. *Positive attitudes towards endorsed celebrities that are preferred by consumers positively affects Chinese consumers' behaviour in purchasing these goods*.

H2. *Positive attitudes towards endorsed celebrities' characteristics positively affects Chinese consumers' behaviour in purchasing these goods*.

H3. *Positive attitudes towards food goods that are endorsed by celebrities positively affects Chinese consumers' behaviour in purchasing these goods*.

H4. *Subjective norms: The opinions of the members of the Chinese consumers' social network in favour of food goods endorsed by celebrities positively affects Chinese consumers' behaviour in purchasing these goods*.

H5. *Perceived behavioural control: Chinese consumers with the conviction that they will successfully execute their purchasing behaviour of food goods endorsed by celebrities positively affects this behaviour*.

In addition to these hypotheses, which are directly inferred from the theory of planned behaviour, four additional hypotheses are proposed. Three of them predict a possible relationship between subjective norms and attitudes. This is considered because the opinions of the people who belong to the social network of a consumer can potentially influence his/her beliefs about the behaviour (Tarkiainen, & Sundqvist, 2005).

H6. *Positive attitudes towards endorsed celebrities that are preferred by consumers are influenced by the positive opinions of people who belong to consumers' social network.*

H7. *Positive attitudes towards endorsed celebrities' characteristics are influenced by the positive opinions of people who belong to consumers' social network.*

H8. *Positive attitudes toward food goods endorsed by celebrities are influenced by the positive opinions of people who belong to consumers' social network*.

A final hypothesis is proposed to account for a possible relationship between attitudes towards endorsed celebrities in terms of consumers' preferences and attitudes towards celebrity characteristics. That is, it

is expected that consumers who value some characteristics of celebrities will prefer celebrities associated with these characteristics. This is stated as follows:

H9. *Positive attitudes towards specific celebrities' characteristics positively affect consumers' preferences for celebrities that reflect these characteristics*.

In considering these four hypotheses, a theoretical framework was created to serve as the basis for the methodology presented in the next section. This framework is presented in Figure 1.

[Figure 1]

In this framework, Hypotheses 1 and 2 propose that attitudes toward both specific celebrity characteristics and the endorsed celebrities themselves directly influence purchasing behaviour. However, Hypothesis 9 suggests a connection between these two types of attitudes. This apparent contradiction arises because current research indicates that attitudes toward specific celebrity characteristics affect purchasing behaviour both directly and indirectly. The direct effect, described by Hypothesis 2, is supported by studies showing that attributes such as attractiveness, reliability, and expertise significantly impact consumer purchase decisions (see, for example, Dzisah & Ocloo, 2013; Nayyar and Ilhan, 2025). Conversely, Hypothesis 9 highlights the indirect effect, where celebrity characteristics influence consumer preferences for these celebrities, which in turn affect purchasing behaviour (supported by Freire et al., 2018; Jun et al., 2023; Cheng et al., 2024; Jain et al., 2024).

3. Methodology

The methodology is underpinned by the theoretical framework presented in Figure 1. To obtain quantitative data for the constructs of the theoretical framework and to determine significant relationships between these constructs, a questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale was designed. (i.e. (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) indifferent; (4) agree; and (5) strongly agree). These statements were translated into Chinese by native Chinese collaborators and tested for consistency by means of a pilot stage. For attitudes, three different sets of statements were considered: the set of statements reflecting attitudes towards the endorsed celebrities in terms of preferences for these celebrities (ACa); statements reflecting attitudes towards the

endorsed celebrities in terms of their characteristics (ACb); and statements reflecting attitudes towards food goods characteristics that are endorsed by celebrities (AG). For subjective norms (SN), on the other hand, Likert statements informing about the influence of people that belong to the social network of Chinese consumers were introduced. For perceived behavioural control, Likert statements related to possible constraints that may affect the purchasing behaviour of Chinese consumers were employed. Finally, for actual behaviour, a statement that informed about the influence of endorsed celebrities on Chinese consumers' purchasing behaviour was proposed. The Likert statements or measurements included in the questionnaire are shown in Table 1.

[Table 1]

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, a pilot analysis was conducted with 30 Chinese respondents. The purpose was to point to any necessary adjustments to the questionnaire including eliminating unclear and ambiguous words (Gillham, Burton, & Gillham 2013). Based on this feedback, more statements about attitude were added to the 5-point Likert scale. The final version of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1.

The snowball sampling technique was adopted in the research, which, according to Salganik and Douglas (2004), is undertaken by selecting respondents from the friendship network of existing members of the sample. The sample process starts when the researcher selects an initial small number of respondents referred to as 'seeds'. The seeds then recruit others to participate in the study, and this process of existing sample members recruiting future respondents continues until the size of the sample required for the investigation is reached. The snowball technique adopted in the current study followed a similar approach to that adopted by Morais, Binotto and Borges (2017); May, Arancibia and Manning (2021); and May et al. (2023) who developed related research. The individuals who consented to participate in the study were invited to complete an online survey, with 312 young Chinese consumers between 15 and 35 years old and living mainly in urban areas responding to the questionnaire. While we acknowledge the significance of older consumers in purchasing decisions, the study's scope focuses on the demographic segment with the highest engagement with online platforms and celebrity marketing strategies (see Section 4.1 for details).

We acknowledge that snowball sampling may introduce a bias through the overrepresentation of similar profiles. To mitigate this limitation, our study employed several strategic measures. First, we ensured geographic and socioeconomic diversity by selecting participants from multiple first- and second-tier cities,

representing a broad range of backgrounds. Second, the referral process was carefully controlled by restricting each participant to recommending no more than two individuals and encouraging them to invite contacts beyond their immediate social or professional networks. Finally, we continuously monitored key sociodemographic variables—such as age (15 to 35 years) and occupation categories including students, corporate employees, administrative staff, health workers, educators, and cultural sector personnel—to maintain a heterogeneous sample reflective of the target population. These measures collectively aimed to enhance the representativeness and validity of our findings despite the inherent challenges of snowball sampling. Although these measures reduce the risk of homogeneity, the use of non-probabilistic sampling limits generalisability.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics were used to describe the profile of the main characteristics of the sample and the PLS method of the Structural Equations methodology was used to test the hypotheses of the model by means of the SmartPLS 4 software (Ringle *et al*., 2023). Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt, (2013) define Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) as a second-generation multivariate method whose purpose is to link data and theory, where a priori knowledge is incorporated into the empirical analysis. The general structural equation model SEM combines the use of observable variables and latent variables, while its structure considers two models, namely *measurement model* and *structural model*. The measurement model defines or specifies the underlying relationships between the observable variables and the latent variables or constructs, while the structural model describes or explains only and exclusively the relationships between the latent variables or constructs. (Garson, 2016; Sabol *et al*., 2023).

In this study we applied the variance-based approach, called Partial Least Square (PLS/SEM) because it is the most appropriate method to predict latent variables or constructs, maximising the explained variance (R^2). The latter has the advantage of allowing some constructs and relationships to be explored. In addition, this approach does not rely on a sample with a normal distribution (Henseler, Hubona, & Ash Ray, 2016).

4. Results

The results from this research are reported in two sections. The first reports the results obtained from the questionnaire and describes the profile and main characteristics of the sample. The second section shows the results of the PLS-SEM analysis which are presented in the three steps followed in this study: fitting results of the measurement model; fitting results of the structural model; and total effect results.

4.1 Sample profile

The primary sociodemographic characteristics of the 312 surveyed young Chinese consumers are as follows: 49% female and 51% male; 43% aged 15–25 years and 33% aged 26–35 years. Geographically, 87% resided in first-tier cities and 13% in second-tier cities. Regarding educational attainment, 74% held a university degree, 17% a technical secondary school diploma, 6% a postgraduate degree, and 3% completed secondary school or lower. Occupationally, 46% were employed by companies and 34% were students. Monthly income distribution was as follows: 29% earned 0–3,000¥, 22% 3,000–5,000¥, 21% 5,000–8,000¥, and 28% more than 8,000¥.

4.2 Results from the PLS-SEM approach

The results of the model fit are presented in three stages: measurement model fit results, structural model fit results, and total effect results. Descriptive statistics of the variables that were found significant by the PLS-SEM model are summarised in Table 2.

[Table 2]

According to the results, the constructs attitudes towards food goods and perceived behavioural control were not significant. Table II shows only the constructs and factors that significantly explain the behaviour under study. For the construct attitudes towards celebrities, two factors were identified which correspond to *attitudes towards celebrities a*, and *attitudes towards celebrities b*. The former includes statements that inform about consumers' preferences for endorsed celebrities, and the latter statements that inform about perceived characteristics of endorsed celebrities. Subjective norms are also a significant construct.

Measurement model fit results

The measurement model describes how each latent variable is explained by the manifest variables or items. To evaluate the consistency of the constructs and their certain items, they must meet minimum conditions of validity and reliability. The individual reliability of the item consists of determining whether the Individual Reliability Loadings (REL) are associated with their respective construct, indicating whether the item (or observed variable) is correlated with the other loadings. Table III indicates that the values of REL, λ, are all greater than 0.7. Therefore, the individual reliability of each item is verified. A level greater than or close to

0.707 implies that approximately 50% of the variance (λ^2) of the observed variable is shared by the construct (Cepeda, & Roldán, 2004).

In addition, in all the constructs, the Composite Reliability Index (CR) takes values greater than or equal to 0.87, complying with what is suggested as a threshold, with values greater than 0.7. This index verifies whether the internal consistency of the indicators of each construct is fulfilled. That is, the observable variables are measuring the latent variable. Additionally, as a complement to measure internal consistency, the Cronbach Alpha scores for all constructs are greater than 0.7 and are considered adequate (Cepeda, & Roldán, 2004; Hair *et al*., 2013).

Regarding convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeds the minimum value of 0.5, which means that the construct shares more than 50% of its variance with its indicators. AVE's function is to evaluate if the set of items that measure the construct are actually measuring it and not another concept. It is important to clarify that when a variable does not satisfy the minimum conditions of validity and reliability, this variable is eliminated from the model. Hence, Tables 2 and 3 show only the variables that satisfy the requirements by the PLS methodology.

[Table 3]

On the other hand, the relationship between actual behaviour and the construct perceived behavioural control was found to be non-significant statistically. Figure 2 shows the model with all the significant relationships.

[Figure 2]

Discriminant validity tells us the degree to which a construct (or latent variable) is truly distinct from other constructs. Thus, the existence of discriminant validity implies that a construct is unique and captures phenomena not represented by other constructs in the model. Traditionally, the Fornell and Larcker criterion is used to assess discriminant validity. For this criterion, it must be verified whether the square root of the AVE values of each construct is greater than its highest correlations with any of the other constructs. This condition is met for each construct. Additionally, discriminant validity is verified with a criterion that is considered more reliable, called the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Henseler *et al*., 2016). Table IV shows the matrix with

the HTMT values for all pairs of constructs. Technically, the HTMT criterion is an estimate of what the real correlation between two constructs would be if they were measured in a perfect way. That is, if they were perfectly reliable. These values must be below the threshold of 0.85. It can be seen in Table 4 that the criterion of discriminant validity is met.

[Table 4]

Structural model fit results

To obtain an adequate interpretation and conclusion from the model, it is necessary to evaluate the structural model, which consists of determining the path coefficients (β), the explained variance (R^2), and the predictive relevance (Q^2). First, the t-value of the relationships between constructs is reviewed to verify if there is a statistically significant relationship. For this purpose, the equivalent of the t-Student statistic is estimated using re-sampling techniques, specifically based on the bootstrapping technique which corresponds to a statistical procedure that resamples a single dataset to create many simulated samples (Efron, & Tibshirani, 1993). Table 5 shows the t-values of the regression coefficients between the latent variables, which are highly significant at 95% confidence. Therefore, the seven hypotheses proposed in the conceptual model are verified.

[Table 5]

Path coefficients or standardized regression weights (β) measure the strength of the relationship between the constructs or the suggested hypotheses of causal relationships. All relationships in Table V are statistically significant with t-values greater than the critical value of 1.96 when considering a 95% confidence level.

To evaluate the predictive relevance of the model, a Blindfolding procedure is followed using the Q^2 index, in which part of the data for a given construct is omitted during the estimation of the parameters with the purpose of estimating omitted ones using the parameters estimated in the first stage of the process (Tenenhaus *et al*., 2005). The results obtained are all positive, indicating that the predictive relevance of the model is met, as shown in Table 6. The R^2 value refers to the amount of variance of a variable that is explained by the dependent

constructs. The acceptance threshold for these values is 0.1, since lower figures have a low predictive level (Falk, & Miller, 1992). Table VI shows that all constructs have an R^2 value of greater than 0.1, indicating acceptance of the model. In particular, for the Behaviour construct, 35.9% of its variance is explained by the model, which indicates a highly satisfactory model.

[Table 6]

In summary, the measurement model has good psychometric properties which validate the estimation of the latent variables, fulfilling the criteria of validity and reliability. On the other hand, the structural model shows statistically significant relationships, verifying four proposed hypotheses. Finally, the predictive relevance and R^2 obtained values are above the accepted thresholds to explain the amount of variance explained by the model. In terms of the proposed hypotheses, only H1, H2, H6 and H9 show significance suggesting that the action of buying food goods endorsed by celebrities are explained by consumers' preferences for some celebrities, attributes of these celebrities, and the influence of people in the social network of these consumers.

Total effects

Table 7 presents the total effect that each construct has on the Behaviour factor. It is observed that *attitudes towards celebrities b* (ACb) that causes the greatest effect on Behaviour. The other constructs have positive effects to a lesser extent, but still have significant impact on Behaviour.

[Table 7]

The interpretation of the total effect of each of the factors on the endogenous variables presented in Table VII, measured in standard deviations, is, for example, if the ACb Factor is increased by one unit, then Behaviour will increase by 0.521 standard deviations. Each of the effects is interpreted in the same way.

5. Discussion

To facilitate the discussion of the results presented in the previous section, a version of the model shown in Figure 2 that includes the statements that form part of each construct and the relevance of each is presented below in Figure 3.

[Figure 3]

According to this model, the construct *attitudes towards celebrities b*, which informs about the attributes of celebrities that are relevant for Chinese consumers, is key in explaining the behaviour of buying food goods endorsed by celebrities. These attributes correspond to reputation, consistency between celebrities' image and the food good, and the person who has been used to serving as an endorsed celebrity; and this influence is also affected by consumers' consideration of the price of the food good. This finding is consistent with the results obtained in previous works based on standard models (e.g. source models, match-up hypothesis and the transfer model). As explained in the introduction, there is consensus that a celebrity who exhibits both expertness and trustworthiness is considered credible, and therefore more persuasive; celebrities who are known to, liked by, and similar to the consumer are attractive and, therefore, more influential; and that endorsed celebrities are more effective when there is a congruence between the endorser and the endorsed product/brand (Byrne, Whitehead, & Breen, 2003; Campbell, &Warren, 2012; McGuire, 1985; Mookda *et al*., 2020; Seiler, & Kucza, 2017). However, in contrast to previous research, the results revealed that this construct affects the behaviour directly and indirectly through its influence on the construct *attitudes towards celebrities a*, which informs about Chinese consumers' preferences for celebrities. This is explained as follows:

The construct *attitudes towards celebrities a* (ACa) includes statements reflecting preferences for different types of celebrities and how advertisements featuring these celebrities increase interest in the food goods they endorse. This construct is strongly influenced by the construct *attitudes towards celebrities b* (ACb) ($\beta = 0.547$), suggesting that consumer perceptions and preferences for certain celebrities are largely shaped by the celebrities' attributes that consumers find relevant. Notably, the strong effect of ACb on ACa ($\beta = 0.547$) also indicates that consumer preferences for a celebrity may lead them to rationalize their perceived characteristics. Some researchers have identified this rationalization effect. For example, Jain et al. (2024) demonstrate that while celebrity endorsements increase sales and consumer preferences, they can also lead consumers to rationalize their behaviour cognitively—even when experiencing ad annoyance or irritation. This highlights a complex interplay between consumer preference and the rationalization of celebrity traits in decision-making.

The construct *attitudes towards celebrities a* is also affected by the construct *subjective norms*, implying that preferences for some types of celebrities are also affected by the opinion of people who belong to

consumers' social network such as friends, colleagues and family members, among others. However, this influence is not as strong as the previous one (i.e. β = 0.333). This is an interesting finding because related research has found that attitudes are affected by subjective norms in the food industry (Tarkiainen, & Sundqvist, 2005). Our result confirms this finding, but it only applies to some specific types of attitudes that reflect preferences for celebrities.

These findings have interesting implications for managerial strategies aimed at increasing the Chinese demand for food goods endorsed by celebrities. This can be seen by determining the strength of the paths that lead to the behaviour, which is calculated by multiplying the β coefficients of a path. According to the model in Figure 3, there are three paths that influence the purchasing of these goods: (*i*) subjective norms, attitudes toward celebrities a, and actual behaviour (path SN-ACa-BEH); (*ii*) attitudes towards celebrities b, attitudes towards celebrities a, and actual behaviour (path ACb-ACa-BEH); and attitudes towards celebrities b and actual behaviour (path ACb-BEH). The strength of the first, second and third paths are, respectively, 0.08 (i.e. 0.333x0.263 = 0.08), 0.144 (i.e. 0.547x0.263 = 0.144) and 0.385. According to these figures, the path ACb-BEH is the strongest in terms of the influence on the behaviour, followed by the path ACb-ACa-BEH. Both are influenced initially by the construct *attitudes towards celebrities b*, suggesting that reinforcing celebrities' attributes such as reputation, trustworthiness and image that is consistent with food goods is the managerial strategy with the higher potential to induce purchasing behaviour. By adding the direct and indirect impact of this construct, it is concluded that it contributes to the behaviour in terms of strength by 0.529, which is much larger than the strength of the SN-ACa-BEH path, i.e. 0.08. This latter path has a much more modest impact revealing that the influence of the social network while significant, has less potential for managerial practices.

6. Conclusions

This study investigated how celebrity endorsements impact Chinese consumers' purchasing behaviour for food products, uncovering several key findings. Primarily, Chinese consumers' purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by their perceptions of celebrity attributes—such as reputation, trustworthiness, and a consistent image aligned with the food goods—rather than by opinions within their social networks, which exert a substantially weaker influence. This distinction highlights the unique importance that Chinese consumers place on celebrity characteristics over social influence mechanisms in this context. Building on these findings, this research contributes to the existing literature by extending the analysis of celebrity endorsement effects beyond attributes alone to incorporate socio-psychological factors relevant to Chinese consumers of food goods

in general. This broader approach represents a novel extension in understanding how celebrity appeals operate in the food sector within this cultural setting.

From a managerial perspective, the strongest driver of consumer behaviour is the perceived quality of celebrity attributes. Accordingly, advertising strategies should prioritise enhancing and reinforcing positive celebrity images through a structured approach. This includes a clear execution framework, quantifiable celebrity selection criteria, and robust risk management strategies to mitigate potential reputational risks. The execution framework entails a stepwise plan: defining target audiences, identifying and promoting celebrity traits that align with brand values, and executing targeted campaigns consistently across channels. Selection criteria should be data-driven and objective, incorporating alignment with brand values, reputation metrics such as trustworthiness and popularity, audience reach, demographic overlap, and past endorsement effectiveness. Risk management should encompass pre-endorsement background checks, ongoing monitoring, contingency clauses, crisis communication protocols, and diversification of endorsements to reduce brand vulnerability.

Regarding actionable recommendations, companies should select trustworthy, expert celebrities whose expertise matches the product category. For instance, health foods benefit from endorsements by credible figures like nutritionists, while popular celebrities with consistent reputations work better for snack products. Social media platforms such as Weibo and Douyin offer essential channels for celebrities to build authentic engagement and trust, significantly boosting purchase intentions. These insights are supported by recent research on Chinese internet celebrities and e-commerce (Arora, 2025; Wang, Abdullah & Adziz, 2025).

Despite the valuable insights generated, this study has several important limitations. The use of convenience sampling resulted in a sample heavily skewed towards participants from first-tier Chinese cities (87%) and a predominantly young demographic, which may bias findings—such as the greater reliance on expert endorsements by higher-income or urban consumers—and limits the generalisability to the broader Chinese population. Additionally, the study did not incorporate key cultural variables, thereby restricting the depth of interpretation regarding socio-psychological factors unique to different regions within China. Future research should employ randomised and stratified sampling techniques to capture a more representative demographic and regional diversity. Moreover, integrating cross-cultural comparisons and qualitative methods, such as focus groups or ethnographies, would enhance understanding of how cultural and socio-economic variables influence consumer behaviour more comprehensively.

Additional avenues for future work include testing established celebrity endorsement and social influence theories in diverse markets to validate or refine causal pathways identified here. Developing culturally

tailored frameworks and quantifiable celebrity selection models will also enhance practical relevance across global contexts. Further exploration of digital engagement, particularly through platforms like Weibo and Douyin, will clarify their broader impact on endorsement effectiveness worldwide. Moreover, future research should further explore the impact of policy and social factors on celebrity endorsement dynamics, such as how the regulation of advertising behaviour might influence consumers' perceptions and responses to celebrity endorsements. This line of inquiry will offer critical insights into the role of regulatory environments and social norms in shaping endorsement outcomes, thereby enriching the theoretical and practical understanding of celebrity influence in marketing.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

I. Profile questions

Please select the word or phrase that best matches your response.

What is your gender?	What is your age?	What is your education level?
Male	Under 16	Technical secondary school
Female	16-25	High school and below
	26-35	Undergraduate degree
	36-45	Postgraduate degree
	46-55	
	56-65	
	More than 65	

What is your occupation?	Where do you live?	What is your monthly income?
Student	Tier one city	Under 1000¥
Enterprise worker	Tier two city	1000-3000¥
Administrative personnel	Tier three city	3000-5000¥

Cultural/health/education worker	5000-8000¥
Retirees	
Other	

II. Statements

Use the scale below to indicate the option that best represent your opinion in relation to the following statements.

Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Indifferent**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

Statements	**Likert score**
When I buy food products, I am influenced by the recommendation of endorsed celebrities	( )
I pay attention to the food advertisements endorsed by celebrities in my daily life	( )
I prefer entertainment celebrity endorsement advertisements in food products (e.g. Huang Bo, jay Chou)	( )
I prefer sports celebrity endorsement advertisements in food products (e.g. Liu Xiang, Sun Yang)	( )
I prefer business celebrity endorsement advertisements in food products (e.g. jack ma, Liu Qiang Dong)	( )
If it's my favorite entertainment celebrity endorsement, I would be interested in buying	( )
I buy when the price of food products endorsed by celebrities goes down or they are on sale	( )
I'm more concerned about who's endorsing the food	( )
I think celebrities have a good reputation and are trustworthy	( )
I think the image of celebrity is consistent with the food	( )
The quality of food products endorsed by celebrities will not affect my purchase	( )
If buying this food product would make me waste money, I would not buy it	( )
When I buy food, I look for quality more than celebrity	( )
Price is more important than celebrity	( )
I only buy food if I am sure it is safe	( )

Friends have a great influence on my choice of celebrity endorsement food products	( )
When I choose food products that celebrities endorse, I will pay attention to my family's opinions	( )
My classmates' opinions will affect my choice of food products endorsed by celebrities	( )
I will refer to whether the teacher chooses the food products endorsed by celebrities	( )
I don't take into account the opinions of the people around me when buying food products endorsed by celebrities	( )
Deciding what brand of food to buy takes up a lot of my time	( )
If the ingredients of a food product have an impact on my choices, I will learn about it	( )
I don't make plans before I buy food because it might change in reality	( )
Before I buy food, I'm thoroughly know what I want	( )

Figures

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

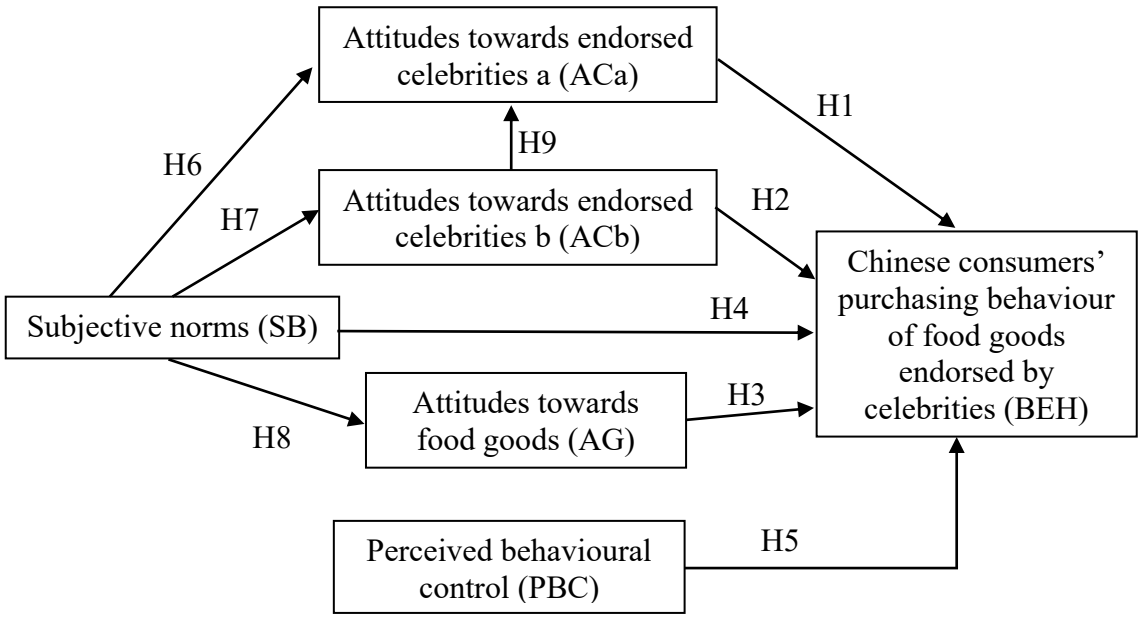


Figure 2. Measurement Model

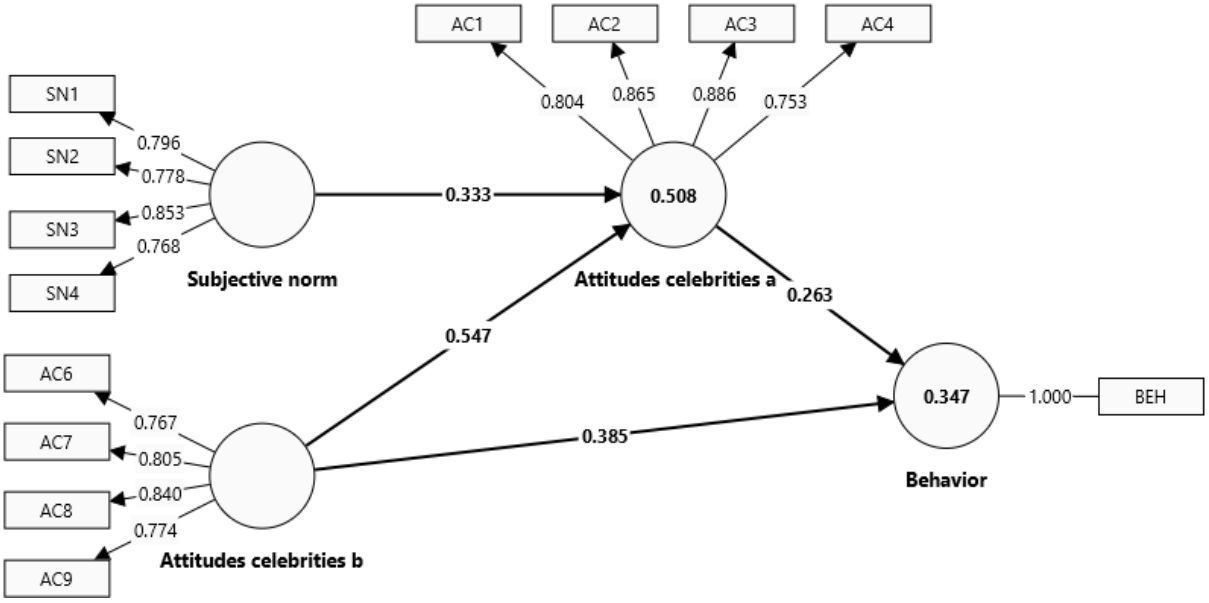
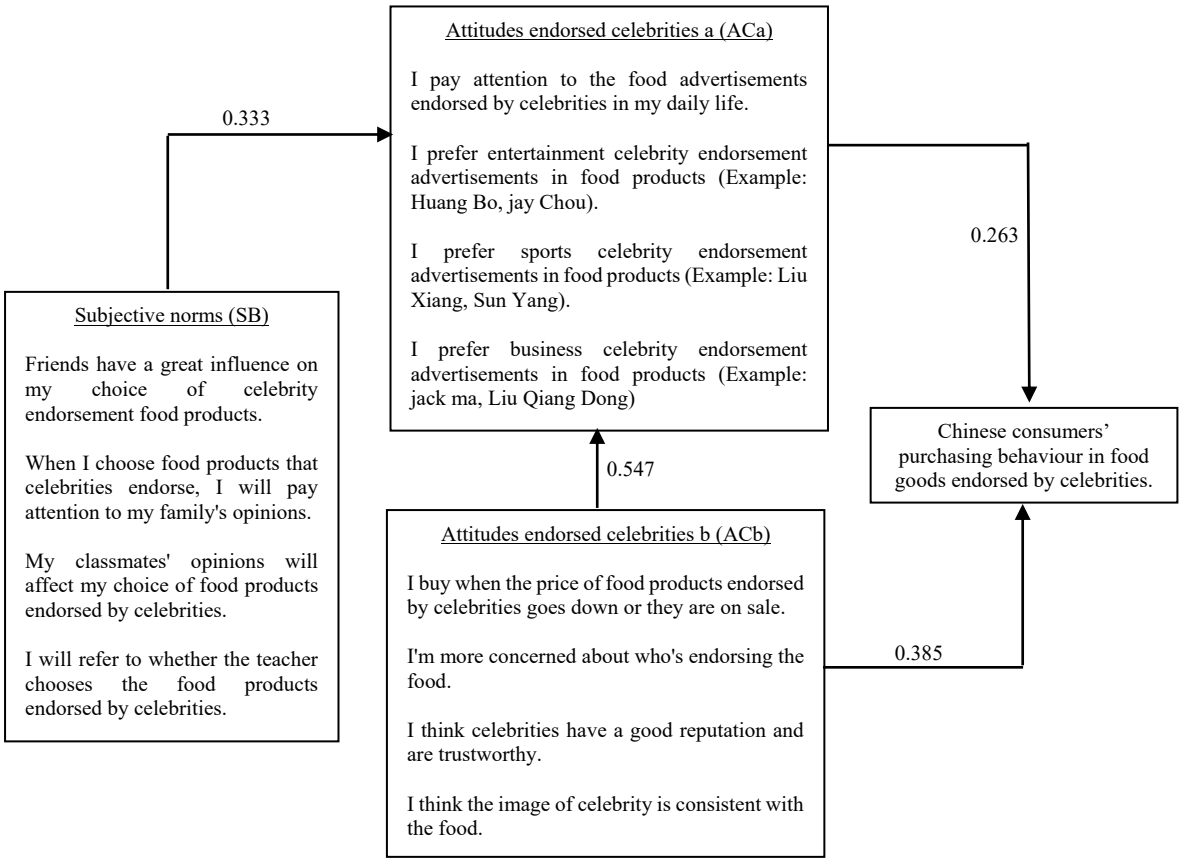


Figure 3. Model for Chinese consumers' purchasing of endorsed celebrity food goods.



Tables

Table 1. Constructs and measurements of the theoretical framework.

Construct	Variables	Description of questions
BEH	BEH	When I buy food products, I am influenced by the recommendation of endorsed celebrities.
ACa	AC1	I pay attention to the food advertisements endorsed by celebrities in my daily life
	AC2	I prefer entertainment celebrity endorsement advertisements in food products (Example: Huang Bo, jay Chou)
	AC3	I prefer sports celebrity endorsement advertisements in food products (Example: Liu Xiang, Sun Yang)
	AC4	I prefer business celebrity endorsement advertisements in food products (Example: jack ma, Liu Qiang Dong)
	AC5	If it's my favourite entertainment celebrity endorsement, I would be interested in buying
ACb	AC6	I buy when the price of food products endorsed by celebrities goes down or they are on sale
	AC7	I'm more concerned about who's endorsing the food
	AC8	I think celebrities have a good reputation and are trustworthy
	AC9	I think the image of celebrity is consistent with the food
AG	AG1	The quality of food products endorsed by celebrities will not affect my purchase
	AG2	When I buy food, I look for quality more than celebrity
	AG3	Price is more important than celebrity
	AG4	I only buy food if I am sure it is safe
SN	SN1	Friends have a great influence on my choice of celebrity endorsement food products
	SN2	

	SN3	When I choose food products that celebrities endorse, I will pay attention to my family's opinions
	SN4	My classmates' opinions will affect my choice of food products endorsed by celebrities
	SN5	I will refer to whether the teacher chooses the food products endorsed by celebrities
	SN6	I do not take into account the opinions of the people around me when buying food products endorsed by celebrities
		When I decide whether to buy food products endorsed by celebrities, I ask for a lot of advice
PBC	P1	Deciding what brand of food to buy takes up a lot of my time
	P2	If the ingredients of a food product have an impact on my choices, I will learn about it
	P3	I don't make plans before I buy food because it might change in reality
	P4	Before I buy food, I'm thoroughly know what I want

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of key variables.

Constructs	Variables	Mean (n = 312)	Standard deviation
Behaviour	BEH	2.79	0.89
Attitude towards celebrities *a*	AC1	2.98	0.95
	AC2	2.91	1.03
	AC3	2.79	0.95
	AC4	2.71	0.92
Attitude towards celebrities *b*	AC6	3.23	0.97
	AC7	1.99	0.88
	AC8	2.89	0.90
	AC9	2.99	0.81
Subjective norms	SN1	3.43	0.93
	SN2	3.23	0.97
	SN3	3.29	0.82
	SN4	2.98	0.93

Table 3. Measurement indicators of the model.

Construct	Indicator	Individual Reliability Loading (λ)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Cronbach Alpha
Actual behaviour	BEH	**1.000**	**1.000**	**1.000**	**1.000**
Attitudes toward endorsed celebrities *a*	AC1	**0.804**	0.686	0.897	0.846
	AC2	**0.865**			
	AC3	**0.886**			
	AC4	**0.753**			

Attitudes toward endorsed celebrities *b*	AC6	**0.767**	0.635	0.874	0.809
	AC7	**0.805**			
	AC8	**0.840**			
	AC9	**0.774**			
Subjective norms	SN1	**0.796**	0.639	0.876	0.811
	SN2	**0.778**			
	SN3	**0.853**			
	SN4	**0.768**			
Perceived behavioural control	P1	**0.937**	0.715	0.909	0.887
	P2	**0.781**			
	P3	**0.882**			
	P4	**0.772**			

Table 4. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) - Matrix	**Behaviour**	**Attitude towards celebrities *a***	**Subjective norm**	**Attitude towards celebrities *b***
Attitude towards celebrities *a*	0.549			
Subjective norms	0.231	0.581		
Attitudes towards celebrities *b*	0.607	0.761	0.329	

Table 5. Beta Values and Bootstrapping Results

Relationship between constructs:	**Path (standardized Beta value)**	**t-statistic**
H1: Subjective norms -> Attitude celebrities *a*	0.333	7.819
H2: Attitude celebrities *a* -> Behaviour	0.263	4.516
H3: Attitudes celebrities *b* -> Attitudes celebrities *a*	0.547	14.980
H4: Attitudes celebrities *b* ->Behaviour	0.385	6.279

Table 6. Predictive relevance and variance explained by the model

Construct	**Q^2**	**R^2**
Behaviour	0.304	0.347
Attitude	0.499	0.508

Table 7. Total effects

Total Construct Effects on Behaviour	**Total effect**
Attitude towards celebrities *a* (ACa)	0.263

Attitudes towards celebrities *b* (ACb)	0.521
Subjective norms	0.088