Assessing Celebrity Endorsement Effects in China

A Consumer-Celebrity Relational Approach

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Celebrity endorsement is a salient executional strategy in China, where national celebrities often endorse more than 20 brands. This paper adopts a relational perspective to examine this research issue. The relational perspective is driven by three core Chinese cultural values: collectivism, risk aversion, and power distance. The authors propose a model that postulates how celebrity-worship leads to value-transfer that, in turn, affects brand purchase intent. Findings from a survey involving 1,030 respondents from a national panel of consumers, showed that consumer celebrity worship is a significant antecedent to endorser effects; over-endorsement by a celebrity is an important moderator; and the model is robust across both sports and entertainment celebrities.

INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of using sports and entertainment celebrities in brand advertising is evident in the marketplace. In both the United States and China, celebrity endorsement is a key executional strategy that continues to grow in popularity (Chan, Hung, Tse, and Tse, 2008). In the United States, one of four advertisements uses celebrities to gain brand awareness and preference (Stephens and Rice, 1998). In China, 40 percent of youth-product advertisement features at least one celebrity (Chan, 2008), making the effect of this executional tactic on young people a particularly important issue to advertisers in China.

The literature on endorser effects is rich, providing insights into the efficacy of endorser effects, the underlying processes, and the conditions under which endorser effects may be strengthened.

The dominant explanation in these studies assumes the value-transfer approach that focuses on how celebrities promote brand awareness and brand purchase through

- source credibility (Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell, 2000);
- source attractiveness (Stephens and Rice, 1998); and

- image congruence (Rifon, Choi, Trimble, and Li, 2004).

Although these approaches provide insights into how endorser effects work, the ways and conditions under which value-transfer functions in different cultures—especially one that highly values personal relations or *guanxi* (Gu, Hung and Tse, 2008)—need to be examined. Indeed, when Nike retained Liu Xiang and the celebrated Chinese 110-m hurdler had to withdraw from the 2008 Beijing Olympics after a false start and aggravation to a previously unrevealed injury, Nike appeared to gain credence with its youthful target audience at a time when many other sponsors simply dropped Liu as a result of his nonperformance.

Celebrities are cultural symbols who reflect the values and ideas of a particular culture. And, therefore, the ways such personas appear in advertising and their impact may vary from culture to culture (Choi, Lee, and Kim, 2005).

In China, where collectivist cultural values predominate (Hung, Li, and Belk, 2007; Hung and Li, 2008) and where people are risk averse and maintain high power-distance (De Mooij, 2005), some marketers have found it effective to use celebrities in their communications to shape the preferences

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of young people—the cohort of "global materialists" (Hung, Gu and Yim, 2007) in the largest Asian consumer market.

In particular, China's Generation Y (those born after, 1980)—deemed a generation of "little emperors" and "little empresses" resulting from the enactment of China's One Child Policy in 1979—has significant power to consume and, increasingly, has become brand- and fashion-conscious. In doing so, they implicitly are embracing Western ideals and values (Arora, 2005; Stanat, 2006). A determination of how these consumers embrace celebrities as brand endorsers and the ensuing effects on brand evaluations will be of great value to marketers who hope to target this desirable consumer segment.

A number of studies have explored how people relate to the celebrities they follow, focusing on the nature of celebrity-worship behaviors and investigating the imaginative parasocial bonds people develop with various icons (Houran, Navik, and Zerrusen, 2005). One study found that, for some people, their relations with celebrities were driven by entertainment and fun; for others, their relations were motivated by intense attachment; and for some extreme individuals, their relations were driven by a pathological urge (McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran, 2002).

As relational bonds likely constitute a precondition for endorser effects (Silvera and Austad, 2004), the relational perspective offers researchers a fresh viewpoint to investigate value-transfer and endorser effects. This perspective especially is useful in a collectivist society such as China, where relational bonds are strong. In this study, the authors pay attention to three topics of interests, all of which have clear practical implications. Specifically:

- To assess the origins of endorser effects, the authors posit that the **relationship with the celebrity** is a salient behavioral antecedent that facilitates value-transfer. The authors argue that celebrities need to have positive ties with consumers before the latter would perceive the endorsements as credible or attractive.

  In short, the current study aims to establish positive celebrity relationships as the foundation for value-transfer mechanisms to operate, which would reaffirm what marketers already know about celebrity endorsement—the importance of using celebrities with positive public images.

- On the topic of **over-endorsement**, the authors postulate that, when a celebrity endorses multiple products and brands, some negative evaluation (e.g., doubting the integrity of the celebrity) may occur. For instance, if a celebrity endorses many products and brands, the negative effect may dominate, causing over-endorsement effects.

  The authors propose that over-endorsement is a significant moderator for the link between relations with celebrity and brand evaluations (measured by brand value-transfer and brand purchase intent). If consumers feel a celebrity endorses too many brands and products, this may ultimately affect their brand consumptions in a negative way.

- The common practice for the **typology of celebrities** is to use either sports or entertainment celebrities as endorsers;

yet, the fundamental processes of how celebrity type may operate and differ have not been studied. This study provides an initial attempt to address this issue by examining both types of celebrities and to suggest how the two types of celebrities may be better used by brands in different contexts.

In a market of high growth and intense competition, celebrity endorsement is one of the most common strategies for a brand to gain awareness. The authors tested their hypotheses on sports and entertainment celebrities using a large-scale survey of 1,030 respondents who were recruited from a national consumer panel that represented different respondent groups.

There are three research objectives in the current study:

- The study aims to confirm celebrity worship as a behavioral antecedent to endorser effects.
- The authors postulate that over-endorsement is a salient moderator.
- The study aims to examine the fundamental differences between the processes through which sports and entertainment celebrities operate.

The authors postulate that a tie-in with consumer-celebrity relationships would help marketers understand the conditions through which endorser effects can be strengthened.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH ENDORSERS
Celebrity Worship

For quite some time, companies have used different sports and entertainment celebrities as effective tools to advertise their products, cashing in on the celebrities' fame and success and drawing people to consider their brands.

Research has shown that celebrity endorsement can help create a positive

effect on the consumer's brand awareness, brand trust (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995), brand preference (Kamins, Brand, Hoeke, and Moe, 1989), and purchase intentions (Ohanian, 1991). These endorser effects are attributed to the celebrities' influence and their ability to transfer their values onto the brands they endorse.

The current literature focuses on three particular processes as key explanations for endorser effects (Mittelstaedt, Riesz and Burns, 2000):

• source credibility,
• affect transfer, and
• image congruity.

Specifically:

• Source **credibility** states that, when a communication source has particular expertise in a topic of interest, the expertise equips the source with authority and believability so that communication from the source will be regarded as trustworthy or credible. Recent product failures in China (e.g., in such categories as toys and baby formula) highlighted the salience of brand trust.

• **Affect transfer** refers to the lateral process through which celebrities improve brand awareness and brand familiarity. When a celebrity endorses a brand, the consumer will pay more attention to the endorsed brand, thereby improving its awareness and attributing it with a positive image (Kahle and Homer, 1985).

  This effect would likely be stronger among fans of the celebrity. Positive relationship with the celebrity also entices adolescents to pursue fan-tracking activities. Some even imitate the icons' behavior. Thus, the psychological foundation for endorser effect may originate from the relations between consumer and celebrity.

In a multiple-product study in the Chinese context, Chan (2008) reported that celebrity appeal was the most commonly used appeal that surpasses even sexual appeal.

• With **image congruity**, consumers subscribe to the values the celebrity possesses (Mathur, Mathur, and Rangan, 1997). Tim Duncan, for instance, is perceived to be very committed to winning each game that he plays in; he strives to be a leader of his team. Such values inspire the public—especially basketball fans—to regard Tim as a role model. Many bloggers in China perceive Yao Ming, the recently retired Houston Rocket basketball player, in a comparably favorable light.

From what basis do source credibility, source attractiveness, and image congruity emerge? One probable source is the positive relation between consumers and the celebrity, without which a celebrity could not convince viewers to trust the endorsed brand. Similarly, without favorable consumer/celebrity relations, no positive values can be transferred onto the brand. In a recent survey, European consumers noted that they would reject a perfume if it were endorsed by the infamous celebrity Paris Hilton.

How Do People Relate to Celebrities?
As media exposure familiarizes consumers with publicly renowned figures, some consumers may form a one-way, imaginative parasocial relationship with the celebrity. These relationships are real in the consumers' perceptions and constitute an important part of the consumers' subjective social experience.

This phenomenon can be a powerful driver in building demand for luxurious brands in emerging markets such as China (Zhou and Belk, 2004). Indeed, the

country's young adults who grew up during its years of robust economic growth increasingly have become "global" and "materialistic" in their pursuit of brands (Hung et al., 2007). Compared with older age groups, Generation Y individuals in China—especially those living in cities—are more individualistic, more embracing of Western influence, and more inclined to pursue self-actualization rather than pure capitalistic "get rich" orientations in career aspirations.

In addition, these individuals have greater tools and avenues of exposure to entertainment-based media, as they have demonstrated to be willing adapters of new technology, especially the Internet (Arora, 2005). In such cases, celebrity worship thus becomes more prevalent and profound: Celebrities represent idealized role models that this particular generation of consumers can embrace—a marked difference from the traditional career-focused expectations of their parents.

Gen Y Chinese consumers often form parasocial relations that correspond notably to a variety of specific actual social relations. Some viewers regard their favorite television performer as a friend. Others regard such individuals as father figures, big sisters, or even lovers. Although the parasocial relations may serve a need fulfillment function, some researchers suggest that relationship importance also can be assessed on a cost/reward basis.

As the celebrity is attractive and the fan controls the one-way relationship, parasocial relations are high-reward/low-cost exchanges (Rubin and Perse, 1987). Meanwhile, there is growing evidence that parasocial relations involve not only calculative commitment but an affective commitment that stems from people's intense emotional involvement with the celebrity. As an Elvis Presley fan once suggested, "I can feel him in my heart. I can see him in my dreams. I can see him on my wall in

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my posters, that's the stuff that's the real Elvis" (Fraser and Brown, 2002, 196).

A celebrity often is regarded as a hero, a role model, or even an other-world figure who takes on a dimension larger than life, allowing the fan to achieve a kind of higher existence (Kozinets, 2001). Another Elvis fan, a devout Catholic, spoke with a religious fervor and suggested, "There is a distance between human beings and God. That is why we are close to Elvis. He is like a bridge between us and God" (Doss, 1999, p. 70). One list of sacredness properties included sacrifice, commitment, ritual, and ecstasy (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry, 1989. These properties illustrate how people dignify and ennoble the celebrities they revere.

When people have strong feelings for—and form an admiration relationship with—a celebrity, the relations may take on a fantasy dimension so that the admirer may fantasize about meeting with the celebrity (e.g., going out drinking), becoming someone like the celebrity (e.g., becoming one's daughter), or even becoming the celebrity him- or herself (Caughey, 1984). These fantasies reflect a deeper identification beyond the celebrity's values and characteristics; they promote important attitudinal and behavioral changes in the admirer (Boon and Lomore, 2001). For instance, Andy Lau, who is among the most popular entertainers in China, has an extensive network of fan clubs across the nation. And through that broad-based following, he has drawn many imitators, impersonators, and self-proclaimed lovers.

Dimensions of Celebrity Worship

In recent studies, researchers have paid increased attention to what is now known as "celebrity worship" (McCutcheon et al., 2002) and have proposed multiple levels of the phenomenon. One commonly used scale—the Celebrity Attitude Scale (McCutcheon et al., 2002) was validated in subsequent studies (Giles and Maltby, 2004; Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, and McCutcheon, 2002). The research all showed that multiple dimensions of celebrity worship were traceable to different underlying motivations, among them entertainment-based motivation, intense attachment, and pathological commitment.

- **Entertainment-based motivation** represents the casual admiration that people hold toward the celebrity and the entertainment values a celebrity provides that give pleasure to the public. Many consumers enjoy learning about the celebrity, discussing with others about the celebrity, and deriving satisfaction knowing the celebrity's life story and recent moves (McCutcheon et al., 2002).

- **Intense attachment** toward the celebrity is another motivational dimension. People who exhibit this motivation perceive that they are personally connected with the celebrity. They think constantly about the celebrity and associate parasocially with the celebrity. When the celebrity succeeds (or fails), they share his or her joy (or sadness). In short, the intense attachment bond "transmits"

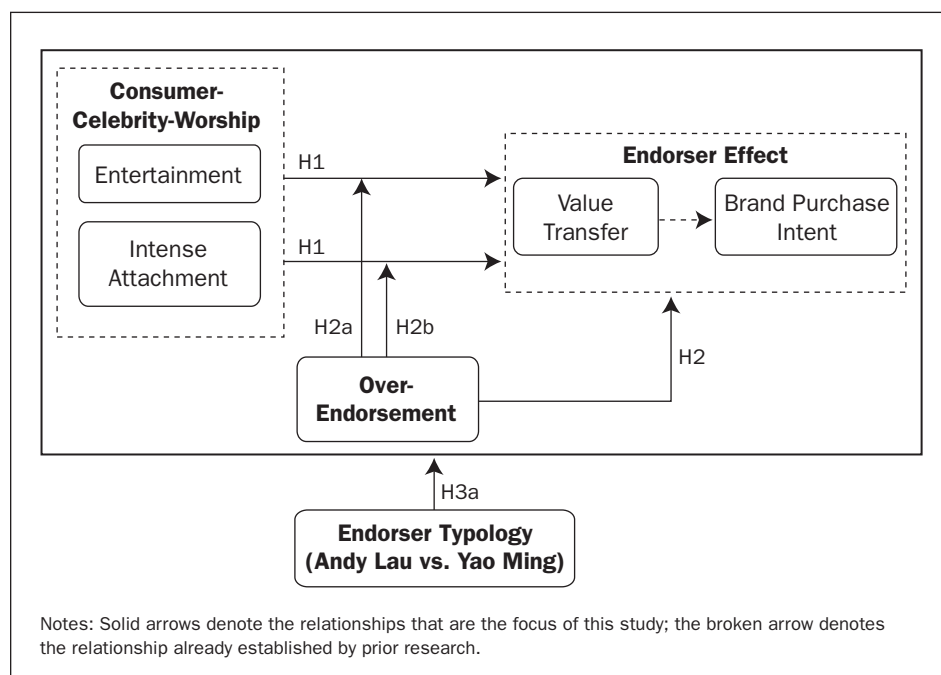what the celebrity feels, encounters, and experiences to the fans.

This celebrity-worship dimension falls between the extremes of a rational, distant relationship and an obsessive, compulsive bond that could advance to becoming pathological (McCutcheon et al., 2002).

- In fact, the last dimension of celebrity-worship motivation is characterized by individuals who take the relationship to such extremes and form a **pathological tie** with the celebrity. This strong attachment often causes the followers to engage in extreme behaviors, often going beyond normal judgment and reasoning to be with the celebrity (McCutcheon et al., 2002). This level of celebrity worship may be closely linked to a psychological disorder known as erotomania, described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

In the current study, the authors examined the first two dimensions because they are common among consumers. They propose that entertainment-based and intense attachment relational components are separate subconstructs of celebrity worship, with their own magnitudes of high and low.

The authors postulate that the entertainment-based component assesses the enjoyment or satisfaction level of a person who worships a celebrity, whereas the intense attachment component assesses the strength of the bond between the follower and the celebrity. Using these two behavioral dimensions, they are able to capture more of the complexity of how consumers relate to celebrities (See Figure 1).

In the current study, the authors surveyed the respondents' self-rated relationship with an entertainment (Andy

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of Celebrity-Worship Relationship.

Although most existing studies confirm the effects of celebrity endorsement, they often are conducted on a single-brand context.

Lau) and a sports celebrity (Yao Ming) using a translated, pretested version of the celebrity-attitude scale. Respondents also rated their evaluation of brands endorsed by these celebrities (value-transfer) and their purchase intentions toward these brands. The authors postulate that consumer-celebrity relations are behavioral antecedents to endorser effects and thus hypothesize:

H1: Consumer-celebrity relationships (measured by entertainment and intense attachment components) are positively related to how consumers evaluate the endorsed brands and their purchase intent toward these brands.

OVER-ENDORSEMENT

Although most existing studies confirm the effects of celebrity endorsement, they often are conducted on a single-brand context. When celebrities endorse multiple brands, however, the endorser effects are cast in doubt.

In China, over-endorsement is a special concern. With the explosive entry of luxurious global brands in the world's fastest-growing market, finding appropriate endorsers with national and international can be a challenge for advertisers (Chan, Hung, Tse, and Tse, 2008).

Researchers have found that the more products a celebrity endorses, the less credible he or she is seen by consumers (Kaikati, 1987; Mowen and Brown, 1981). This finding is not unreasonable: When a celebrity endorses a brand, the consumer associates the brand with the celebrity, allowing his or her expertise to transfer onto the brand. As the celebrity endorses more brands, however, the consumer may feel that the celebrity is losing his or her trustworthiness and commitment to the original brand. The consumer may also think that the celebrity is purely motivated by financial gains, which may in turn reduce his or her credibility. Indeed,

some studies have confirmed a negative correlation between the number of brands endorsed by celebrities and consumer's preference toward the brands (Tripp, Jensen, and Carlson, 1994).

The findings have two implications:

- Multi-brand endorsement will be viewed negatively by some consumers and causes an over-endorsement effect.
- Over-endorsement lowers the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement.

One of the more interesting aspects of the current study was an examination of the moderating effect of over-endorsement (i.e., enhancing or reducing) on the effects of celebrity-worship relations—specifically, in terms of value transfer and brand-purchase intent. The authors postulated that the two components of celebrity-worship relationships—entertainment-based and intense-attachment relations—would have positive impacts on endorser effects—again, in terms of brand value transfer and purchase intent).

One question remained, however: Would over-endorsement enhance (or reduce) the effects of these two celebrity-worship components on endorser effects? The motivation underlying the entertainment-based relational component is that the consumer enjoys associating

with the celebrity casually (e.g., reading about his or her activities or chatting with friends about matters that relate to the celebrity).

This motivation is rewarded when people acquire the endorsed brands. Yet, when the celebrity endorses many brands, the enjoyment associated with each brand averages out, and the satisfaction is subsequently weakened. In such cases, moreover, consumers also may think that the celebrities are motivated primarily by the endorsement fee rather than their loyalty to the brands they endorse. As a result, the consumers' support for the endorsed brands is lowered, suggesting that over-endorsement reduces the effects of "entertainment/fun" on the endorser effects of brand value-transfer and purchase intent.

In the case of "intense attachment," however, consumers are motivated to form strong bonds with the celebrity. Endorsing more brands allows the consumers to have additional opportunities to strengthen their bond with the celebrity. Fans who are strongly attached to Yao Ming, for instance, not only buy his sneakers and sports gear but consume the drinks and fast food he endorses; in this case, the celebrity's multiple endorsements are opportunities to form stronger bonds. In short, the authors hypothesize that over-endorsement would strengthen the positive link between "intense attachment" and the endorser effects of brand value transfer and purchase intent. Therefore, they hypothesize:

H2: celebrity's over-endorsement will negatively affect endorser effects.

H2a: Over-endorsement will dampen the link between the "entertainment-based" component of consumer-celebrity relations and endorser effects.

H2b: Over-endorsement will strengthen the link between the "intense attachment" component of consumer-celebrity relations and endorser effects

ENDORSER TYPOLOGY
Sports Celebrities versus Entertainment Celebrities

The study's third topic of interest relates to the typology of celebrity endorsers.

In most societies—including China—well-known, respected figures may emerge from many different professions, including politics, science, literature, history, art, business, sports, and entertainment. Among them, sports and entertainment are popular pastimes so regularly featured in mass media that they have become two major sources of celebrities. Athletes and entertainers capture the mainstream interests of the general population (especially among children and adolescents) and are iconized more than other types of celebrity (McCutcheon et al., 2002). In China, Yao Ming and Andy Lau are rated among the top national icons surpassing such renowned business leaders as Li Ka Shing (Yue and Cheung, 2000).

The literature to date examines celebrities as a group, with little emphasis on how sports and entertainment celebrities might differ. The authors postulate that endorser effects for these two groups do differ—that they are driven by their respective value sets. Athletes usually have one core goal: to perform at the highest level at their chosen sport. Entertainment celebrities, conversely, can branch out into different life dimensions and goals. They can sing, act, and model, making use of their multiple talents. From a celebrity-worship relationships perspective, consumers may perceive sports celebrities as having a narrower set of values (e.g., "to be the best at their sports") than entertainers (e.g., "to be good at singing, acting, or modeling").

As a result, consumers may expect a more restrictive product category for sports celebrities than entertainment celebrities.

Yao Ming has transcended cultural barriers by playing professional basketball in America. To consumers, his real and only expertise is playing basketball. Andy Lau, conversely, consistently has consistently appeared in television shows and concerts and directed and starred in many top box-office movies. The diversity of Andy Lau's activities represents a wider value set than that of Yao Ming. Thus, in the eyes of a consumer, Andy Lau would be a more credible source to endorse a wider variety of brands than Yao Ming.

Following the source-credibility explanation, the authors argue that a celebrity's perceived value set may determine the variety of brands that a celebrity can appropriately endorse and, therefore, hypothesize:

H3: Respondent rating of over-endorsement for Yao Ming (a sport celebrity) would be significantly higher than the rating for Andy Lau (an entertainment celebrity).

H3a: The dampening effect of over-endorsement would be more salient for Yao Ming than for Andy Lau.

METHODOLOGY
Study Design

To test their hypotheses, the authors adopted a dual-icon and multiple-respondent group study design.

The first step was to select two popular celebrities for the study: Yao Ming, a national basketball star who also played in the American National Basketball Association, and Andy Lau (a top Chinese singer and movie star). In public popularity surveys among consumers in China, each

celebrity was ranked among the top three in his profession, and each had extensive networks of fan clubs across China.

The authors used one of China's largest online national consumer panels, with more than 200,000 respondents. The panel was managed by a professional marketing firm (a joint-venture with equal equity interest from France and China). To ensure a wide coverage of different kinds of respondents who had different kinds of relations with the selected celebrities, the study placed hyper-links in fan-club Web sites to invite fans to participate in the online survey. In return, the research team rewarded the respondents with bonus points that they could exchange for gifts through the marketing-research firm. To minimize potential bias, the study used a between-subject design with two celebrity types and two respondent types (fans, non-fans). The online survey lasted for 2 weeks, resulting in more than 1,300 respondents.

To ensure the data quality, the authors

- pretested the questionnaire with 50 respondents using the online Web site and made minor changes before conducting the survey proper;
- included screening questions to ensure a probable balance between fans and non-fans; and
- placed a number of questions with reverse-worded concepts to check for systematic response biases.

The authors also conducted careful data cleaning after receiving the data, deleting respondents who finished the survey in less than 10 minutes, those whose responses were consistent in predesigned items that were reverse-worded, and those who were older than 30 years of age—the last change to focus the analyses on Generation Y consumers. The data cleaning reduced the sample by 27.9 percent. The final sample of 1,030 respondents included 572 in the Andy Lau sample (288 fans, 284 non-fans) and 458 in the Yao Ming sample (241 fans, 217 non-fans.)

Measures and Sample Demographics

The measures in this study were adapted from previous research with back-translation. The authors translated and modified the McCutcheon et al. celebrity attitude scale (2002) to measure the respondents' involvement with the selected celebrities. They conducted a factor analysis (with varimax rotation) and identified an entertainment-based dimension (α = 0.88) and an intense attachment dimension (α = 0.86) that concurred with previous studies (Giles and Malthy, 2004; Maltby et al., 2002). The consequences of celebrity-worship relations, endorsed brand value-transfer (α = 0.91), and brand purchase intent were adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The authors developed their own measures for over-endorsement (α = 0.89) and they assessed the basic descriptive statistics (see Table 1).

In a demographic analysis of respondents, the authors examined the mean differences on key measures and determined that they did not differ significantly across cities (See Table 2). Although the sample from the current study had higher levels of income and education, the socio-demographic characteristics of the group was consistent with Internet users in major Chinese cities.

TABLE 1
Basic Descriptive Statistics (Overall Sample)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Overall sample							
1. Entertainment	3.331	1.110	1				
2. Intense Attachment	2.102	0.849	0.467**	1			
3. Over-Endorsement	3.067	0.973	−0.126**	0.089**	1		
4. Brand Value-Transfer	3.451	1.015	0.496**	0.453**	−0.059*	1	
5. Brand Purchase Intent	3.160	1.331	0.479**	0.437**	−0.066*	0.582**	1
Sample of Andy Lau							
1. Entertainment	3.254	1.116	1				
2. Intense Attachment	1.942	0.794	0.526**	1			
3. Over-Endorsement	2.956	0.905	−0.159**	0.004	1		
4. Brand Value-Transfer	3.368	1.009	0.524**	0.453**	−0.117**	1	
5. Brand Purchase Intent	3.040	1.329	0.489**	0.442**	−0.126**	0.567**	1
Sample of Yao Ming							
1. Entertainment	3.427	1.095	1				
2. Intense Attachment	2.301	0.873	0.390**	1			
3. Over-Endorsement	3.205	1.037	−0.114*	0.123**	1		
4. Brand Value-Transfer	3.554	1.015	0.452**	0.437**	−0.023	1	
5. Brand Purchase Intent	3.300	1.320	0.458**	0.412**	−0.030	0.591**	1

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*
** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

TABLE 2

Sample Social Demographics

	Andy Lau Sample		Yao Ming Sample		Overall Sample	
	Non-fan	Fan	Non-fan	Fan	Non-fan	Fan
Age						
Under 20	44 (16%)	32 (11%)	36 (16%)	36 (15%)	80 (16%)	68 (13%)
21–25	163 (57%)	151 (52%)	121 (56%)	134 (56%)	284 (57%)	285 (54%)
26–30	77 (27%)	105 (37%)	60 (28%)	71 (29%)	137 (27%)	176 (33%)
Educational level						
Junior Middle School or Below	5 (2%)	3 (1%)	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	8 (2%)	5 (1%)
Senior middle school or Secondary technical school	29 (10%)	33 (11%)	47 (22%)	42 (17%)	76 (15%)	75 (14%)
Junior College	91 (32%)	88 (31%)	63 (29%)	69 (29%)	154 (31%)	157 (30%)
Bachelor	140 (49%)	132 (46%)	88 (41%)	119 (49%)	228 (45%)	251 (47%)
Above Bachelor	19 (7%)	32 (11%)	16 (7%)	9 (4%)	35 (7%)	41 (8%)
Family Monthly Income (RMB)						
2,000 or less	54 (19%)	41 (14%)	63 (29%)	71 (30%)	117 (23%)	112 (21%)
2,001–4,000	84 (30%)	89 (31%)	61 (18%)	75 (31%)	145 (29%)	164 (31%)
4,001–6,000	55 (29%)	58 (20%)	49 (23%)	39 (16%)	104 (21%)	97 (18%)
6,001–8,000	40 (14%)	34 (12%)	15 (7%)	22 (9%)	55 (11%)	56 (11%)
8,001–10,000	22 (8%)	32 (12%)	18 (8%)	17 (7%)	40 (8%)	49 (9%)
10,001–20,000	18 (6%)	27 (9%)	6 (3%)	15 (6%)	24 (5%)	42 (8%)
20,001 or more	11 (4%)	7 (2%)	5(2%)	2 (1%)	16 (3%)	9 (2%)
Occupation						
Government officer/teacher	30 (11%)	37 (13%)	15 (7%)	21 (9%)	45 (9%)	58 (11%)
Technician	28 (10%)	33 (12%)	61 (28%)	69 (29%)	89 (18%)	102 (19%)
Management level	21 (7%)	24 (8%)	17 (8%)	19 (8%)	38 (8%)	43 (8%)
Worker/General Clerk/Service	99 (35%)	99 (34%)	47 (19%)	58 (24%)	140 (28%)	157 (30%)
Student	88 (31%)	71 (25%)	66 (30%)	66 (27%)	154 (30%)	137 (26%)
Others	18 (6%)	24 (8%)	17 (8%)	8(3%)	35 (7%)	32 (6%)
Total	284	288	217	241	501	529

RESULTS

Validation of Measures

The authors assessed the measurement model using the common analysis approach for structural equation models (See Table 3). They also used three approaches to assess discriminant validity further:

- The authors tested the confidence intervals of the phi estimates of the constructs and found that none of them included 1.
- The authors ran chi-square difference tests for all constructs in pairs to test whether the restricted model is significantly worse than the freely estimated model. All chi-square differences are highly significant.
- The constructs met Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, which requires that the shared variances between all possible pairs of constructs be lower than the

TABLE 3

Measurement Items and Validity Assessment

Celebrity-Worship Relationships:	SFL
– Entertainment-Based Component: CR = 0.887, AVE = 0.728, HSV = 0.238	
1 Learning the life story of Andy Lau/Yao Ming is a lot of fun.	0.658
2 I enjoy watching, reading, or listening to Andy Lau/Yao Ming.	0.930
3 My friends and I like to discuss what Andy Lau/Yao Ming has done.	0.942
– Intense-Attachment Component: CR = 0.831, AVE = 0.560, HSV = 0.264	
1 When something bad happens to Andy Lau/Yao Ming, I feel like it happened to me.	0.598
2 When Andy Lau/Yao Ming fails or loses at something, I feel like a failure myself.	0.604
3 It would be difficult to replace my connectiveness with Andy Lau/Yao Ming.	0.905
4 Compared to other people I know, I have invested a great deal in being a Andy Lau/Yao Ming fan.	0.835
Over-Endorsement: CR = 0.894, AVE = 0.682, HSV = 0.030	
1 Emotionally, I cannot accept that Andy Lau/Yao Ming endorses so many brands.	0.687
2 I find Andy Lau/ Yao Ming too money-minded as he endorses so many brands.	0.921
3 Andy Lau/Yao Ming endorses so many brands, I find it boring.	0.933
4 Andy Lau/Yao Ming endorses so many brands, it hurts the relation between he and his fans.	0.734
Value-Transfer: CR = 0.914, AVE = 0.780, HSV = 0.264	
A lot of brands have invited Andy Lau/Yao Ming to be their endorsers. Please indicate in the following how you feel about the brands endorsed by Andy Lau/ Yao Ming:	
1 I feel close to the brand.	0.860
2 I am confident in the brand.	0.903
3 I have feelings for the brand.	0.886
Brand Purchase Intent:	
I am willing to buy the brands endorsed by Andy Lau/Yao Ming.	

Overall model fit: $\chi^2_{(80)}$ = 482.53, p < 0.001; GFI = 0.943, CFI = 0.962, IFI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.070
Notes: SFL = standardized factor loading, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, and HSV = highest shared variance with other constructs.

average variance extracted for the individual constructs.

In sum, the measurement model fit the data well, and all constructs possessed adequate measurement properties.

Before testing the hypotheses, the authors considered the overall fit of the causal model using the structural-equation approach (See Figure 2). As the model involved moderation effects by over-endorsement, the authors used Ping's (1995) technique to calculate the interaction terms between over-endorsement and celebrity-worship relations (i.e., entertainment and intense attachment) and included two interaction terms in the model linked directly to brand value-transfer and purchase intent.

The authors also linked brand value-transfer to brand-purchase intent. The model fit the data satisfactorily ($\chi^2_{(106)}$ = 621.45, $p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95, IFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.069). In addition, each of the estimated causal paths was significant, with one exception (see further). Interaction effects were further analyzed using the technique recommended by Aiken and West (1991), who refer to it as simple slope analysis. The procedure allowed the authors to assess the relationship between the criterion and predictor variables at plus-and-minus one standard deviation of the moderator (i.e., over-endorsement).

Hypothesis Testing

Celebrity-Worship Relationships and Endorser Effects The central tenet of the current study argued that consumer celebrity-worship was the behavioral antecedent for endorser effects. In H1, the authors proposed that the two components of celebrity-worship relations (entertainment and intense attachment) were positively related to the respondents' evaluation of the endorsed brands (i.e., value transfer) and their purchase intent. Both "entertainment" and "intense attachment" exerted significant influences (path coefficients were, respectively, 0.243 and 0.577)

> The central tenet of the current study argued that consumer celebrity-worship was the behavioral antecedent for endorser effects.

Overall sample
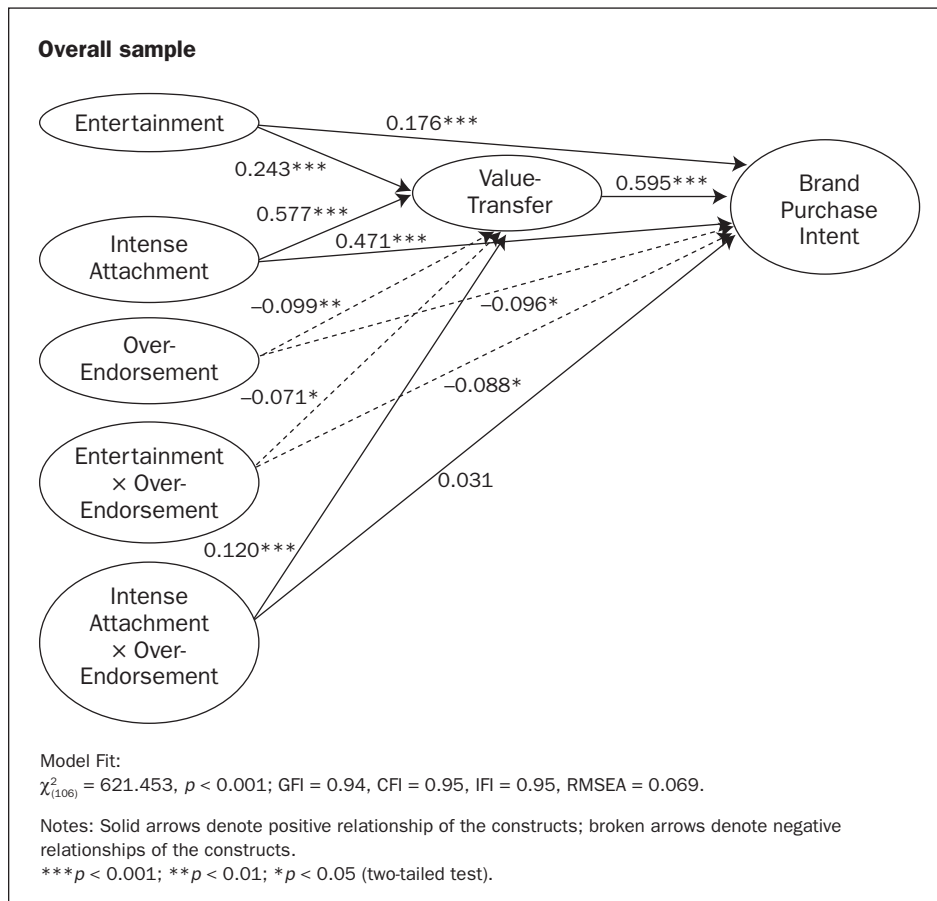
Figure 2 Structural Equation Model Results based on Ping's (1995) Method.

on value transfer and brand-purchase intent (path coefficients were 0.176 and 0.471) at $p < 0.01$ level (See Figure 2).

H1 was confirmed. These findings indicate that consumer-celebrity relations constitute a salient antecedent for endorser effects.

Hypothesis Testing

Over-Endorsement by Celebrities Although it is a common practice for a celebrity to endorse multiple brands, how consumers rate these activities—in particular whether the endorsement activities are excessive—has not been explored.

Conceptually, a celebrity endorsing more brands would have higher media exposures that could reinforce his or her source attractiveness. The celebrity's credibility over the endorsed brands may decline, however, driven down by over-endorsement effects. In H2, the authors proposed that the respondents' rating of a celebrity's over-endorsement would exert a negative influence on the brand's endorsed effects. The findings in the current study support this hypothesis (See Figure 2): The causal paths linking over-endorsement and brand value transfer (-0.099, $p < 0.01$) and purchase intent (-0.096, $p < 0.05$), respectively, are negatively significant.

The authors also conceptualize that over-endorsement also would moderate the effects of the two dimensions of consumer-celebrity relations. In particular,

H2a postulated that over-endorsement would dampen the effect of entertainment-based component on endorser effects. The results once again support the authors' proposition: The interaction term (over-endorsement × entertainment) exerted negative influences on value transfer (-0.071, $p < 0.05$) and purchase intent (-0.088, $p < 0.05$) (See Figure 2).

The details of this interaction were examined further by deriving the simple slopes as suggested by Aiken and West (1991). Regressions were conducted at high (one standard deviation above) and low (one standard deviation below) levels of over-endorsement. In the case in which over-endorsement was low, the relationship between entertainment-based component and value-transfer (or purchase intent) was significant and positive (*for* value transfer: $t = 3.01$, $p < 0.01$; *for* purchase intent: $t = 2.30$, $p < 0.02$). This relationship, however, was insignificant at high levels of over-endorsement (*for* value transfer: $t = 0.98$, *n.s.*; *for* purchase intent: $t = 0.34$, *n.s.*). Hence, the strength of the relationships weakened as over-endorsement increased (See Figure 3, Panels a and b). This suggests that, among consumers driven more by entertainment-based motivation, their ratings of over-endorsement will lower its (entertainment-based) effects on the endorsed brands.

By contrast, if the consumers were driven more by intense attachment, they would not mind if the celebrity is endorsing multiple brands. In some regards, the multiple brand endorsements enable them to relate more strongly to their celebrities. As a result, over-endorsement would strengthen the effect of "intense attachment" on the endorsed brands.

The findings partially supported this hypothesis: The interaction term (over-endorsement × intense attachment) exerts positive influences on value-transfer (0.120, $p < 0.001$) and purchase intent

(a) The Interaction of Entertainment-Based Component and Over-Endorsement on Value Transfer

(b) The Interaction of Entertainment-Based Component and Over-Endorsement on Brand Purchase Intent

(c) The Interaction of Intense Attachment and Over-Endorsement on Value Transfer
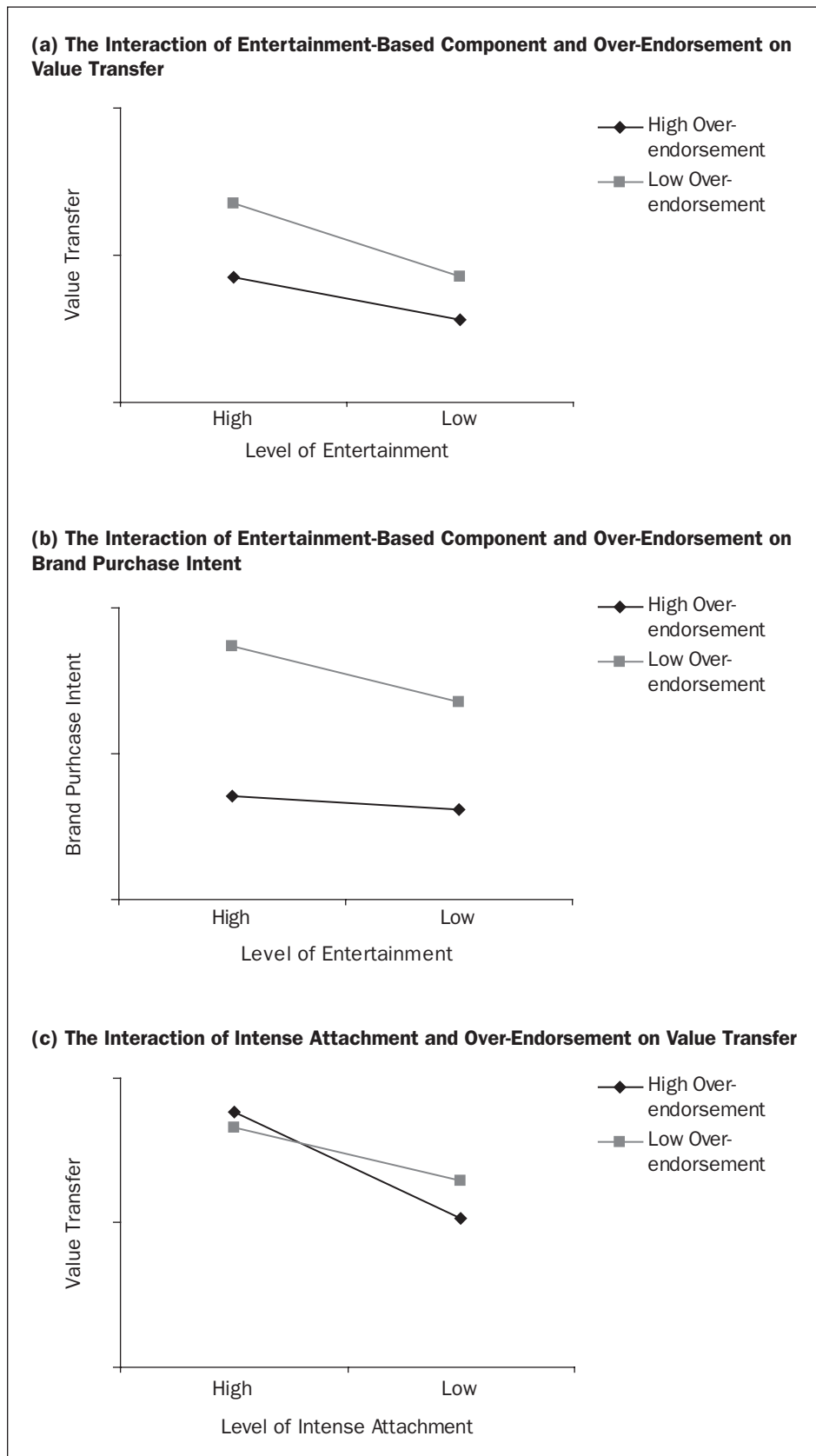
Figure 3 Interaction Plots.

(0.031, $p > 0.10$). Again, the nature of the interaction effect on value-transfer was explored further by deriving the simple slopes at high and low levels of over-endorsement (See Figure 3, panel c). In both cases, the relationship between over-endorsement and value-transfer was significant and positive. However, the relationship was stronger at high levels of over-endorsement ($t = 9.90$, $p < 0.001$) than it was at low levels of over-endorsement ($t = 4.92$, $p < 0.001$).

The findings have two implications:

- The robustness of the result suggests that over-endorsement effects are salient and can be understood through consumer celebrity-worship relations.
- How consumers react to over-endorsement is related to the specific motivations they hold toward their celebrities.

Hypothesis Testing

Issue of Celebrity Types For obvious reasons, brand managers often use the two major types of celebrities (athletes and entertainers) to endorse their brands. Yet, how celebrity type differs in its ability to endorse multiple brands has not been extensively studied. The authors postulated in H3 that the respondents' over-endorsement rating would be higher for a sport celebrity (Yao Ming) than for an entertainment celebrity (Andy Lau).

To test the validity of the hypothesis, the authors ran a mean comparison test on the over-endorsement ratings. And the results supported H3: The mean score was 3.20 for Yao Ming and 2.96 for Andy Lau, with the mean difference significant at $p < 0.01$.

To examine H3a—the moderation effect of over-endorsement on celebrity type—the authors split the sample into a Yao Ming sample and an Andy Lau sample. The authors ran the standard split-sample structural equation model and the results
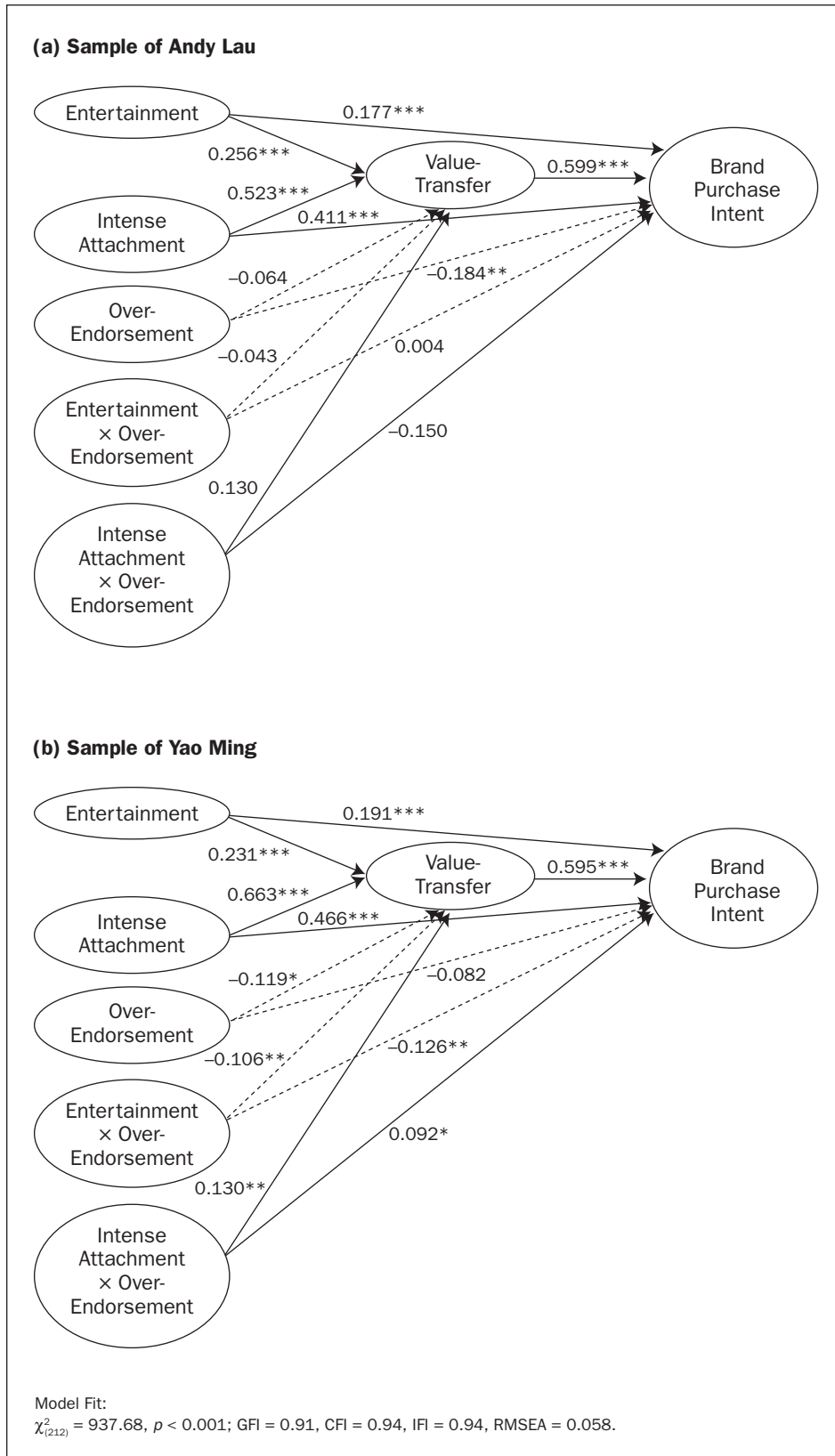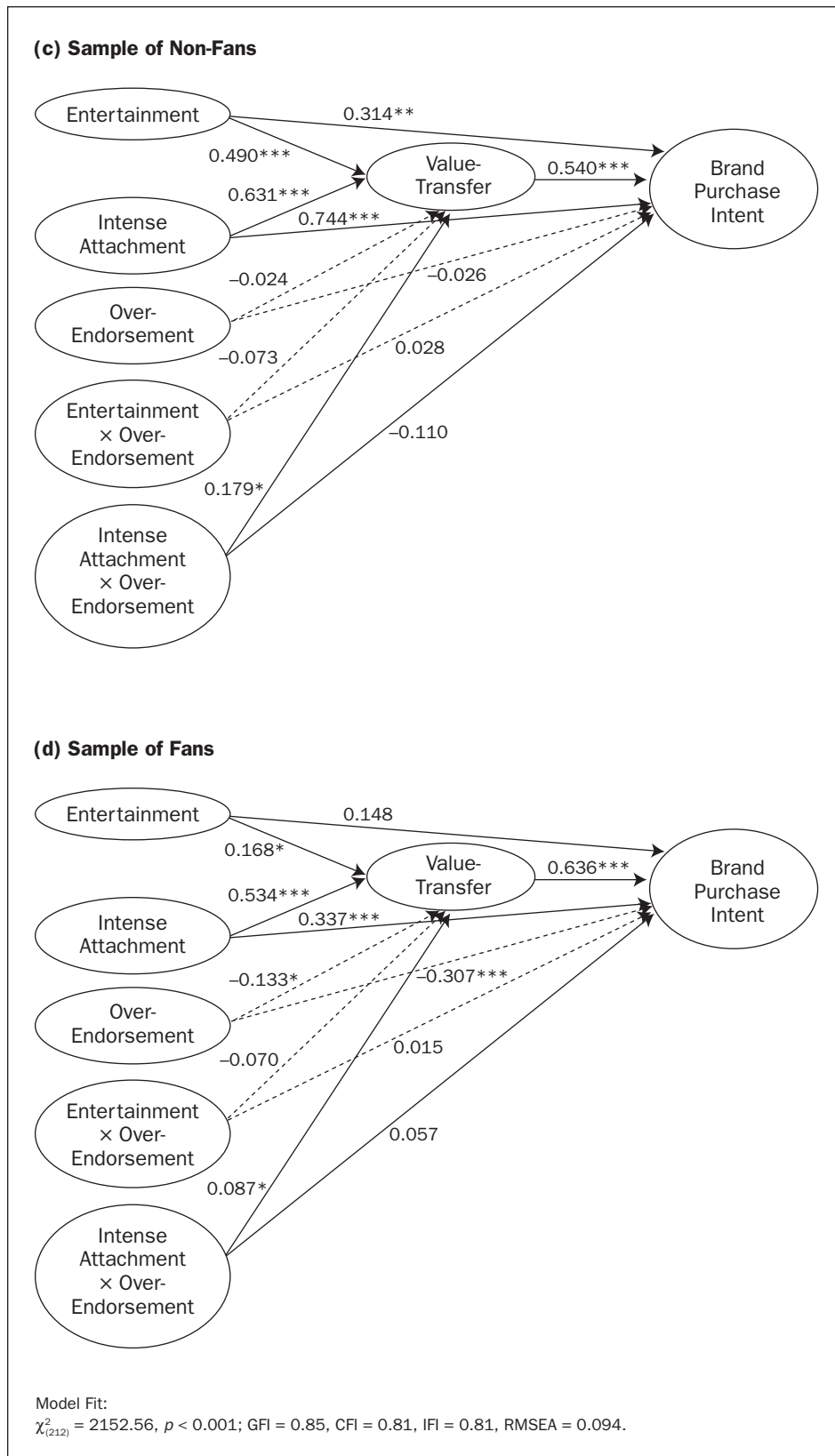
Figure 4 Structural Equation Model Results based on Ping's (1995) Method (continued).

For obvious reasons, brand managers often use the two major types of celebrities (athletes and entertainers) to endorse their brands.

(See Figure 4, panels a and b). The indices for the overall model fit were $\chi^2_{(212)}$ = 937.68, $p < 0.001$; GFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.94, IFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.058), reflecting that the overall model is robust across the two celebrity types.

The authors then examined the moderation effects for each sample. In the case of Yao Ming, all four moderation effects were significant, with the correct directional signs as hypothesized earlier (brand value transfer: –0.106, $p < 0.01$; –0.126, <0.01; brand-purchase intent: 0.130, $p < 0.01$ and 0.092, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, the causal path coefficients for Andy Lau all were insignificant, confirming the hypothesis (H3a) that over-endorsement is a significant moderator for sports celebrities but not for entertainment celebrities. (The authors point out that the findings of our study were limited and need further replication. The robustness of the findings, however, suggests that indeed there are fundamental differences in endorser capacity between the selected stars).

In addition to the hypotheses, the authors conducted *post-hoc* analyses to examine whether the current model provided a good fit for fans versus non-fans (See Figure 4, panels c and d). In fact, there were differences in the moderation effects, and the general model holds for the subgroup analyses (See Figure 1). All

(c) Sample of Non-Fans

(d) Sample of Fans

Model Fit:
$\chi^2_{(212)}$ = 2152.56, p < 0.001; GFI = 0.85, CFI = 0.81, IFI = 0.81, RMSEA = 0.094.

Figure 4 Structural Equation Model Results based on Ping's (1995) Method (continued).

interaction effects except one ("Intense attachment × over-endorsement") of both samples were nonsignificant, showing that the interactions were neither driven by the fan nor non-fan sample. These findings further justify the robustness of the proposed model.

To conclude, the overall findings support the study's central tenet: Using a relational perspective (celebrity worship) to understand endorser effects contributes to our existing knowledge on endorser effects. Specifically, the authors confirmed that consumer-celebrity relations are salient behavioral antecedents for endorser effects. The current study also provides insights into the issues of over-endorsement and endorser typology.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS
The findings in the current study confirm that consumer/celebrity relationship is a relevant theoretical foundation for understanding endorser effects. As marketers increasingly use endorsers to shape and influence brand purchase, this relational perspective provides two strategic implications for companies using celebrities as brand endorsers, a key executional factor in China:

• It is important for marketers to understand how their target consumers relate to the celebrity endorser they have selected. If the consumers' motivation largely were entertainment-based, the endorsed brands likely would be superficially processed by these consumers, who likely would engage in peripheral processing without careful consideration of details of the brand or its attributes.

• If the consumers' motivation toward the celebrity were intense-attachment based, however, the endorsed brands likely would be evaluated more carefully with conscious and detailed

considerations. As such, the endorsed brands would be processed through the "central" route, and the link between the brands and the celebrity would be evaluated more carefully. These inferences may be characteristic of Generation Y consumers, whom the current study primarily represented. Supporting research can be carried out in the future to further validate these inferences and to test the generalizability with other consumer groups.

Marketers need to be cautious that there may be capacity limits for celebrities when they endorse multiple brands. This issue is relevant for brand owners, advertising agencies, and modeling agencies. The findings from the current study suggest that this capacity may be related to the diversity of the celebrity's core value set; the more diversified the value set, the more brands the celebrity can endorse in the eyes of a consumer.

The issue of over-endorsement concerns the nature of the relationship a consumer holds toward a celebrity. Consumers driven by an entertainment-based relationship may resent the endorsed brands more strongly when the celebrity over-endorses. In contrast, consumers driven by intense attachment may be less resentful when over-endorsement occurs. This suggests that brand owners may need to design segment-specific strategies when they use celebrities to endorse multiple brands: for example in this case, targeting the younger Generation Y consumers with celebrities that can appeal to their desires for attachment

The findings in the current study provided a number of managerial implications for firms and advertisers. First and foremost, it is important to recognize that consumers are bonded with celebrities either through entertainment values or intense-attachment needs. Thus, celebrities can serve more than

vehicles of value transfer. It is necessary for brand managers and advertising professionals to develop, nurture, monitor, and benefit from consumer-celebrity relationships. Indeed, celebrity fans can be a core loyal group of customers who may prove to be of value in launching new products.

Choosing the right type of celebrities as endorsers also has implications for marketing managers. The current study shows that Yao Ming, China's long-time national basketball hero, is perceived by some as over-endorsing. This suggests that advertising professionals need to look for (and develop) potential endorsers from icons whom people respect. China's Olympic champions may provide this potential pool.

This study used Yao Ming and Andy Lau as the sole representatives for sports and entertainment icons, respectively. The study of their appeals to consumers, however, generated some interesting insights into endorser effects and capacity—findings that may be validated through future follow-up studies.

In comparison to entertainment celebrities, sports celebrities may have a stronger endorsement "depth" because they have a deeper—but narrower—value set consumers (i.e., striving to be the best at a particular sport) in the eyes of the consumers. By contrast, entertainment celebrities may have a wider endorsement width given their larger value sets (i.e., success in acting, singing, modeling, and the like), yet their endorsement depth may be relatively "shallower." It may be a rewarding strategy to scout emerging musicians and other entertainment talents in a highly diversified country such as China to find the appropriate brand endorsers. Again, these implications in terms of range differences in celebrities' value sets due to their job nature warrant further studies.

In addition, currently there are no known published statistics on exactly

how large fan group sizes behave—a failing that is particularly notable among intensely loyal fans. Should those numbers becomes available, brand managers and advertising professionals may be able to use such statistics to better estimate potential sales effects that would provide additional return on investment justification from using particular celebrities as their brand endorsers.

There are a number of limitations in our study that provide future research opportunities:

- As a pioneering study on the issue of over-endorsement, the findings need to be replicated across more celebrities and celebrity types. In particular, the online survey sample focused on Generation Y consumers, an important group but one that is not representative of the overall consumer population in China. Thus, further studies can investigate the robustness of our findings across different consumer groups.
- The issue of over-endorsement is a rich area that needs further work. The issue of endorser capacity and its underlying processes are topics worthy of further investigation in emerging markets such as China.
- Although the current study was conducted in the China market, the authors believe the findings have implications that extend beyond that cultural context. Future comparative work likely will generate new academic and managerial insights for a quickly globalized marketplace. **JAR**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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