

**The effect of Celebrity Endorsement Marketing Strategy of Tennis Sports Brands on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention in North Cyprus**

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**Abstract**

This study set out to examine the antecedents of purchase intention in the North Cyprus tennis sporting industry. Specifically, it examined the effect of endorser credibility and brand congruency on brand attitude, the effect of brand attitude on purchase intention and the moderating effect of negative publicity on the brand attitude-purchase intention path. Using data from consumers of the tennis products sold by tennis brands in North Cyprus, the study analyzed the data using PLS-SEM conducted via the ADANCO PLS software. It found no support for the effect of endorser credibility on brand attitude nor any support for the moderating effect of negative publicity on the brand attitude-purchase intention path. However, it did find support for the effect of brand congruency on brand attitude and for the effect of brand attitude on purchase intention. Summarily, it found that within the North Cyprus tennis goods industry, consumers cared more about endorser congruency with the brand than with endorser credibility.

*Keywords:* Consumer Behavior, Endorser credibility, Purchase Intention, Theory of Planned Behavior, Source Credibility Model

**1. Introduction**

Today's global marketing environment has become ever more competitive and consumers are being bombarded with thousands of advertising and promotional messages through a variety of different media channels. Besides the traditional advertising methods such as billboards, magazines, radio, television, and newspaper, the new technology "digital era" is enabling brands to communicate with their customers interactively through social media platforms. Marketers are working hard and trying all the possible ways to make sure that their messages are being heard by the target market. However, many of these messages are not able to raise the attention of consumers. When consumers are exposed to constant advertisements, they are more likely to ignore or neglect the message and advertisements remain unnoticed by the intended target market. Thus, creating distinct positioning in the marketplace and grasping consumers' attention is one of the main concerns of today's marketers (Rodgers and Thorson 2000). Brands usually appoint celebrities from a specific field to be a part of an advertising campaign to persuade target audiences to choose a specific brand from a plethora of options, the marketing attributes and imagery of a brand are supplemented with celebrity endorsements.

For decades, celebrity endorsements have been used as a marketing tool to promote products or brands, and have thus become an important part of modern marketing (McCracken 1989). This is because marketing campaigns that use celebrities can boost the persuasiveness and effectiveness of the message

(Roy 2016). In a way, they have the ability to persuade consumers to purchase the brand (Knoll and Matthes 2016). In another word, celebrity endorsement serves as a credible means of increasing brand spending because the consumer immediately links with the product and distinguishes the endorsed brand from others. Elberse and

Verleun (2012) indicate that over 20% of advertisements in the USA were featured celebrities endorsing the brands and celebrity endorsements may account for up to 25% of all television commercials and 10% of advertising budgets (Erdogan et al. 2001). Moreover, Li et al., (2012) suggest that the use of celebrity endorsers particularly in social media advertisings is a key marketing strategy and more effective technique than any other form of mass media.

There are numerous influential examples of celebrities from various professions who are used to endorse brands and products, such as athletes, actors, and pop stars. Since the internet has been one of the most transformative and fast-growing technologies, more people use the related communication technologies to watch sporting events. Hence, athletes are increasingly being regarded as global celebrities (Ratten, 2015) and become the most popular celebrities among others to the point where they are regarded as human brands. This means that an athlete's image may be associated with various attributes, which may have a significant impact on consumer behavior (Carlson & Donovan, 2013).

This research aims to examine the antecedents of purchase intention for endorsed products in the North Cyprus tennis industry. The effect of endorser credibility on brand attitude, the effect of brand congruency on brand attitude, the effect of brand attitude on purchase intention, and the moderating effect of negative publicity on the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention path are investigated by using data from tennis players for the products of tennis brands in North Cyprus.

## **2. Review of Literature, Theoretical and Hypotheses Development**

### *Source Credibility Theory*

Source credibility is a concept that refers to a communicator's good attributes that influence the recipient's acceptance of any information such a communicator is passing across (Ohanian 1990, p. 41). Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) initially proposed and postulated the source credibility model, which stated that expertness and trustworthiness are the two characteristics that influence a communicator's perceived credibility. A source of valid assertions, expertise is referred to as authoritative, competency, expertness, or qualification (Ohanian 1990). (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley 1953). The degree of trust and acceptance of the communicator and the information is referred to as trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley 1953; Ohanian 1990). McGuire (1985) later modified his model to include source attractiveness. Aesthetic and physical attractiveness, chicness, sexiness, familiarity, resemblance, or likability have all been classified as attractiveness (Ohanian 1990; McGuire 1985). People are more inclined to think favorably of a brand and increase their purchase intention if a communicator recommends it and more so if such a communicator is viewed as reliable, according to Belch and Belch (2004). To put it another way, endorser credibility refers to a person's integrity, skill, and attractiveness, all of which are key variables in increasing a message's persuasiveness (Ohanian 1990).

The source credibility model (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) has been used in the past to evaluate the influence of endorser credibility (Wang, Kao, and Ngamsiriudom. 2017; Ong and Ong 2015; Rashid et al. 2002; Chi, Yeh, and Huang 2009; Low and Lim 2012) and brand congruency (Wang and Yang 2010; Jeng 2016; Erdem and Swait 2004) on purchase intention (Wang, Kao, and Ngamsir According to Wang, Kao, and Ngamsiriudom (2017), the endorser credibility and purchase intention of Taiwanese air transportation services have a substantial positive association. In Malaysia, Rashid et al. (2002) investigated the impact of endorser credibility on purchase intention among different ethnic groups (i.e., Malay, Chinese,

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and Indian) and concluded that endorser credibility has a significant impact on purchase intention; Low and Lim (2012) also discovered a strong relationship between endorser credibility and purchase intention among younger customers in the context of sport products; however, Ong and Ong (2015) discovered a weak relationship between endorser credibility and purchase intention of Malaysian consumers. According to Spry, Pappu, and Bettina Cornwell (2011), endorser credibility improves brand and consequently advertising effectiveness. In terms of brand congruency, Wang and Yang (2010) and Jeng (2016) found that brand congruency has a favorable impact on consumer brand purchase intention in the Chinese automobile and airline industries, respectively. Furthermore, Wang and Scheinbaum (2018) discovered that a positive endorser credibility boosts brand congruency, while Malodia et al. (2017) established that both endorser credibility and brand congruency play a role in modulating purchase intention.

### *Theoretical Associations between Attitude and Behavior*

*Theory of Reasoned Action:* The relationship between attitude and behavior has been widely harnessed and used in advertising (Spears and Singh 2004). The primary goal of an advertisement, as per Watkins et al. (2016), is to affect the consumer's attitude about the marketed product or service. 'The impact of attitude on behavior is mostly influenced by Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which assumes that an individual's behavior follows reasonably from their ideas, attitudes, and intentions,' according to Ajzen and Fishbein (2005, p.174). Individuals' readiness to behave in a given manner is based on their attitude (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), and an individual's predisposition to judge an object in a favorable or negative manner is based on their attitude (Ajzen and Fishbein 2005; Katz 1960). Consumers' favorable or unfavorable responses to product assessments in terms of brand terminology, design, symbol, or indeed any element that distinguishes one seller's good or service from those of other sellers are referred to as attitude towards brand (Wood 2000, p. 664). In their studies, Spears and Singh (2004) and Malodia et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of attitude towards brand for purchase intention. Sallam and Wahid (2012) and Wahid and Ahmed (2011) found that consumer attitudes toward advertisement have positive and significant effects on their attitude towards brand as well as their purchase intention; Ong and Ong (2015) revealed that consumer attitudes toward advertisement have significant impact on purchase intention for ghee cooking oil and overhead products in Yemen.

*Theory of Planned Behavior:* The relationship between attitude and behavior is most importantly part of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). TPB is an extension of TRA that adds perceived behavioral control to increase the model's predictive power. TPB is made up of three different variables: attitude toward behavior, social norms, and perceived behavioral control. TPB is an accepted hypothesis to describe beliefs and behavior when studying customers' purchase intention towards a particular brand or product (Ajzen 1985, 1991). It has been used to investigate purchase intention in a variety of contexts, including dietary supplement usage (Noor et al. 2014), alcohol intake (Cooke et al. 2016), entrepreneurial intent and activity (Kautonen, Gelderen, and Fink 2015), green purchase intention (Isa, Lim, and Chin 2017), as well as the fashion industry (Isa, Lim, and Chin 2017; Valaei and Nikhashemi 2017). Consumers' proclivity to buy a particular product or brand (Wang, Kao, and Ngamsiriudom, 2017) is described as a combination of their desire and their ability to acquire the goods (Wang, Kao, and Ngamsiriudom, 2017). The most constant predictor of purchase intention, which is also an attitudinal characteristic predicting a product's future contribution to a brand, is a consumer's attitude toward it (Wang, Kao, and Ngamsiriudom. 2017).

Despite the fact that there are several studies on endorser credibility and brand congruency, there are few studies on the impact of these two sources on attitude towards brand and consequently on purchase intention, particularly in the context of the tennis sporting sector and emerging markets. Based on the theoretical framework and previous findings, it is critical to not only measure the impact of source credibility on purchase intention, but also to comprehend consumer attitude towards brand in order to boost consumer purchase intention. As a result, we propose the following conceptual model to evaluate the phenomenon in the tennis sporting industry of North Cyprus, as shown in Figure 1.

### *Endorser Credibility and Attitude towards the Brand*

Customers' perceptions of an endorser's expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness may have a favorable or negative impact on their brand evaluation. As previously indicated, many studies have looked into the effect of endorser credibility on purchase intent. However, studies on the link between endorser credibility and consumer attitudes is currently sparse. Recent research has confirmed that endorser credibility has a positive impact on attitudes towards brands (Muda et al. 2014; Wang and Scheinbaum 2018; Wang, Kao, and Ngamsiriudom. 2017). Ngamsiriudom, Wang, and Kao (2017) and Wang and Scheinbaum (2018) both shown how the endorser credibility may improve BC in the airline industry. According to Spry, Pappu, and Bettina Cornwell (2011), endorser credibility can improve brand awareness and consequently advertising effectiveness. Endorser credibility has a considerable effect on Hong Kong teenagers' attitude towards brand, according to Chan, Leung Ng, and Luk (2013). These positive findings are associated with endorsers since they are well-known personalities in society who are seen to be highly credible and have a stronger impact on a brand's appraisal and ability to alter consumers' purchase intentions (Mukherjee 2009). However, Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000) discovered that endorser credibility only influences attitude toward advertising but not attitudes towards brands, whilst Paul and Bhakar (2018) claim that celebrity image congruence has a negative significant effect on attitudes towards brands. In the tennis sporting industry, however, the relationship between endorser credibility and attitude towards brands in the tennis sport industry is still unknown. As a result, this study offers the following hypotheses:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The more credible the endorser is, the more positive the attitude of consumers towards the tennis sporting brand will be.

### *Brand Congruency and Attitude towards the Brand*

Customers' perceptions of a brand's expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness may have a favorable or unfavorable impact on their appraisal of the brand. Consumers are more likely to rate a product favorably when it has a high level of perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, according to Anridho and Liao (2013). This is due to the fact that high credibility represents a product's superior quality, higher value, and worthiness, resulting in a more favorable attitude from customers. Tennis sporting products are considered high-involvement purchases in sociology, as they strongly reflect personality, social standing, and even cultural heritage (Fairhurst, Good, and Gentry 1989; O'Cass 2004). Brand congruency enhances the likelihood of a product being included in a consumer's decision set, according to Erdem and Swait (2004) and Paul and Bhakar (2018). Furthermore, previous studies on brand congruency have discovered a strong link between it and the attitude toward advertisement, attitude towards the brand, and the subsequent purchase intention of consumers (Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell 2000; Lafferty and Goldsmith 1999; Paul and Bhakar 2018). As a result, a product produced by a company with a high brand congruency with its endorser in the perception of consumers, may have a positive impact on customers' attitude towards the brand, affecting their brand or product purchase intentions. As a result, the second hypothesis is generated to examine this association as follows:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** The higher the congruency between the endorser and the tennis sporting brand, the more positive the attitude of consumers towards the brand will be.

### *Attitude towards Brands and Purchase Intention*

In their research, Spears and Singh (2004) emphasized the importance of attitude towards brands for purchase intention. Consumer attitude has positive and significant effects on purchase intention, according to the latest literature earlier addressed in detail in the preceedingthe 'Attitude–Behavioral relation' section of this paper (Sallam and Wahid 2012; Wahid and Ahmed 2011; Paul and Bhakar 2018; Ong and Ong 2015; Wang and Yang 2010; Jeng 2016). Customers' positive attitude towards the brand alongside brand congruence according to the study, boost their willingness to buy a product. As a result, the following hypothesis is outlined:

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**H<sub>3</sub>:** The more positive consumers attitude towards a tennis sporting brand is, the higher the purchase intention will be.

Publicity, advertising, and third-party endorsement are all examples of persuasive communication that can result in either favorable or unfavorable information about a brand and organization (Cho, 2005; Ramly & Omar, 2016). In comparison to company-controlled communication, Bond and Kirshenbaum (1998) concluded that externally originating publicity is more legitimate and persuasive. Negative publicity concerning products and enterprises is easily distributed in today's rising social media powered markets (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). It is defined as potentially toxic and detrimental information about a product, business unit, person, or service that circulates through mass media, word of mouth, or physical press (Sherrell, Reidenbach, Moore, Wagle, & Spratlin, 1985). When unfavorable brand exposure is verified and confirmed to be official or factual (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014), not only the company but also stakeholders will be hurt (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014). (Dahlen & Lange, 2006). Negative information is proven to be more powerful than positive information with regard to attribution of business beliefs (Dahlen & Lange, 2006). Similarly, negative news, stories or testimonials about a brand has been demonstrated to have greater influence on decision-making than positive or neutral marketing content, and it leads to a negative opinion about businesses which in effect negatively affects attitude towards brands and consequently purchase intention (Cho, 2005). In light of the above, this study posits the following hypothesis.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Negative publicity about the endorser negatively moderates the relationship between attitude towards the brand and purchase intention.

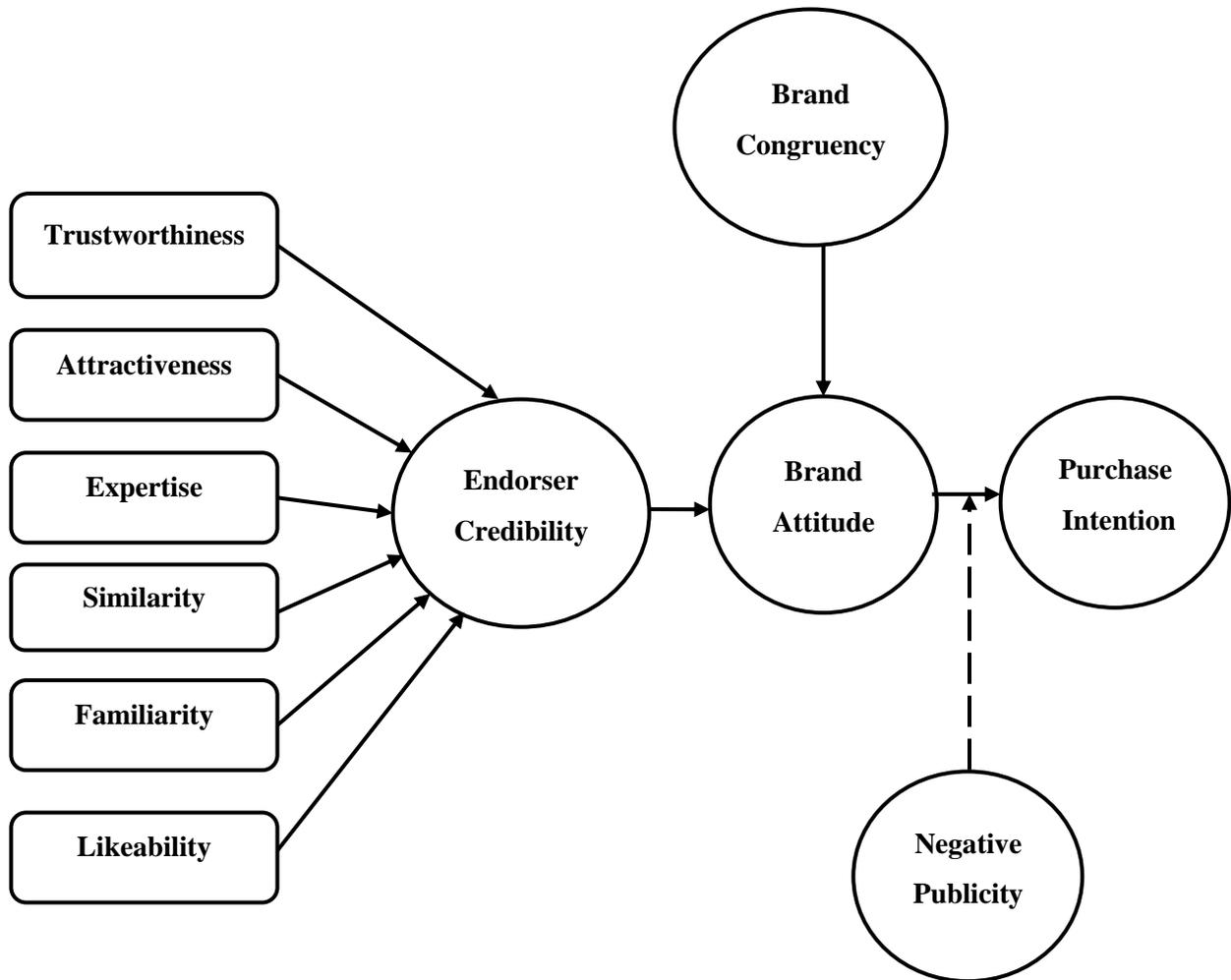


Figure 1. The conceptual model of the research

### 3. Research Methodology

#### *Data collection and sample selection*

This study used a quantitative approach with self-administered questionnaires as the primary data gathering tool. In this study, hypotheses testing was performed to analyze the variation in the dependent variable in order to estimate or anticipate the association (Saunders, et al., 2009; Sekaran and Bougie 2010). Soft copies of the study survey were administered in three major cities in North Cyprus and specifically to the customers of selected local tennis sporting brand shops and outlets. Consumer data was identified through the social media pages of the tennis sporting brands included in the study. Data collection was conducted via email and via targeted dissemination of the survey instruments via social media, and lasted two months (June–July 2021). Before the actual survey, a pilot research was undertaken in order to fine-tune the final survey questionnaire.

The target study audience was consumers over the age of 18 who had purchased or used any of the North Cyprus tennis sporting brands previously before taking part in the survey. This was done to guarantee that the study results were accurate. To reach the required sample size for this investigation, 384 self-administered questionnaires were disseminated (Saunders, 2009; Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2013). A response rate of approximately 42% was recorded as 163 responses were received. 13 survey questionnaires containing missing data that constituted of 50% of the questionnaire items were excluded, leaving 150 viable questionnaires for the final data analysis and hypothesis testing.

#### *Variable measurement*

This study's measuring tools and items were adopted and adapted from prior extant research within which they had previously been validated. The study used a 7-point Likert scale with 1 indicating strong disagreement, 2 indicating disagreement, 3 indicating somewhat disagreement, 4 indicating neutrality, 5 indicating somewhat agreement, 6 indicating agreement and 7 indicating strong agreement. Endorser credibility and its dimensions were measured using questionnaire items adapted from Yoon and Kim (2015), Brand congruency was measured using questionnaire items adapted from Spry, Pappu and Cornwell (2011), Attitude towards brands was measured using questionnaire items adapted from Spears and Singh (2004), Negative publicity was measured using questionnaire items adapted from Zhou and Whitla (2013) and Purchase intention were measured using questionnaire items adapted from Hung et al. (2011).

#### **4. Data Analysis and Study Results**

##### *The Analytical Procedure*

This study uses the variance-based structural equation modeling (VB-SEM) technique to analyze the study data. Specifically, it utilized the partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach due to its reputation for demonstrating adequately robust analytical and predictive capabilities (Hair et al., 2016). However, before proceeding we conduct a series of preliminary analysis to control for the content validity of the instruments used and the presence of common method Bias and a description of the study participants.

##### *Preliminary Analysis I: Pilot Test*

First of all, we pilot-tested the survey instrument on a set of 30 participants to establish content and face validity of the questionnaire items. Adjustments were then made to sentence structure of some items in the questionnaire where necessary to engender clarity of meaning. The initial 30 participants included in the pilot study were then excluded from participating in the main study.

##### *Preliminary Analysis II: Test of Common Method Variance (CMV)*

Next, we examine the presence of common method bias by testing for the presence of common method variance (CMV). Typical of all data collection procedures based on the deployment of self-administered surveys collected at single time points, the tendency for the observed associations within such data to be artificially inflated by the presence of common method variance is usually high as elaborated by Podsakoff et al., (2012). Thus, to avoid the introduction of common method bias, this study uses and the *ex ante* and *ex post* procedure recommended Podsakoff et al., (2003). *Ex ante*, this study sought to apply a set of preventive measures before distributing the questionnaire. First, we offered guarantees to the participants that they will remain anonymous throughout the entire process and there is nothing designed into the survey that can link them to their responses. Secondly, we used different Likert scale points for each construct and finally, we incorporated within each section of the questionnaire (representing the measurement items for each individual construct) a timed psychological separation approach by using elaborate opening statements which were both descriptive and instructional in nature. These forced a mental shift in the respondents that required them to pay adequate attention to the different mental requirements necessary to accurately respond to items as they moved from one section to the other within the survey instrument, thereby minimizing the transfer of response patterns from one section of the survey to the other. In addition, *ex post*, after collecting data from the main study sample, we examined the collected data statistically for the presence of common method variance by using the Harman's single factor test. In particular, we conducted an unrotated factor analysis in SPSS using the principal components approach and extracted factors based on eigen values greater than 1. The test produced an initial factor solution of nine factors which had a cumulative explanation power of 72.4% of the total variance. The first factor however, explained only 15% of the total variance observed, far below the 'above 50%' threshold criteria required by Podsakoff et al., (2003) to establish the presence of common method variance. We thus empirically conclude that our data is devoid of common method bias.

*Preliminary Analysis III: Descriptive profile of the respondents*

Before proceeding to examine the measurement model, this study examines the profile of the participants. A total of 150 responses were collected from the respondents, of which responses from male respondents represented 55.30% of all responses received while those from female respondents accounted for 44.70% of all responses.

**Table 1: Descriptive Profile of Respondents**

<b>Demographic Variables</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Means</b>	<b>SD</b>
Gender	Male	83	55.30	1.45	0.499
	Female	67	44.70		
Nationality	Cyprus	92	61.30	1.63	0.848
	Turkey	22	14.70		
	Others	36	24.40		
Level of Education	High School	9	6.00	2.67	0.790
	Bachelor's	52	34.70		
	Master's	68	45.30		
	Doctorate	21	14.00		
Age	20 - 30 years	82	54.70	1.85	1.145
	31 - 40 years	33	22.00		
	41 - 50 years	16	10.70		
	51 - 60 years	14	9.30		
	Above 60 years	5	3.30		
Employment Status	Unemployed	8	5.30	2.53	0.967
	Student	21	14.0		
	Part Time	11	7.30		
	Full Time	104	69.30		
	Retired	6	4.00		
Average Monthly Income	Below \$500	27	18.00	2.69	1.112
	\$500-\$1000	42	28.00		
	\$1000-\$1500	32	21.30		
	Above \$1500	49	32.70		

Respondents were mostly from Cyprus and other nations apart from Turkey (comprising 61.30% and 24.40% respectively). The majority of the respondents had a postgraduate degree (approximately 53.90%), aged between 20 and 40 years old (76.70%) and worked full time (69.30%). Finally, most of the respondents earned an average monthly income of between \$500 -\$1000 (28.00%) and above \$1500 (32.70%). Respondents earning within both salary-ranges collectively accounted for about 60.70% of all responses.

***Assessing the Measurement Model***

As mentioned earlier, using the two-step process of executing structural equation modelling, we conduct the initial step which entails the assessment of the measurement model. In Table 2, (please see the appendix section) we report results from the ADANCO PLS-SEM software demonstrating acceptable standardized factor loadings and significance levels as recommended by Hair et al., (2016). In Tables 3 and 4 convergent and divergent validities are established as ( $\rho_A$ ) Dijkstra-Henseler's rho, ( $\rho_C$ ), Jöreskog's rho and ( $\alpha$ ) Cronbach's alpha surpass the recommended 0.70 threshold and (AVE) average variance extracted surpass the recommended 0.50 threshold necessary for establishing convergent validity (Hair et al., 2016; Henseler, Ringle & Sinkovics, 2009; Chin, 1998); while in Table 4, discriminant (divergent) validity was established as the square root of AVE (represented in bold in the diagonal) were all higher than all inter-construct

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correlations and similarly, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT values) were all below the conservative threshold of 1 as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Henseler et al., (2015) respectively. These results lead to the conclusion that the measurement model used in this demonstrated adequate reliability, convergent and discriminant validity and is suitable to be used to examine the hypothesized structural model.

Finally, we examined the presence of collinearity and multicollinearity issues among the independent variables in our study model, by examining the data for levels of variance inflation factors (VIF). The results reveal that all observed VIF factors were below 5 and within the acceptable range required to establish the absence of multi-collinearity (Hair et al., 2017).

**Table 3: Reliability and Convergent Validity**

	$\rho_A$	$\rho_c$	$\alpha$	AVE	R <sup>2</sup>
<i>Measures</i>					
Endorser Credibility	0.9547	0.9529	0.9477	0.4559	0.9798
Brand Congruency	0.9347	0.9503	0.9344	0.7928	-
Brand Attitude	0.9388	0.9526	0.9377	0.8010	0.4730
Purchase Intention	0.8898	0.9212	0.8846	0.7461	0.3667
Negative Publicity	0.9829	0.9433	0.9368	0.6502	-

*Notes:  $\rho_A$  = Dijkstra-Henseler's rho;  $\rho_c$  = Jöreskog's rho; AVE=average variance extracted;  $\alpha$ =Cronbach's alpha; R<sup>2</sup> = coefficient of determination;*

**Table 4: Discriminant Validity**

	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Measures</i>					
1. Endorser Credibility	<b>0.4674</b>	0.4222	0.4027	0.3900	0.0819
2. Brand Congruency	0.8854	<b>0.7928</b>	0.4611	0.3225	0.0514
3. Brand Attitude	0.6425	0.7025	<b>0.8010</b>	0.3399	0.0261
4. Purchase Intention	0.6751	0.6193	0.6141	<b>0.7460</b>	0.0613
5. Negative Publicity	0.3012	0.2349	0.1617	0.2649	<b>0.6502</b>

*Notes: Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios are below the diagonal, values above the diagonal in bold are squared inter-construct correlations for Fornell–Larcker criterion. Values in bold are AVE*

**Assessing the Structural Model**

Upon establishing the validity and reliability of the measurement model, we proceed with the second step of the structural equation model analysis by examining the structural model. As illustrated in both Table 5 and Figure 1, we present results from a bootstrapping analysis using 4,999 resamples. The direct effects results indicate that endorser credibility had no significant effect on brand attitude ( $\beta = 0.207$ ;  $\rho = .1160$ ). However, brand congruency exhibited a moderately strong and positively significant effect on brand attitude ( $\beta = .503$ ;  $\rho = .000$ ), while brand attitude exhibited a strong, positive and significant effect on purchase intention ( $\beta = .568$ ;  $\rho = .000$ ). We also examined the indirect moderating effect of negative publicity on the effect of brand attitude on purchase intention. The results show that negative publicity did not significantly moderate the brand attitude – purchase intention path ( $\beta = .0408$ ;  $\rho = .4677$ ).

**Table 5:** Testing the hypothesis (Path Coefficients)

	$\beta$	SE	t-value	p-value	$f^2$	Results
<i>Direct Effects</i>						
<b>H<sub>1</sub>:</b> Endorser Credibility -> Brand Attitude	0.207	0.1316	1.5730	0.1160	0.0226	Not Supported
<b>H<sub>2</sub>:</b> Brand Congruency -> Brand Attitude	0.503	0.1223	4.1135	0.0000	0.1335	Supported
<b>H<sub>3</sub>:</b> Brand Attitude -> Purchase Intention	0.568	0.0531	10.6890	0.0000	0.4760	Supported
<i>Indirect Effect (Moderation)</i>						
<b>H<sub>4</sub>:</b> Interaction (NPxBA) -> Purchase Intention	0.048	0.0661	0.7264	0.4677	0.0035	Not Supported

*Notes:  $\beta$ =beta coefficient; SE=standard error;  $f^2$ = Cohen's effect sizes; For significance: t-value =>1.96, p-value =<0.05*

We also examine the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) to determine the total variance explained in outcome variable (endogenous) by predictor variables (exogenous). As illustrated in figure 1, endorser credibility and brand congruency collectively accounted for over 47% of the total variance observed in brand attitude, while brand attitude and negative publicity both accounted for over 36% of the total variance observed in purchase intention. Finally, we examine the magnitude of effect of all of the observed effects using Cohen's effect size ( $f^2$ ) estimation rules which stipulates that effect sizes ranging from 0.02 and above, 0.15 and above, and 0.35 and above are indicative of small, medium and large effect sizes respectively (Sarstedt et al., 2017). From Table 4 above, we observe that the effect sizes of the non-significant path: endorser credibility-brand attitude ( $f^2 = 0.226$ ) was small, while the second non-significant path: the moderating effect of negative publicity on the brand attitude-purchase intention path ( $f^2 = 0.0035$ ) fell way below the provided threshold which we interpret to be extremely small. However, for the significant paths, we observed that the effect sizes for the effect of brand congruency on brand attitude ( $f^2 = 0.1335$ ) was mediocre, while the effect of brand attitude on purchase intention ( $f^2 = 0.4760$ ) was large. Therefore, our results summarily provide support for hypotheses 2 and 3, but finds no support for hypotheses 1 and 4.

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## 5. Discussion

This study set out to examine the effect of endorser credibility and brand congruency on brand attitude and purchase intention, while controlling for the moderating effect of negative publicity. In particular, it empirically investigated four hypotheses. The findings of support for or the lack thereof for these hypotheses have been presented in the preceding section. In this section however, the findings are discussed by reproducing the hypothesis, reiterating the findings and discussing the contributions and ramification of these findings for both the extant body of scholarly literature and for practice.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *The more credible the endorser is, the more positive the attitude towards the brand will be.*

While this hypothesis appears intuitive, interestingly, this study did not uphold it as the observed effect of endorser credibility on the attitude of consumers of tennis brands was not significant. This finding contradicts the body of extant research for instance, that of Wang et al., (2017) which found that endorser credibility greatly influenced consumers' attitude towards brands. This study's finding is interesting because studies such as Wang et al., (2017) which found support for the hypotheses were carried out in developed countries and in sectors other than the sporting sector talk more of the tennis sub-sector. To the best of the author's knowledge this study is the first to examine this path within the tennis sub-sector of the North Cyprus sporting industry. Having stated that, it is important to note that this finding may not be unconnected with the fact that Turkish Cypriots and residents of North Cyprus in general, are by nature risk averse, in the sense that risk avoidance behavior is a very prominent behavioral pattern among the general populace, and as such the credibility of an endorser plays a very little role in how positive brand attitude is triggered in the consumer. Other factors such as perception of actual efficacy and quality of a product (often

spread through familial or trusted close acquaintance word of mouth) is a stronger predictor of the brand attitude of consumers to products. Taken the preceding argument into context, it becomes clear why the above hypothesis is not supported.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** *The higher the congruency between the endorser and the brand, the more positive the attitude towards the brand will be.*

This study found support for the above hypothesis as the brand congruency-brand attitude path was not only significant, but exhibited a moderately strong effect. This finding is in line with extant studies especially in the sporting industry. For instance, Chang et al., (2018) and Chang (2018) found in separate studies that celebrity athlete-brand congruence elicits a positive outlook towards brands by stimulating and influencing the “implicit and explicit” attitude or consumers toward the brand. However, to the best of our knowledge this study is the first to establish this linkage between the endorser and the brand and brand attitude within the North Cyprus tennis industry.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *The more positive attitude towards the brand is, the higher the purchase intention will be.*

Wang et al., (2017) also found that an increase in the positive attitude of consumers to a brand, positively influences their purchase intention. Similarly, within the sporting sector, Lee and Koo, (2015) find that the more positive thoughts consumers have about a brand, the higher the credibility of the brand’s being endorsed in the minds of the consumer which eventually leads to a higher consumer purchase intention of the brands product. However, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, this is the first study to confirm this linkage between brand attitude and purchase intention within the peculiar context of the tennis sport sub-industry. This is important seeing that depending on the type of sport literature had observed disparate findings across sub-industries of the sporting industry (e.g. football, basketball, volley ball, badminton etc.) Secondly, this study is the first to examine this linkage within the context of Northern Cyprus tennis industry.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** *Negative publicity about the endorser negatively moderates the relationship between attitude towards the brand and purchase intention.*

This study did not find support for the hypothesis that negative publicity about the endorser negatively moderates the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. The non-significant effect found, couple with the failure to support hypothesis one, shows that in the North Cyprus tennis product industry, consumers may be indifferent to endorser credibility and as such positive or negative publicity about endorsers have little to no effect on the attitude of tennis product consumers in North Cyprus. This further re-enforces the idea that other than endorser credibility, brand congruency with the endorser affects the attitude of tennis product consumers in North Cyprus and hence their purchase intention.

All in all, we find that within the North Cyprus tennis product industry, while endorser credibility had no significant effect on brand attitude, and negative publicity of the endorser had no moderating effect on brand attitude and purchase intention. However, where there is brand congruency between the endorser and the brand, it does lead to positive brand attitude. Similarly, where brand attitude is positive it leads to an increase in purchase intention. Although not hypothesized, using evidence from extant literature, this increase in purchase intention is likely as a result of an increase in brand credibility (not endorser credibility) conferred upon the brand by the positive attitude of consumers to the brand emerging from brand congruency with endorser.

#### *Implications for Research*

This study while providing support to extant research on the effect of brand congruency with endorser on positive attitude of consumers towards a brand; and the effect of positive attitude of consumers towards a

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brand on consumer purchase intention, this study provides some novel findings. First of all it finds no support for the effect of endorser credibility on the generation of positive brand attitude among consumers and finds no support for the moderating effect of negative publicity on the brand attitude – purchase intention path. This finding emanating from data collected from consumers of the products of tennis brands in North Cyprus, reveals that these consumers are not affected by credibility related issues but respond more to brand congruency. In other words, higher levels of congruency brands attain with endorsers leads to higher levels of brand attitude.

This finding represents a novel contribution in the sense that it is the first to be observed in the sporting literature, but most importantly, it is the first to be reported within the tennis industry in North Cyprus. It however, speaks directly to the characteristics of the consumers of tennis products in North Cyprus compared to the characteristics of similar consumers elsewhere. While these characteristics have been elaborated upon in the preceding paragraphs, future researchers can study examine these characteristic differences a bit more.

### *Implications for Practice*

For several decades organizations across the globe have invested heavily in the use of endorsers in their marketing campaigns. While evidence exists to show that these resources yield a very considerable return on investment for organizations, evidence also shows that they can cause considerable damage to the reputation of firms in situations where the endorser was found to have engaged in negative often anti-societal behavior (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995; Louie et al., 2001).

Through the current study, we however, present new findings to practitioners operating in the tennis sports product industry in Northern Cyprus and perhaps island nations in general, that consumers attitude towards a tennis brand, may not be necessarily connected to the credibility of an endorser nor is it affected by negative publicity associated with the endorser. Instead if an endorser is found to be exhibit high brand congruency with the tennis brand or its products it will certainly elicit positive attitude towards the brand from consumers. Thus, tennis brands in North Cyprus will be better served investing in avenues to ensure high levels of brand congruency with their endorser in a bid to increase positive attitudes toward the brand and hence increase purchase intention.

### *Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research*

As with all studies of this nature, this study is not bereft of limitations. First of all, the study was conducted on the tennis industry in the unique geopolitical entity called Northern Cyprus and as revealed in this study's findings, certain consumer characteristics such as risk avoidance, affected the outcome of the study. Thus, future researchers may want to replicate this study in geopolitical locations similar to North Cyprus (especially other small island nations with dependent sovereignties) to test the generalizability of the findings.

Secondly, while this study used endorser credibility, brand congruency and brand attitude as antecedents of purchase intention, other antecedents could provide deeper insight into predictors of purchase intention within the North Cyprus tennis industry. Similarly, since endorser credibility was not found to have a significant effect on brand attitude, perhaps using endorser credibility as a moderator in future studies would reveal the actual role it plays in effecting brand attitude and hence purchase intention.

Thirdly, the findings of this study points, to the possible effect of cultural characteristics of residents of North Cyprus especially on the endorser credibility-brand attitude path. Thus, it is pertinent that future researchers carry out comparative analysis using consumer data from two distinct cultural predispositions to further amplify any culture-based differences in behavior especially for the endorser credibility-brand attitude path and as well as for the moderating effect of negative publicity.

Finally, this study utilized cross-sectional data collected at one time-point. It is possible that examining the phenomena over several time points would determine if the obtained results would remain consistent over time or if it may change. Thus, we encourage future researchers to replicate the study using longitudinal data.

## 6. Conclusion

All in all, this study set out to examine the antecedents of purchase intention in the North Cyprus tennis industry. Specifically, it examined the effect of endorser credibility on brand attitude, the effect of brand congruency on brand attitude, the effect of brand attitude on purchase intention and the moderating effect of negative publicity on the brand attitude-purchase intention path. Using data from consumers of the products of tennis brands in North Cyprus, the study analyzed the data using PLS-SEM conducted via the ADANCO PLS software. It found no support for the effect of endorser credibility on brand attitude nor any support for the moderating effect of negative publicity on the brand attitude-purchase intention path. However, it did find support for the effect of brand congruency on brand attitude and for the effect of brand attitude on purchase intention. Summarily, it found that within the North Cyprus tennis industry context, consumers cared more about endorser congruency with the brand than with endorser credibility. The study further set out implications of the findings for both research and practice, while elaborating on the limitations of the study and making ample recommendations for future research.

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**APPENDIX 1 : Table 2 : Factor Loadings and T-Values**

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SECTION 2 – ENDORSER CREDIBILITY

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<i>Trustworthiness</i>	<b>Loadings (t-values)</b>
ECT1 I find the celebrity endorser dependable.	0.8640 (16.1354)
ECT2 I find the celebrity endorser honest.	0.9396 (54.9466)

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ECT3	I find the celebrity endorser reliable.	0.8934 (36.5479)
ECT4	I find the celebrity endorser sincere.	0.8920 (22.2689)
ECT5	I find the celebrity endorser trustworthy.	0.9180 (28.8468)

*Attractiveness*

ECA1	I find the celebrity endorser attractive.	0.8500 (12.0378 )
ECA2	I find the celebrity endorser classy.	0.8380 (15.1993)
ECA3	I find the celebrity endorser sexy.	0.7723 (8.9773)
ECA4	I find the celebrity endorser handsome.	0.8336 (12.5639)
ECA5	I find the celebrity endorser elegant.	0.7757 (16.8771)

*Expertise*

ECE1	I find the celebrity endorser an expert.	0.9126 (24.4398 )
ECE2	I find the celebrity endorser experienced.	0.9174 (21.3476)
ECE3	I find the celebrity endorser knowledgeable.	0.9404 (37.9567 )
ECE4	I find the celebrity endorser qualified.	0.9500 (42.4537)
ECE5	I find the celebrity endorser skilled.	0.9401 (36.1986)

*Similarity*

ECS1	The celebrity endorser thinks like me.	0.9070 (19.1988 )
ECS2	The celebrity endorser behaves like me.	0.9508 (19.8935)
ECS3	The celebrity endorser is like me.	0.9020 (13.8488)
ECS4	The celebrity endorser is similar to me.	0.9430 (17.9334 )

*Familiarity*

ECF1	I find the celebrity endorser familiar.	0.6701 (10.4560 )
ECF2	I can easily recognise the celebrity endorser.	0.8573 (14.3344 )
ECF3	I have heard of the celebrity endorser before.	0.8538 (16.7974 )

*Likeability*

ECL1	I find the celebrity endorser warm.	0.9208 (33.0564 )
ECL2	I find the celebrity endorser likeable.	0.9140 (24.7235 )
ECL3	I find the celebrity endorser friendly.	0.9263 (39.1256 )

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SECTION 3 – CONGRUENCY WITH BRAND

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CB1	It is very logical for the celebrity to endorse the brand.	0.8850 (28.8125)
CB2	It is very appropriate for the celebrity to endorse the brand.	0.9014 (37.0206 )
CB3	The brand matched with the celebrity's personality.	0.8461 (22.3207 )
CB4	The celebrity and the brand represent each other well.	0.9118 (28.0085 )

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CB5	The celebrity and the brand fit together well.	0.9060 (27.9114)
SECTION 4 – ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE BRAND		
AB1	You find the brand appealing.	0.8964 (45.4027 )
AB2	You find the brand good.	0.9255 (58.7850)
AB3	You find the brand pleasant.	0.8999 (31.1542 )
AB4	You find the brand favourable.	0.8477 (18.4332 )
AB5	You find the brand likeable.	0.9037 (45.0113 )
SECTION 5 – NEGATIVE PUBLICITY		
NP1	Celebrities who are accused of an assault are not credible.	0.7333 (5.6875 )
NP2	Celebrities who are accused of an assault are not dependable.	0.7786 (6.5558 )
NP3	Celebrities who are accused of an assault are not reliable.	0.7788 (6.5190 )
NP4	Celebrities who are accused of a drug abuse are not credible.	0.8876 (8.8656 )
NP5	Celebrities who are accused of a drug abuse are not dependable.	0.8911 (8.8198 )
NP6	Celebrities who are accused of a drug abuse are not reliable.	0.8636 7.9616 ( )
NP7	Celebrities who are accused of a sex scandal are not credible.	0.7752 (6.0284 )
NP8	Celebrities who are accused of a sex scandal are not dependable.	0.7502 (5.7366 )
NP9	Celebrities who are accused of a sex scandal are not reliable.	0.7811 (6.1409 )
SECTION 6 – PURCHASE INTENTION		
PI1	I definitely intent to buy the product endorsed by the celebrity.	0.9195 (59.4988)
PI2	I have a high purchase interest in buying the product endorsed by the celebrity.	0.9224 (64.5602)
PI3	I will definitely buy the product endorsed by the celebrity.	0.8285 (23.8689)
PI4	I will probably buy the product endorsed by the celebrity.	0.7755 (15.4267)