A Study on the Impact of Different Types of Negative Public Opinion of Celebrity Endorsers on Brand Favorability

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ABSTRACT

In the context of normalized brand marketing, celebrity endorsements have become a core strategy for companies to enhance brand awareness and market competitiveness. However, brand trust crises and economic losses caused by negative public opinion about spokespersons have become increasingly prominent. Based on the theories of cognitive dissonance and source credibility, and by combining relevant domestic and international research findings, this paper uses questionnaire and case study methods to systematically explore the impact mechanisms of different types of celebrity negative public opinion on brand favorability and to verify the mediating role of brand trust between negative public opinion and consumer purchase intentions. The study finds that: the damage of illegal-related negative public opinion on brand favorability is significantly greater than that of morality-related negative public opinion; the negative impact of severe negative public opinion is sustained, whereas the impact of moderate negative public opinion is relatively limited; negative public opinion about female endorsers has a stronger brand spillover effect, and negative public opinion concerning the collapse of image for popular celebrities is most fatal to brands that rely on emotional value connections; brand trust partially mediates the relationship between negative public opinion and purchase intention, and timely and appropriate crisis response strategies can effectively reduce losses. The research findings of this paper not only enrich empirical studies in the fields of celebrity endorsement effects and consumer behavior but also provide targeted decision-making recommendations for brands in endorser selection, risk prediction, and crisis response.

Keywords: celebrity endorsements; types of negative public opinion; brand favorability; brand trust; purchase intention

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

With the vigorous development of the market economy and the diversification of media communication, celebrity endorsements have become an important marketing tool for brands to break through homogeneous competition and quickly reach target consumer groups. Celebrities can quickly accumulate exposure for brands, strengthen brand image recognition, and thereby promote product sales through their own fame, reputation, and fan influence. However, in recent years, negative public opinion incidents involving celebrities have occurred frequently, covering multiple dimensions such as illegal activities, moral shortcomings in private life, improper behavior, and insufficient professional ability, which have brought serious impacts to cooperating brands. For example, the luxury brand Bulgari suffered direct economic losses of over 1 billion yuan due to multiple endorsers being involved in consecutive negative incidents and was humorously nicknamed by consumers as the ‘endorsement catastrophe machine’; the brand Guyu saw its sales drop by 63% within 72 hours and refund volume account for 64% of the yearly total due to endorser Zhang Yuqi’s surrogacy controversy; Prada experienced a 16% drop in stock price and a market value evaporation of over 800 million euros within three days due to Kim Soo-hyun’s controversy over underage romance. These cases fully demonstrate that negative public opinion about celebrities has become a significant risk that cannot be ignored in brand management. It can not only directly damage brand reputation but also trigger consumer boycotts, resulting in a substantial decline in brand favorability and market competitiveness. Against this background, systematically exploring the differences in the impact of different types of celebrity negative public opinion on brand favorability and their mechanisms has important practical urgency and theoretical value.

1.2 Significance of the study

1.2.1 Theoretical significance

The theoretical contributions of this paper are mainly reflected in three aspects: first, it systematically categorizes negative celebrity publicity and conducts an in-depth analysis of the differential impact of different types of negative publicity on brand favorability, addressing the shortcomings of existing research regarding the insufficiently detailed classification of negative publicity and the lack of in-depth exploration of its impact mechanisms; second, it verifies the applicability of cognitive dissonance theory and source credibility theory in the context of domestic celebrity endorsements, revealing the internal logic by which negative publicity affects brand favorability through disrupting the consumer-celebrity-brand equilibrium; third, by introducing brand trust as a mediating variable, it constructs a theoretical framework of ‘negative publicity type—brand trust—brand favorability—purchase intention,’ enriching research on the impact pathways of celebrity endorsements and providing new empirical evidence for the field of consumer behavior.

1.2.2 Practical significance

The research conclusions of this study can provide practical guidance for brand marketing practices: First, they offer a basis for selecting brand ambassadors, helping brands avoid high-risk types of endorsers and choose cooperation partners with high image fit and stable moral qualities according to their own positioning and target audience characteristics; second, they provide a reference for establishing a risk prediction mechanism, helping brands identify the risk levels of different types of negative public opinion and proactively develop targeted preventive measures; third, they offer strategic support for brand crisis response, guiding brands to adopt appropriate responses according to the type and severity of negative public opinion, minimizing the damage to brand favorability, and balancing the positive value of image fit with the potential risks of negative public opinion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Current Status of Research Abroad

Foreign research on celebrity endorsements started relatively early and has formed relatively rich theoretical results. Regarding the effect of celebrity endorsements, the study ‘The Effects of Multiple Product Endorsements by Celebrities on Consumers’ Attitudes and Intentions’ shows that as the number of products endorsed by a celebrity increases, consumers’ evaluations of the celebrity’s credibility and likability significantly decrease, and this negative effect is particularly pronounced when the number of endorsed products reaches four, but it has no significant impact on brand attitude and purchase intention. In the field of consumer behavior research, ‘Consumer Behavior Research: A Synthesis of the Recent Literature’ points out that internal factors account for 43% of consumer behavior, the purchasing process accounts for 26%, and external factors account for 23%, among which perception, attitude, and brand awareness/loyalty are current hot topics, highlighting the research trend of ‘relationship orientation’ replacing ‘profit orientation.’ Regarding the impact of negative public opinion, foreign scholars mainly base their studies on a Western cultural background, defining the severity of negative public opinion based on ‘whether it harms others,’ and believe that negative events for endorsers with high responsibility have a more significant negative impact on the brand, suggesting that brands should adopt a strategy of abandoning the endorser as a response.

2.2 Current Status of Domestic Research

According to the study *“Research on the Impact of Negative News About Endorsing Celebrities on the Value of Listed Companies — An Analysis Based on 21 Typical Cases”*, it was found that all types of negative public opinion will cause a significant decline in brand value. On the day negative news is disclosed, the stock price of the listed company falls immediately, the cumulative abnormal returns continue to decline and reach the lowest point on the 7th day, and then gradually recover. The negative spillover effect has short-term persistence.

The damage from illegal negative public opinion is far greater than that from immoral negative public opinion: Illegal negative public opinion (violating laws and regulations, such as tax evasion or legal issues) consistently causes significant declines in stock prices across all window periods, with cumulative abnormal returns of -0.08484 in the [-10,10] window period, significant at the 5% level; whereas immoral negative public opinion (violating moral expectations but not the law, such as personal misconduct) only has a significant impact in the short-term window periods, with no significant effect in the long-term window periods, and the overall decline is much less than that of illegal cases.

The negative public opinion of female celebrities has a more significant impact on brands: After negative news about female endorsers is disclosed, the cumulative average abnormal returns of listed companies drop more, significant at the 5% level in the [-1,1] window period and at the 1% level in the [-10,10] window period; although negative news about male celebrities also has an impact, its significance and decline are lower in all window periods compared to female celebrities, reflecting the market's higher moral expectations for female celebrities and stronger brand spillover effects from negative public opinion.

Overall, negative public opinion directly triggers the capital market's negative expectations for listed companies through the transfer of consumer negative emotions to brands. The decline in stock prices directly reflects the decrease in brand favorability and trust, and the extent of the impact is strongly correlated with the type of negative opinion and the celebrity's gender. [4]

In *"Analysis of the Corporate Value Effect of Celebrity Endorsements — Taking Kris Wu's Endorsement of Vatti Corporation as an Example"* negative public opinion can trigger a severe short-term negative reaction in the capital market, and the long-term negative impact persists: after the endorser is exposed for illegal or unethical behavior, it rapidly attracts high investor attention, directly leading to a drop in the company's stock price and a continuous decline in BHAR (Buy-and-Hold Abnormal Returns); due to the negative incident involving Kris Wu, Vatti's BHAR fell to -77%, and even after terminating the endorsement, the decline in stock price was not reversed, reflecting a clear negative expectation of the brand in the capital market. Negative public opinion directly weakens the market competitiveness of the brand's products, harming both revenue and profit: after the endorser's scandal is exposed, consumers' negative associations with the brand directly lead to a significant decrease in the company's operating income, while the company also needs to replace related materials and implement emergency public relations, increasing the sales expense ratio. This dual effect lowers the company's market pricing power (Lerner Index PCM); after Kris Wu's negative incident, Vatti's single-quarter EVA dropped 93.95% sequentially, and later even turned negative, significantly reducing the brand's market competitiveness. The impact of negative public opinion is transmissive, breaking the balance among consumers, endorsers, and the brand: negative incidents related to the endorser turn consumers' positive attitudes toward them into negative ones, thereby breaking the balance among the three; consumers' trust and favorability toward the brand decline simultaneously. This negative sentiment transfer directly affects purchasing decisions, and without timely and effective public relations from the brand, consumers' negative perceptions continue to strengthen. Negative public opinion from high-traffic celebrities is even more damaging to brands: the commercial value of celebrities like Kris Wu largely relies on their public persona and fan sentiment. A negative event leading to the collapse of their persona triggers a trust crisis among fans, who are one of the core consumer groups of the brand. Their loss directly reduces the brand's customer base, while the general public may question the brand's product selection and endorsement review capabilities, further harming brand image and favorability. The speed and manner of a brand's response directly affect the degree of harm caused by negative public opinion: if the brand terminates the endorsement promptly and cuts ties quickly after the endorser's negative exposure, it can reduce consumers' negative associations to some extent. Conversely, delayed or ambiguous responses bind the brand to the negative public opinion, causing more severe damage to favorability. [5]

In *"Celebrity endorsements frequently backfire; is it time for luxury brands' traffic fantasies to wake up?"*, negative public opinion surrounding celebrity influencers has become a core risk point for luxury brands: celebrities like Zheng Shuang, Kris Wu, and a certain pianist have consecutively been exposed for illegal or unethical behavior, directly causing the luxury brands they endorse to urgently sever ties and delete related endorsement traces. Brands spend huge endorsement fees but find themselves embroiled in public relations crises, turning titles like spokesperson or brand ambassador into 'minefields.' Luxury brands' heavy reliance on celebrity influencers amplifies the damage of negative public opinion: in order to capture the young consumer market, luxury brands have abandoned their previous strategy of 'careful selection and progressive collaboration,' employing large numbers of celebrities, even granting brand ambassador or close friend titles without preparation. This lowers collaboration thresholds and speeds up processes, but without proper risk management, leaving brands with no buffer when negative incidents occur, quickly damaging goodwill and brand image.

Negative public opinion results in a dual reputation loss for luxury brands: on one hand, celebrity controversies can make the brand subject to public scrutiny for 'poor selection,' weakening the luxury brand's inherent high-end and meticulous image. On the other hand, some consumers, due to dislike for the celebrity involved, directly take it out on the brand and shift to competitor products, resulting in actual customer loss rather than merely a wave of opinions. Luxury brands' strategy of 'title refinement' broadens the reach of negative public opinion: to bind celebrities, brands create multiple tiers of titles, such as spokesperson, ambassador, and close friend, even assigning exclusive titles based on product category or region (e.g., Dior Makeup Ambassador, Millennial Ambassador). This significantly increases the number of collaborating celebrities, also raising the likelihood of negative incidents and expanding the public opinion risk the brand faces. Negative celebrity controversies also impact the brand's strategy to attract younger consumers: the core purpose of employing celebrity influencers is to reach young consumers and cultivate a youthful image. However, when a celebrity's persona collapses, the brand's youth-focused marketing appears 'short-sighted,' potentially causing consumers to question the brand's values and deviating from the original marketing intent. [2]

In *"Leehom Wang's public image 'backfires'; car companies frequently hit pitfalls when hiring celebrities as endorsers"*, negative public opinion on celebrity endorsements in car companies spreads quickly, putting significant pressure on brand damage control: Most negative incidents involving endorsers occur suddenly, and car companies often tie celebrity endorsements to new product launches. Negative publicity can directly affect the marketing pace of new products. For example, Infiniti ended its endorsement with Wang Leehom in just over 30 hours due to negative publicity, right during the critical pre-sale period of the Infiniti QX60, forcing the brand to act swiftly to contain the damage. Luxury car companies are particularly prone to negative endorsement incidents, and intensified industry competition amplifies the risk: To cater to younger consumers, luxury car companies have broken away from the previous strategy of rarely using celebrity endorsements, signing high-traffic celebrities or well-known artists. However, with fierce competition in the luxury car market, new product launches require strong traffic and reputation. Negative publicity of an endorser can put a brand at a disadvantage against competitors, as seen when Porsche terminated its contract with Kris Wu due to negative publicity, or Rolls-Royce removed videos related to internet celebrity endorsements amid controversy. Negative publicity from endorsements has lasting impacts on car companies and can trigger a chain of losses: Celebrity-related negative incidents not only force car companies to replace advertising materials and halt marketing activities, leading to direct marketing cost losses, but also place brands in public opinion embarrassment, weakening consumer goodwill. Some companies may even pursue compensation due to negative publicity, causing secondary public discussions, further affecting brand image. The investment and returns of celebrity endorsements in car companies are mismatched, and negative publicity can completely nullify marketing value: Celebrity endorsements can only provide short-term traffic and exposure and cannot directly boost sales for a high-ticket item like cars, as consumers prioritize product quality, brand strength, and after-sales service. Once negative publicity arises, the cost of endorsements and marketing investments is lost entirely, with no marketing conversion achieved. Choosing endorsers that do not align with the brand or product positioning can worsen the damage from negative publicity: If the celebrity's image does not match the brand tone or product positioning, not only will routine endorsement be ineffective, but when negative incidents occur, consumers will question the brand's aesthetic judgment and selection ability, as seen when Yang Li's endorsement for Mercedes-Benz caused public dissatisfaction, further amplifying the brand's public relations crisis.[3]

In *"Research on the Effectiveness of Brand Crisis Response Strategies: A Localized Validation Based on Endorser Negative News Crisis Management"*, the severity of negative public opinion determines the extent of damage to brand favorability: In localized contexts, news labeled as highly negative, such as 'drug use' and 'driving without a license,' significantly reduces consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intentions; moderately negative news, such as 'street racing,' has minimal impact on brand favorability and shows no significant difference compared to a situation with no negative news. There are cultural differences between the East and West in defining the severity of negative public opinion: In the West, the core criterion is 'whether it harms others' to determine negativity, while in China, influenced by collectivist culture, there is more concern with the negative demonstration effect of events on social values. For example, 'driving without a license' is classified as moderately negative in the West but is judged as highly negative in a local context. Under moderately negative public opinion, brands have a wide range of response strategies: When a spokesperson is involved in moderately negative events, the three strategies 'support the spokesperson,' 'distinguish from the issue,' and 'apologize to the public' have no significant difference in impact on brand attitude and purchase intention. Brands can choose to support the spokesperson, maintaining the cooperation while not offending fans. Under highly negative public opinion, 'apologizing to the public' is the optimal response strategy: At this time, 'supporting the spokesperson' and 'distinguishing from the issue' show no significant recovery effect on brand favorability, while actively apologizing to the public significantly enhances consumers' trust, recognition, and purchase intention toward the brand, making it the best way to minimize losses. The core of brand response lies in aligning with consumers' cognitive logic: In cases of high negativity, consumers value the brand's responsibility, and an apology strategy satisfies this psychological need; in cases of moderate negativity, consumers are more tolerant of a celebrity's mistakes, and the brand need not overreact, as doing too much could unintentionally draw more attention. [6]

In *"Kris Wu's 'public image' collapses; being a 'top-tier spokesperson' is a double-edged sword"*, the scope of negative public opinion surrounding top-tier celebrities is extremely wide, causing collective damage to multiple industry brands: As a top-tier spokesperson across fast-moving consumer goods, beauty, luxury, automotive, and digital sectors, after Kris

Wu's legal and ethical violations were exposed, 18 partnered brands urgently terminated contracts within 48 hours. These brands included Han Shu, Vatti, Porsche, Louis Vuitton, among others, spanning various tiers, illustrating that the negative spillover effect spreads across industries. The damage to brand favorability caused by the collapse of a celebrity's persona is most lethal: Kris Wu's image as a 'pure-hearted big boy' was severely inconsistent with the nature of the negative events, directly triggering a public trust crisis regarding the products he endorsed. This breakdown of trust quickly transferred to the brands, weakening their long-term accumulated credibility, with brands relying on emotional value connections with consumers being hit particularly hard. The speed of brand response directly affects the extent of loss, and rapid contract termination can achieve a 'crisis transformation': Han Shu, as the first brand to publicly terminate its contract, saw live-stream viewership soar by 400% and sales increase by 868%. By quickly cutting ties, the brand demonstrated its values, not only reducing negative association but also attracting new potential consumers; conversely, brands that reacted slowly were easily linked to negative public opinion, causing sustained damage to their favorability. Endorsements by high-traffic celebrities are essentially a 'risky investment' with very high uncertainty: The commercial value of these celebrities relies on short-term popularity and persona packaging, with rapid iteration and insufficient self-discipline. For brands, the relationship is essentially 'interdependent but sharing risks.' Once a celebrity 'flops,' prior endorsement investments and marketing conversions are nullified, and the brand also bears reputational losses. Negative public opinion is driving a transformation in the endorsement industry, with demand for traditional celebrity endorsements declining: The high risk of top-tier endorsements is prompting brands to shift toward small-circle KOLs, KOCs, and virtual idols (such as Luo Tianyi). These types of endorsements more easily evoke consumer empathy and carry no moral risk associated with real celebrities, becoming a new direction for brand marketing in the future. [1]

2.3 Research Review

Overall, both domestic and international scholars have explored the impact of negative public opinion about celebrities from multiple perspectives, but there is still room for further development: First, although existing research has paid attention to the differences in types of negative public opinion, the classification lacks systematicity, and there is a lack of in-depth comparison of the impact mechanisms of different types of negative public opinion; second, current studies mainly focus on the direct effects of negative public opinion, and the exploration of mediating variables such as brand trust is insufficient, failing to clearly reveal the intermediate path through which negative public opinion affects brand favorability and purchase intention; third, most existing studies are either single-case studies or large-sample empirical analyses, lacking comprehensive research that combines survey methods and case studies, making it difficult to simultaneously consider the generalizability and depth of the research. Based on this, this paper will systematically classify the types of negative public opinion, introduce brand trust as a mediating variable, and combine survey methods with case analysis to comprehensively examine the impact of different types of celebrity negative public opinion on brand favorability.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, QUESTIONS, AND HYPOTHESES

3.1 Research Objectives

3.1.1 Academic Goals

(1) Verify the mediating role of brand trust between negative publicity and purchase intention, revealing the internal mechanism by which negative publicity affects brand favorability; (2) Enrich empirical research evidence in the field of consumer behavior and provide support for the localized application of relevant theories.

3.1.2 Actual goal

(1) Provide reference for brands to establish a negative public opinion risk prediction mechanism, clarifying the risk levels of different types of negative public opinion; (2) Provide brands with targeted crisis response strategies, helping them quickly stop losses after negative public opinion occurs and maximize the protection of brand favorability.

3.2 Research question

1. Is there a significant difference in the impact of negative public opinion about different types of celebrities on brand favorability?

2. Does brand trust play a mediating role between negative public opinion and consumers' purchase intention?

3. Do factors such as the celebrity's gender and type (traffic star/traditional star) moderate the impact of negative public opinion on brand favorability?

4. For different types of negative public opinion, what response strategies can brands adopt to most effectively reduce damage to brand favorability?

3.3 Research Hypothesis

Based on the above research questions and literature review, this paper proposes the following research hypotheses:

H1: Negative public opinion of different types of celebrities has a significant negative impact on brand favorability, and the degree of impact varies; among them, negative public opinion related to illegal behavior has a significantly greater negative impact than that related to immoral behavior, and severe negative public opinion has a significantly greater negative impact than moderate negative public opinion.

H2: Brand trust plays a partial mediating role between negative public opinion and purchase intention, that is, negative public opinion weakens consumers' purchase intention by reducing brand trust.

H3: The gender of celebrities plays a moderating role in the relationship between negative public opinion and brand favorability, with the negative impact of negative public opinion on brand favorability being significantly greater for female endorsers than for male endorsers.

H4: The type of celebrity has a moderating effect on the relationship between negative public opinion and brand favorability, with the negative impact of negative public opinion from traffic celebrities on brand favorability being significantly greater than that of traditional celebrities.

H5: Crisis response strategies have a moderating effect on the relationship between negative public opinion and brand favorability. Under severe negative public opinion, the brand's use of the 'apologize to the public' strategy has the best recovery effect; under moderate negative public opinion, there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of the 'support the spokesperson' and 'distancing' strategies.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 Questionnaire method

4.1.1 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire mainly consists of four parts: The first part is the basic information of the respondents, including demographic variables such as gender, education, and income level; the second part is the celebrity endorsement cognition and consumption behavior scale, which measures the respondents' attention to celebrity endorsements and past purchasing behavior influenced by celebrity endorsements; the third part is the negative public opinion types and brand attitude scale, which presents different types of negative celebrity public opinion (illegal, immoral, moderate, severe, etc.) through scenario simulation, allowing respondents to evaluate the impact on brand favorability and brand trust, scored using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree); the fourth part is the purchase intention scale, which measures respondents' purchase intentions under different negative public opinion scenarios.

4.1.2 Sample Selection and Data Collection

Using online questionnaires, the sample covers consumers of different genders, educational backgrounds, and occupations, focusing on groups with experience purchasing products endorsed by celebrities.

4.1.3 Questionnaire results

Table 1. Empirical Analysis Table of the Impact of Different Types of Negative Public Opinion on Brand Favorability [7].

Types of negative public opinion	Core features	Survey average favorability decline	Range of empirical reductions in the literature	Consistency with Research and Literature	Representative event
Illegal activities (tax evasion/drug use)	Violating laws and regulations, endangering society	-46.8%	-45%~-55%	Highly consistent	Fan Bingbing tax evasion, Kris Wu involved in criminal case
Immorality in private life (adultery/cheating)	Violates public order and good customs, highly controversial morally	-40.2%	-35%~-45%	Highly consistent	Show Lo group sex, Kris Wu private life controversy
False endorsement / Fraud	Lack of business integrity, infringing on consumer rights	-36.8%	-30%~-40%	Highly consistent	Celebrities promoting products with false advertising and falsifying product power
Inappropriate remarks/cultural offense	Touch the cultural bottom line, causing public opinion controversy	-29.5%	-25%~-35%	Moderate consistency	Celebrities' anti-China remarks and culturally discriminatory statements
Professional competence failure	Insufficient professional ability, professionalism in doubt	-19.7%	-15%~-25%	Highly consistent	The singer went off-key on stage and didn't understand the functions of the products they endorsed.
Mild improper behavior	Improper behavior in details, minor impact	-10.3%	-5%~-15%	Highly consistent	Low emotional intelligence and minor impolite behavior in public places

4.2 Case Study Method

4.2.1 Case Selection Criteria

Select representative celebrity endorsement negative public opinion incidents in recent years as cases. The selection criteria include: (1) the types of negative public opinion are typical, covering different categories such as illegal, immoral, moderate, and severe; (2) the brand industries are diverse, including fast-moving consumer goods, beauty, luxury products, automobiles, and other fields, to reflect industry differences; (3) the event impact is significant, with negative public opinion triggering widespread social attention and having observable effects on brand favorability and market performance; (4) the brand response strategies are diverse, providing support for comparing the effects of different response approaches.

4.2.2Case Study Content

Conduct an in-depth analysis of the selected cases, mainly including four aspects: (1) Case background review, including the cooperation between the celebrity and the brand, the occurrence process and core content of negative public opinion; (2) Definition of negative public opinion types and risk level assessment; (3) Analysis of brand response strategies, including response time, response methods, specific measures, etc.; (4) Market feedback evaluation, including changes in brand favorability, sales fluctuations, stock price changes, consumer opinion feedback, etc., comparing the differences in effectiveness between different types of negative public opinion and response strategies.

5. RESEARCH CONTENT

5.1 Systematic classification of types of negative public opinion about celebrities

Based on existing research findings and practical cases, and considering dimensions such as the nature and severity of negative public opinion, this study systematically classifies negative public opinion about celebrities. In terms of nature, it is divided into illegal (such as tax evasion, drug use, sexual assault, and other actions violating laws and regulations) and immoral categories (such as infidelity, cheating, inappropriate behavior, and other actions that violate public morals but do not break the law). In terms of severity, it is divided into severe negative (such as drug use, illegal crimes, and other behaviors that have a serious negative impact on social values) and moderate negative (such as speeding, minor inappropriate behavior, and other behaviors with limited impact and lighter circumstances). In terms of celebrity type, it can be further distinguished between negative publicity concerning popularity-driven celebrities and traditional celebrities. This classification lays the foundation for subsequent differentiated impact analysis.

5.2 Validation of the Differentiated Impact of Different Types of Negative Public Opinion on Brand Favorability

Empirically test the differences in the impact of different types of negative public opinion on brand favorability using questionnaire data. Specifically, analyze the differences between illegal-related and emotional-related negative public opinion in terms of impact magnitude and duration; compare the different effects of severe and moderate negative public opinion on brand favorability and brand trust; explore the role of moderating variables such as celebrity gender and celebrity type, and verify whether negative public opinion about female endorsers or traffic celebrities causes a stronger impact on brand favorability. At the same time, supplement and verify the empirical results through case studies, and explore in depth the differences in how brands in different industries are affected by negative public opinion, such as the different sensitivities of FMCG brands and automotive brands when dealing with negative public opinion about celebrities.

5.3 Testing the mediating role of brand trust

Construct a structural equation model that includes types of negative public opinion, brand trust, brand favorability, and purchase intention, and test the mediating effect of brand trust. Analyze how different types of negative public opinion affect brand favorability and purchase intention by reducing consumers' trust in the brand; clarify the differences in the strength of the mediating effect of brand trust in the impact paths of different types of negative public opinion, providing theoretical support for brands to resist the impact of negative public opinion by maintaining brand trust.

5.4 Comparative Analysis of the Effectiveness of Brand Crisis Response Strategies

Based on case analysis and survey data, compare the effectiveness of different crisis response strategies. For severe negative public opinion, analyze the recovery effect on brand favorability of three strategies: 'apologizing to the public,' 'distancing from the spokesperson,' and 'supporting the spokesperson.' For moderate negative public opinion, explore the applicability of different response strategies. Summarize best practices for brand crisis management, including key elements such as response timing, response methods, and communication focus, providing reference for brands to develop crisis response plans.

6. RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1 Core Hypothesis Test Results

Assumption 1: Different types of negative public opinion have significantly different negative impacts on brand favorability.

Empirical conclusion: The negative impact of different types of negative public opinion on brand favorability is significant at the $p<0.001$ level, and the magnitudes of the impacts differ significantly.

Ranking of favorability decline: Illegal/criminal activity (-48.6%) > Immoral private life (-40.2%) > False endorsements/fraud (-36.8%) > Inappropriate remarks/cultural offense (-29.5%) > Professional competence failure (-19.7%) > Mild misconduct (-10.3%).

The impact of moral-type negativity (mean -41.9%) is significantly greater than that of competence-type negativity (mean -19.7%), consistent with the findings of the 2021 study published in the International Journal of Communication; however, the 2020 conclusion in Beijing Social Sciences that “emotional/ethical violations > illegal violations” is partially revised in this study — the harm from illegal/criminal negative events is slightly greater than that from immoral private life, reflecting that highly educated groups are more sensitive to legal boundaries.[7]

Hypothesis 2: Brand trust plays a partial mediating role between negative public opinion and purchase intention

Empirical conclusions:

1. The negative predictive effect of negative public opinion type on brand trust is significant ($\beta=-0.52$, $p<0.001$);

2. The positive predictive effect of brand trust on purchase intention is significant ($\beta=0.61$, $p<0.001$);

3. After including brand trust, the direct effect of negative public opinion type on purchase intention is still significant ($\beta=-0.28$, $p<0.001$), indicating that brand trust plays a partial mediating role, and the mediating effect accounts for 47.3% of the total effect.

Mechanism interpretation: Negative public opinion first weakens consumers’ trust in the brand (e.g., ‘the brand made a poor choice in selecting people’), and then further reduces purchase intention, rather than acting directly on the purchasing decision.

Hypothesis 3: The celebrity’s gender moderates the relationship between negative public opinion and brand favorability

Empirical Findings:

The decline in brand favorability due to negative public opinion is significantly higher for female endorsers (-42.1%) than for male endorsers (-39.8%), with the difference being more pronounced in morally negative contexts (female -44.2% vs male -40.5%). The moderating effect is significant (interaction term $\beta=0.12$, $p<0.05$).

Reason: Under China’s collectivist culture, consumers have higher moral expectations for female celebrities. Negative publicity about female endorsers is more likely to trigger associations of “value collapse.”

Hypothesis 4: The type of celebrity moderates the relationship between negative public opinion and brand favorability.

Empirical conclusion:

The drop in brand favorability due to negative public opinion is significantly higher for internet-popular celebrities (-43.5%) than for traditional celebrities (-37.2%), with a significant moderating effect (interaction term $\beta=0.18$, $p<0.01$).

Segment differences: The impact on brand favorability from personality-collapsing negative incidents involving internet-popular celebrities (e.g., the Kris Wu case) (-51.2%) is much greater than the impact from professional-mistake negative incidents involving traditional celebrities (-22.3%), reflecting the fragility of the commercial value of internet-popular celebrities.

Hypothesis 5: Crisis response strategies moderate the relationship between negative public opinion and brand favorability.

Empirical conclusion:

1. Severe negative impact (illegal/criminal acts or personal misconduct): The ‘public apology + sever ties with the endorser’ strategy is most effective in restoring favorability, reducing the drop from -48.6% to -32.1%; the ‘fully support the endorser’ strategy further amplifies the damage (drop increases to -55.3%).

2. Moderate negative impact (professional misconduct/faint misbehavior or inappropriate remarks): There is no significant difference in recovery effectiveness among the three strategies ‘maintain the status quo,’ ‘fully support the endorser,’ and ‘draw a clear boundary.’ Overreacting may instead trigger unnecessary public attention.

6.2 Descriptive Statistics Results

6.2.1 Sample Characteristics and Core Cognition

There are 402 valid samples (with college degree or above), among which 59.2% are undergraduates, and 74.13% are aged 18-35, matching the characteristics of the mainstream consumer group.

82.6% of respondents stated that they “would change their favorability towards the endorsed brand due to negative celebrity publicity,” while only 17.4% said they “would not be affected,” indicating that the brand spillover effect of negative celebrity publicity is widespread.

6.2.2 Expectation of Brand Favorability Recovery

Table2. Expectations for Brand Favorability Recovery from Different Types of Negative Information

Negative Type	Difficult-to-Recover Percentage	Over1-Year Recovery Percentage	Key Conclusion
Illegal or Criminal Acts (Tax Evasion/Drug Use)	68.4%	12.2%	Almost irreversible, brand repair is extremely difficult
Private Life Misconduct (Cheating/Affairs)	45.3%	32.1%	Long-term negative impact, repair requires 1-2 years
Professional Ability Failure	28.6%	15.3%	Short-term impact, can recover in six months to 1 year
Minor Misconduct in Speech or Actions	8.9%	6.2%	Almost no long-term impact, quick recovery

6.2.3 The detailed effects of the moderating variable

Moderating Variables Key Findings

Education: The group with a master’s degree or above is the most sensitive to negative issues related to illegal activities and crimes (decline of -52.3%), significantly higher than the group with an associate degree (-45.1%).

Age: The young group aged 18-25 shows the strongest negative reaction to private life misconduct (decline of -43.7%), higher than the group aged 46 and above (-34.2%).

Purchase Frequency: The group that frequently buys celebrity-endorsed products is more sensitive to false endorsements (decline of -40.1%) than the low-frequency group (-32.5%).

6.3 Research Conclusions and Theoretical/Practical Contributions

6.3.1 Theoretical contribution

Improved the classification system and impact quantification of negative celebrity public opinion in the Chinese context, verifying the core pattern that moral-type negatives have a greater influence than ability-type negatives.

Revealed the partial mediating role of brand trust, supplementing the intermediary path “negative public opinion → brand trust → purchase intention,” enriching the theoretical framework of celebrity endorsement effects.

Verified the moderating effects of celebrity gender and type, explaining the perception differences of negative public opinion among different groups, addressing the shortcomings of existing research.

6.3.2 Practical contribution

Provide quantitative reference for brand ambassador selection: give priority to traditional celebrities and male endorsers, and avoid traffic stars and types with high moral risks.

Provide strategic guidance for crisis response: for severe negative events, implement 'quick apology + cutting ties with the ambassador'; for moderate negative events, 'handle discreetly'; avoid excessive public relations.

Provide basis for brand risk early warning: establish a graded warning mechanism for negative public opinion, focusing on preventing risks related to illegal activities and the collapse of traffic stars' public image.

7. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

1. Sample limitations: The sample is concentrated on the 18-35 age group with college education or above, with insufficient representation of middle-aged and elderly people and those with lower education levels, which may lead to result bias.

2. Method limitations: The study uses a scenario-based questionnaire method and does not combine longitudinal data from real events, making it impossible to verify dynamic changes in long-term effects.

3. Variable limitations: Moderating variables such as brand awareness and product type were not included, and differences across industries (e.g., luxury goods vs. fast-moving consumer goods) were not fully explored.

4. Future directions: The sample range can be expanded to all age groups, combined with long-term tracking data from real cases, and more moderating variables can be introduced to deepen the research.

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