

Exploring the differential impact of a male celebrity endorser on brand trust in Scarlett Cosmetics across genders

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Abdul Gofur*, Hanuna shafariah

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Prodi Administrasi Bisnis, Fakultas Ilmu Administrasi, Institut Ilmu Sosial dan Manajemen STIAMI, Jakarta Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of celebrity endorsers on brand trust, considering gender as a moderating variable, with a focus on the use of celebrity endorsements for cosmetic products in Indonesia. Based on the Source Credibility Theory, this study employs a quantitative method using Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) with 115 respondents in Jakarta, who were obtained through a chain referral system technique. The results show that celebrity endorsers significantly increase brand trust, in line with previous findings that support the credibility of endorsers. A crucial finding is the role of gender as a significant moderator, where the influence of celebrity endorsers is more substantial on male consumers than female consumers in the context of women's cosmetic products. Managerial implications suggest that marketers consider gender dynamics in the selection of celebrity endorsers to optimize marketing strategies and campaign effectiveness, even for products traditionally aimed at a particular gender. This study contributes to enriching the marketing literature by providing empirical insights from the Indonesian context regarding the role of gender in moderating the influence of celebrity endorsers.

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Corresponding Author:

Abdul Gofur, Email: govhoer@gmail.com

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengaruh celebrity credibility dalam konteks celebrity endorsement terhadap pembentukan brand love serta peran pengaruh sosial dalam memoderasi hubungan ini. Metode penelitian kuantitatif digunakan dengan melibatkan survei online dan wawancara terstruktur terhadap konsumen yang memiliki pengalaman dengan merek yang melibatkan celebrity endorsement. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa celebrity credibility memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap peningkatan brand love, dan pengaruh sosial memainkan peran penting dalam memperkuat hubungan antara celebrity credibility dan brand love. Implikasi praktis penelitian ini adalah pentingnya pemilihan selebriti yang kredibel dan pemanfaatan interaksi sosial dalam strategi pemasaran untuk memperkuat ikatan emosional konsumen terhadap merek.

Kata kunci: brand love; celebrity credibility; friendship; social influence; moderation

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive digital era, consumer trust in brands (brand trust) has become a crucial factor in determining loyalty and purchasing decisions (Villagra et al., 2021). Celebrity Endorsement (CE) has emerged as an effective marketing strategy for building a positive image and fostering consumer trust (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). However, the impact of CE on brand trust is still debated globally, with some studies showing a significant effect (Suriyadi, 2021; Kristian et al., 2021), while others found a minimal effect (Lou & Yuan, 2019) and no effect (Sumarni et al., 2024; Aisyah, 2023). This phenomenon highlights the need for further exploration, particularly by considering moderating variables such as gender, which can help clarify the mechanism of this relationship in diverse contexts.

In Indonesia, the influencer marketing and celebrity endorsement industries are experiencing rapid growth, driven by high social media penetration and shifts in consumer behavior (Erwin et al., 2023). However, research on the effectiveness of CE in building brand trust remains limited, particularly in terms of gender differences. Indonesia has unique cultural and social characteristics, where the perceptions of male and female consumers towards CE can differ significantly (Pratiwi & Haryanto, 2022). Thus, this study is important for providing relevant empirical insights to business actors and academics in Indonesia.

The Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) serves as the primary foundation for understanding the relationship between source credibility (CE) and brand trust. This theory posits that the credibility of the source influences how audiences accept messages, ultimately shaping their trust (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Despite its widespread application, the impact of CE on brand trust has yielded inconsistent results, particularly when considering gender as a factor (Edwards & La Ferle, 2009; Laura, 2020; Pradhan et al., 2017). Therefore, this study aims to reevaluate the theory by including gender as a moderating variable to elucidate the mechanisms underlying this relationship.

Several previous studies have demonstrated a positive effect of CE on brand trust (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Suriyadi, 2021; Kristian et al., 2021), while other research has indicated no significant relationship (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sumarni et al., 2024). This contradiction highlights the need for further investigation into the factors that may moderate this relationship, such as gender (Tor-Kadioglu & Bozyigit, 2025; Samarasinghe, 2018). Additionally, most existing studies have been conducted in Western countries, which limits the generalizability of the findings to developing nations like Indonesia (Erwin et al., 2023).

Empirical studies have often concentrated on celebrities or micro-influencers without thoroughly examining gender differences (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Moreover, most of this research has been conducted within the fashion and cosmetics industries (Pratiwi & Haryanto, 2022), which limits its representativeness across other sectors. Previous studies have predominantly focused on respondents from the fashion area, such as Erigo (Bisma & Hadi, 2024), which may not accurately reflect overall consumer behavior. Therefore, this study will include samples from a different sector, specifically the cosmetics industry, while incorporating gender considerations.

Research by Sokolova and Kefi (2020) and Leite and Baptista (2022) suggests that influencers' intimate self-disclosure (ISD) promotes parasocial relationships and enhances source credibility, both of which contribute to establishing brand trust. Notably, parasocial relationships have a more significant influence on purchase intent than source credibility alone. These findings underscore the importance of selecting influencers who can forge authentic emotional connections while maintaining professionalism for successful endorsement strategies. However, a study by Djafarova & Matson (2021) revealed that the audience's emotional involvement is more influential than just the credibility of the celebrity endorser. This suggests that the mechanisms behind celebrity endorsement influence may be more complex than previously thought and warrant a more comprehensive examination.

Recent studies have also begun to explore the role of gender in moderating the relationship between celebrity endorsement (CE) and brand trust. For instance, Samarasinghe (2018) found that gender differences affect how source characteristics, such as expertise, trustworthiness, likability, and similarity, influence consumer purchase intention in celebrity endorsements, while source familiarity remains unaffected by gender. This suggests that gender-specific product campaigns should strategically adapt these source characteristics. Additionally, a study by Klaus and Bailey (2008) demonstrated that both celebrity gender and consumer gender significantly impact reactions to celebrity endorsements, with women showing distinct responses to female endorsers, providing partial support for gender interaction effects in endorsement effectiveness.

However, similar studies in Indonesia remain limited (Erwin et al., 2023), making it difficult to generalize these findings. Therefore, this study will examine gender differences within the Indonesian context to offer more relevant scientific contributions. This study aims to analyze the effect of celebrity endorsement on brand trust while considering gender as a moderating variable. Theoretically, it will test the validity of Source Credibility Theory in a different context, thus enriching the marketing literature with empirical findings from Indonesia. Practically, the results will enable marketers to optimize celebrity endorsement selection strategies based on gender segmentation, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory, developed by Hovland and Weiss (1951), posits that the credibility of the message source—encompassing expertise and trustworthiness—has a substantial impact on the audience's acceptance of the message (Ohanian, 1990). In the context of celebrity endorsements (CE), this theory explains that consumers tend to trust a brand more if the CE is considered credible, either because of competence in their field (for example, a celebrity relevant to the product) or because of their integrity (such as transparency in endorsements) (Lafferty et al., 2002). This CE credibility then becomes the basis for forming brand trust, where consumers associate the reliability of the brand with the figure that represents it (Spry et al., 2011).

The application of this theory in research on the influence of CE on gender-moderated brand trust is grounded in the finding that perceptions of source credibility can differ between

men and women (Till & Busler, 2000). For example, research by Amos et al. (2008) shows that women tend to be more sensitive to the trustworthiness dimension of CE, while men are more influenced by expertise. This indicates that gender can strengthen or weaken the relationship between CE and brand trust, depending on the alignment of CE characteristics with audience gender expectations (Jin & Phua, 2014). Thus, Source Credibility theory not only explains the basic mechanism of CE influence but also provides a framework for analyzing the role of gender as a moderator in the relationship.

The Influence of Celebrity Endorsers on Customer Trust in Brands

The Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) posits that the effectiveness of persuasive messages largely depends on the source's credibility, which encompasses both expertise and trustworthiness. In the realm of celebrity endorsements, this theory posits that public figures deemed credible—either due to their expertise in a specific area or their integrity—can enhance brand trust (Ohanian, 1990). Numerous studies support this relationship; for instance, Erdogan (1999) found that endorsers with high credibility significantly boost consumer trust in brands. Similarly, Spry et al. (2011) demonstrated that celebrity endorsers perceived as experts and trustworthy can strengthen brand equity by enhancing brand trust.

However, despite the considerable support for the positive influence of celebrity endorsers on brand trust, results are not always consistent. For example, research by Pornpitakpan (2004) revealed that endorser credibility does not always exert a significant effect when the audience is not highly engaged with the product. Additionally, factors such as the match-up between the endorser and the brand (Till & Busler, 2000), overexposure of the endorser (Amos et al., 2008), and cultural differences (Jin & Phua, 2014) may moderate this relationship. These inconsistencies suggest that, while Source Credibility Theory provides a robust theoretical framework, further research is needed to comprehend the underlying mechanisms at play across various contexts. This includes examining the influence of social media platforms (Lou & Yuan, 2019) and the demographic characteristics of the audience (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that celebrity endorsers who are viewed as credible—in terms of both expertise and trustworthiness—will positively influence brand trust.

H1: Celebrity endorsers influence consumer trust building in brands.

Gender Role

According to the Source Credibility Theory proposed by Hovland and Weiss (1951), our judgment of a messenger is closely tied to the level of credibility we attribute to them. This trust has a significant influence on our perception of the message. However, the importance of credibility can vary based on the recipient's characteristics, including gender (Amos et al., 2008). Research indicates that men and women process information from celebrity endorsements differently. These differences can stem from psychological factors as well as societal upbringing and interactions (Jin & Phua, 2014). For instance, women tend to pay more attention to and trust individuals they consider honest and reliable, valuing relationships and emotional connections (Till & Busler, 2000). In contrast, men are often more influenced by the perceived expertise and authority of the person in the advertisement (Spry et al., 2011). This suggests that gender can significantly influence how a celebrity in an advertisement affects our trust in a brand.

While several studies have investigated the role of gender in celebrity endorsements, the findings remain mixed. For example, research by Lafferty et al. (2002) indicates that women are more likely to build brand trust through female endorsers due to gender congruence. In contrast, men do not show a significant preference. Conversely, a recent study by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) suggests that, in the digital age, gender roles are becoming increasingly complex due to

factors like androgynous celebrity personalities and gender fluidity on social media. Additionally, most previous studies have been conducted in Western contexts (Erdogan, 1999; Pornpitakpan, 2004), limiting the applicability of their findings to different cultural settings, such as Indonesia (Erwin et al., 2023). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that gender will moderate the influence of celebrity endorsers on brand trust, with women being more influenced by the trustworthiness aspect and men by perceived expertise.

H2: The Role of Gender in Moderating the Influence of Celebrity Endorsers on Brand Trust

Methods

Population and sampling procedure

The population targeted in this study consisted of consumers who had purchased Scarlet Whitening products in communities associated with three institutions in Jakarta. Sampling was conducted using a chain referral technique, involving nine representatives from the three institutions. These representatives distributed the questionnaire to their colleagues, friends, and acquaintances who had also purchased Scarlet Whitening products. Data collection took place over one month, resulting in 127 completed questionnaires. After filtering for completeness, 115 responses were deemed usable. Among the 115 respondents, 32 were male, while 83 were female. The average age of the respondents was between 20 and 27 years, with a majority of 76 individuals falling within that age range. The remaining respondents were either below the age of 20 or above 27.

Measurement

In this study, the Celebrity Endorsement variable was assessed using five items from Sharma's (2016) research. This scale utilizes a five-point Likert scale, measuring the level of agreement from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Additionally, the Brand Trust variable was evaluated using a four-item scale based on the work of Aurier and N'goala (2010), also employing a five-point Likert scale in the questionnaire.

Data analysis procedures

This study examines the existence of gender moderation, employing Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) with the aid of SPSS 26 to analyze the data.

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics

Based on Table 1, several key observations can be made regarding the variables under study. The average score for the Celebrity Endorser variable is 4.03, with a standard deviation of 0.81, indicating a moderate variation in respondents' perceptions of celebrity endorsements. The Gender variable shows an average of 1.72 and a standard deviation of 0.45. Since Gender is typically coded as a dummy variable (e.g., 1 for male and 2 for female, or vice versa), this average reflects the distribution of respondents by Gender within the sample. Lastly, the Trust variable has a high average score of 4.31, with a standard deviation of 0.98, suggesting that respondents generally have a high level of trust in the brand, with moderate variation in their responses.

Table 2.

Mean, SD, and Correlation

Variabel	mean	Std D	Celebrity endorser	Gender
Celebrity endorser (CE)	4.03	.81		
Gender	1.72	.45	-.20*	
Trust	4.31	.98	.79**	-.08

Source: Author(s)

The correlation matrix in Table 2 shows the relationship between variables. There is a weak but significant negative correlation between Celebrity Endorser and Gender ($r = -.20$, $p < 0.05$), which implies an inverse relationship between perceptions of celebrity endorsers and respondents' gender category. A strong and significant positive correlation is found between Celebrity Endorsers and Trust ($r = .79$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the more positively perceived celebrity endorsers are, the higher the level of trust in the brand. Meanwhile, the correlation between Gender and Trust is very weak and insignificant ($r = -.08$), indicating that there is no strong linear relationship between respondents' gender and level of trust in the brand in this sample. Overall, this table provides a descriptive overview of the study variables and the correlational relationships between them, with significant findings on the relationship between celebrity endorsers and brand trust.

Hypothesis testing

Table 3 displays the results of three stepwise regression models, each of which adds a new variable to assess its impact on the dependent variable. In Model 1, only gender is included. The results indicate that gender has an insignificant adverse effect on the dependent variable ($\beta = -0.081$, $t = -0.868$). This result is further supported by the t-value, which is well below the conventional threshold for significance (e.g., $t > 1.96$ for a 5% significance level). Additionally, the negative Adjusted R^2 value of -0.002 suggests that this model explains almost no variation in the data. With an insignificant F-statistic of 0.754 , we can conclude that gender alone does not have significant predictive power in this context.

Table 2.

MRA test result

Variabel	Model 1 β	Model 1 t-value	Model 2 β	Model 2 t-value	Model 3 β	Model 3 t-value
Gender	-.081	-.868	.079	1.357	.610*	2.243
Celebrity endorser (CE)			.807	13.791**	1.287**	5.204
CE x Gender					-.651*	-1.997
Adj R^2	-.002		.625		.645	
F	.754		96.108**		67.109**	

Source: Author(s)

Model 2 introduces the celebrity endorser variable, which significantly impacts the regression results. The celebrity endorser variable demonstrates a highly significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.807$, $t = 13.791$), supporting the first hypothesis (H1) that celebrity endorsers have a positive effect on the dependent variable. This relationship's strength is reflected in the increase in Adjusted R^2 to 0.625 , indicating that 62.5% of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by the celebrity endorser. The high and significant F-statistic (96.108) confirms that this model is an improvement over Model 1. However, in this model, gender shows a small but insignificant

positive effect ($\beta = 0.079$, $t = 1.357$), which may be attributed to interaction or confounding effects with the celebrity endorser.

Model 3 introduces the interaction between gender and celebrity endorser (CE \times Gender), providing deeper insight into how these variables influence each other. The celebrity endorser remains significant with a larger coefficient ($\beta = 1.287$, $t = 5.204$), while the interaction between gender and celebrity endorser has a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.651^*$, $t = -1.997$). This supports the second hypothesis (H2) that the effect of celebrity endorsers varies depending on gender. The adjusted R^2 increases slightly to 0.645, suggesting that this interaction enhances the model's explanatory power, although it is not a significant increase. The F-statistic remains high (67.109), indicating that the model is significant overall.

These results affirm the second hypothesis (H2) that the effect of celebrity endorsers differs between men and women. The negative interaction coefficient indicates that the influence of celebrity endorsers is stronger for men than for women. In other words, while celebrity endorsers are generally effective, their impact is more pronounced among men, whereas women tend to experience a lower effect. The Adjusted R^2 , which increased to 0.645, shows that this interaction contributes to explaining the variation in the data, albeit to a modest extent.

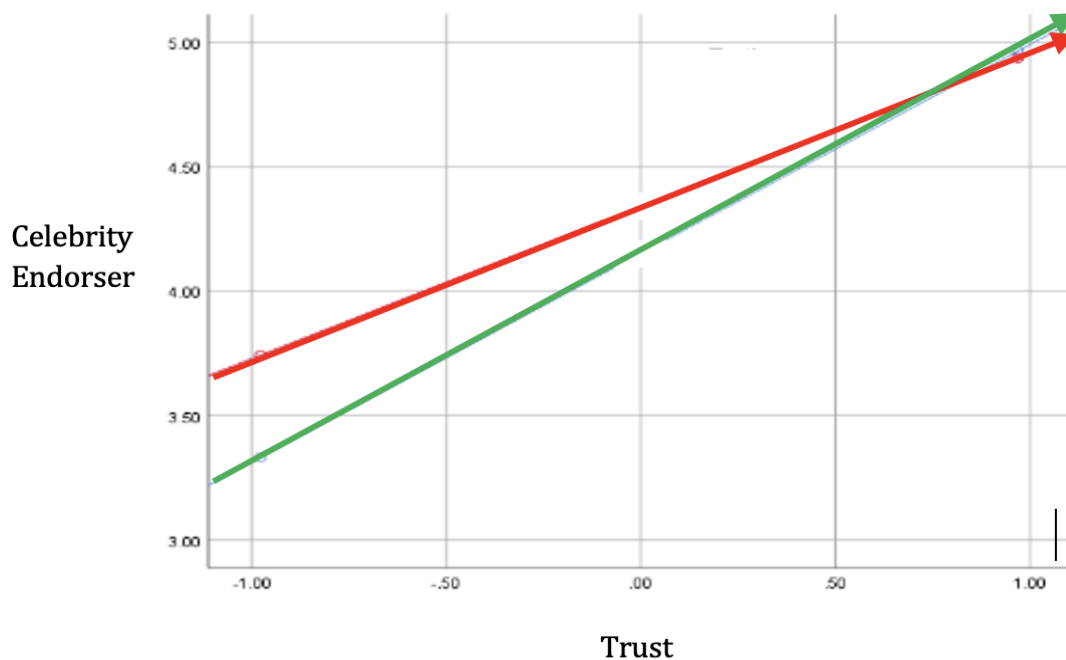


Figure 1.

Moderation Graph

Note: Green line for Women, Red line for Men

Source: Author

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that the use of Korean celebrity endorsers has a significant influence on consumer trust in the Scarlett Whitening cosmetic brand. This finding aligns with the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), which states that the credibility of the message source—including expertise and trustworthiness—plays a crucial role in shaping the audience's perception and beliefs about the information presented. In this study, the popularity and positive image of a celebrity as a renowned actor can be associated with expertise in selecting

quality products and a trustworthy reputation, thereby enhancing consumer confidence in the claims and quality of Scarlett Whitening products.

Several previous studies support the positive impact of celebrity endorsers on brand trust. For instance, research by Firman et al. (2021) found that the attractiveness and credibility of celebrities significantly increased consumer trust in the products or services they promoted in the international market. Similarly, Herjanto et al. (2020) demonstrated that celebrity endorsements have a positive and significant impact on brand trust and consumers' purchase intentions in the Indonesian cosmetics industry. Furthermore, Qiu et al. (2021) revealed that a celebrity's trustworthiness significantly enhances consumer trust within the tourism sector, particularly on Online Travel Agency (OTA) platforms. The trust derived from endorsers' trustworthiness further drives consumer engagement through three dimensions: ability, benevolence, and integrity. These findings extend the celebrity credibility theory by demonstrating that trustworthiness not only fosters direct trust but also indirectly enhances consumer engagement.

In a specific context regarding the influence of gender on endorsements, research by Suwanmatcha et al. (2025) found that the popularity and positive image of male celebrity endorsers significantly affect female consumers' trust in beauty products, particularly in Thailand. This may be attributed to consumers viewing male endorsers as objective and unbiased when recommending women's beauty products. Additionally, research by Hugosson et al. (2014) indicates that the gender of both the endorser and the advertised product notably influences consumers' perceptions of celebrity endorsers. Female consumers tend to prioritize the trustworthiness and expertise of the endorser, especially for products traditionally associated with their gender. In contrast, male consumers are more influenced by the attractiveness of the endorser. Furthermore, the match-up hypothesis posits that a gender match between the endorser and the product enhances brand trust, with female endorsers being perceived as more credible for feminine products and male endorsers being viewed similarly for masculine products.

The results of this study reinforce the idea that celebrity endorsement—particularly by selecting a figure with strong credibility and appeal—is an effective marketing strategy for building and increasing consumer trust in the Scarlett Whitening cosmetic brand. This finding suggests that companies must carefully evaluate the credibility, image, and appropriateness of celebrity endorsers for the brand and its target market to maximize the positive impact on consumer trust. An interesting finding from this study is the significant role of gender as a moderating variable in the relationship between celebrity endorsers and consumer trust in the Scarlett Whitening brand. Specifically, the results indicate that the positive impact of celebrity endorsement on brand trust is statistically more substantial among male consumers than among female consumers. This suggests that male celebrity endorsers are more effective in building brand trust among male consumers for women's cosmetic products, due to their perceived attractiveness and credibility.

This phenomenon can be explained through psychological and socio-cultural lenses that influence how men and women process endorsement information, as noted by Jin and Phua (2014). Their research highlights fundamental differences in how the two genders evaluate information sources and form perceptions of brands. According to the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), while source credibility is generally important, the components of expertise and trustworthiness may carry different weights for men and women. The finding that men are more positively affected suggests that they may perceive male celebrities as having a higher level of expertise or objectivity when recommending beauty products for women. This perception might stem from the view that recommendations from the same gender (in this case,

male endorsers) serve as unbiased indicators of quality, grounded in more rational considerations or observations of practical outcomes. These results align with the findings of Spry et al. (2011), which state that men tend to be more focused on competence and status. In this context, the popularity and success of a male celebrity as an actor may resonate more with these values among male consumers, thereby increasing their trust in the brands associated with him.

In contrast, women typically prioritize trustworthiness and relationship values when evaluating endorsers, as noted by Till and Busler (2000). While male celebrities may be perceived as highly trustworthy by female consumers, factors such as identification with female endorsers and more compelling emotional narratives often play a more significant role in establishing brand trust among them. A study by Yu (2024) on the impact of gender on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements in the fashion industry also revealed that consumer responses to endorsers can vary based on the alignment of the endorser's gender with the product's gender and the consumer's gender. Although cosmetics are traditionally associated with women, the presence of a credible and popular male endorser can create a unique novelty effect for male consumers, increasing their curiosity and trust in the quality of products recommended by figures they admire.

This finding suggests that marketers should carefully consider gender dynamics in their celebrity endorsement strategies. While Scarlett Whitening primarily targets women, the appeal of male celebrities has proven effective in building trust among male consumers. This suggests a secondary market or strong word-of-mouth influence from male consumers to their social circles, which may include women. Further research is needed to understand better the psychological and social mechanisms behind these differences in gender influence. Additionally, a study by Suwanmatcha et al. (2025) found a significant impact of male celebrity endorsers on female consumer trust in the Thai market, which provides an intriguing perspective. However, the study indicated an even greater effect on male consumers. This raises the speculation that different psychological mechanisms may be at play. Male consumers might perceive endorsements from successful male figures as a form of validation or status signal related to the recommended product, even when it is traditionally aimed at women.

Limitations

This study offers valuable insights, but it has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the population and sampling method, which focused on communities within three institutions in Jakarta using a chain referral system technique, may limit the generalizability of the findings. With a sample size of only 115 respondents, the results may not accurately represent all consumers of Scarlett Whitening products in Indonesia. Therefore, they cannot be widely generalized. Second, the focus on a male celebrity endorser and a single cosmetic brand (Scarlett Whitening) means that the findings may not be applicable to other types of endorsers, such as micro-influencers or female celebrities, nor product categories outside the cosmetics industry.

Third, while gender is identified as a moderating variable, the study does not qualitatively explore the psychological or socio-cultural reasons behind the differences in the influence of gender. The reasoning behind why men may be more influenced by male endorsers for women's products remains speculative and requires further validation through qualitative research. Finally, the study did not explicitly consider other external factors that could influence the relationship between celebrity endorsement and brand trust, such as endorser-brand alignment, endorser overexposure, or broader cultural differences that may moderate this relationship.

Conclusion

This study confirmed that using celebrity endorsers significantly boosts consumer trust in a brand. Additionally, it revealed that gender plays a significant moderating role in this relationship. The analysis showed that the positive impact of celebrity endorsement on brand trust was notably more substantial among male consumers than among female consumers.

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