Internet Celebrity Self-Brand Attitudes and Purchase Intentions among Malaysian Gen Y Consumers: The Moderating Effect of Willingness to Pay Premium Price

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Abstract

Purpose: This research investigates the antecedents of consumer attitudes and purchase intentions for internet celebrity self-brands, grounded in Cognitive Consistency Theory. It examines the impact of congruence, authenticity, and involvement, and assesses the moderating role of willingness to pay premium price (WTPPP) in the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions. **Design/methodology/approach:** Data were screened and prepared using IBM SPSS 27. The proposed conceptual model was then tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4, chosen for its suitability in exploratory studies and complex models. **Findings:** The expected outcome of this research is to identify factors that facilitate consumers' attitudes towards internet celebrity self-brands to predict purchase intentions, while moderating effect of willingness to pay premium price on the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intention. **Research limitations/implications:** The research is limited by the fast-changing social media landscape and varying effects across product categories. **Practical implications:** This research offers actionable insights for internet celebrities developing self-brands by elucidating the attitudes, purchase intentions, and price sensitivies of Malaysian Gen Y consumers. The findings guide the creation of authentic brands and strategic pricing models, such as tiered product structures that align with millennial values and financial thresholds, ensuring market viability. **Originality/value:** To the authors' knowledge, empirical research examining willingness to pay premium price as a moderator in the context of internet celebrity self-brands remains limited. This study addresses this gap by being one of the first to empirically validate this mechanism specifically among Malaysian Generation Y consumers. By repositioning WTPPP from a traditional dependent variable to a critical economic boundary

condition, this research challenges prior literature that views it solely as a behavioural outcome. This theoretical shift clarifies how financial valuation functions as a filter, determining when positive attitudes successfully crystallize into purchase intentions.
Keywords: Internet Celebrity Self-Brands, Cognitive Consistency Theory, Internet Celebrity-Consumer Congruence, Internet Celebrity-Brand Congruence, Brand-Consumer Congruence, Brand Authenticity, Internet Celebrity Involvement, Willingness To Pay Premium Price

Introduction
Internet celebrities are predominantly distinguished by their high degree of public visibility, which may arise from either fame or infamy, positive or negative attention, as well as demonstrated talent, skill, or other personal attributes. Such visibility may be enduring or fleeting, intentional or incidental, and may or may not involve monetization. Crucially, the attainment of internet celebrity status depends on audience recognition and engagement; individuals who produce high-quality online content but fail to attract viewership, validation, or social acknowledgment cannot be considered internet celebrities (Abidin, 2018). The quantity of followers an individual has may function as a measure of their status as an internet celebrity (De Veirman et al., 2017). An increasing number of internet celebrities have begun creating self-branded products in order to increase their control and exert their influence, rather than merely endorsing the products of other companies (Tseng & Wang, 2023).

The proliferation of social networking platforms has catalysed a significant expansion within the celebrity sector. Consequently, the concept of the celebrity brand has gained prominence, describing business ventures where famous individuals leverage their public recognition to generate brand equity and financial returns (Saldanha et al., 2018; Teng et al., 2020). Moreover, a celebrity brand is a professionally managed and publicly recognised persona whose value is derived from the ability of a consumer base to identify them as distinct from others (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). Despite the commercial success of celebrity branding and specific appeals for further investigation (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012), academic inquiry into this phenomenon remains sparse. This scarcity of research has resulted in a significant knowledge gap; specifically, it remains unclear how consumer purchase intentions and attitudes differ when comparing standard influencer endorsements against the emerging category of internet celebrity self-brands (Kennedy et al., 2021).

This research examines the brand attitudes and purchase intentions by using Cognitive Consistency Theory. An integrated model is theoretically constructed to forecast brand attitudes and purchase intentions about internet celebrity self-brand. This research further highlights the underlying mechanisms explaining this relationship by unveiling the moderating role of willingness to pay premium price. Furthermore, this research extends recent research on internet celebrity self-brands by examining a new demographic area which are age and geographic location whose scope is much wider.

Generation Y (Gen Y), also known as Millennials, is characterized by early and frequent exposure to technology, which has shaped their cognitive, emotional, and social development (Immordino-Yang et al., 2012). This generation is fond of technology, embraces daring entrepreneurship, and displays autonomous attitudes, behaviours, and high self-confidence (Tutar et al., 2021). The rapid technological and societal changes during their formative years make them distinctly different from previous generations.

Generation Y individuals are known to follow technology closely and are capable of managing multiple tasks or businesses simultaneously with the aid of digital tools (Tutar et al., 2021). According to Ordun (2015), Gen Y represents one of the largest consumer segments with high purchasing power, making them a dominant force in the marketplace. Brands, for them, serve as tools to express identity and communicate values (Ordun, 2015). Supporting this, Muda et al. (2016) found that most Millennials preferred to purchase from online sellers operating on Facebook and Instagram, as these platforms inspire greater confidence. The study also concluded that the perceived reputation of online marketers has a positive and statistically significant impact on their willingness to adopt online shopping.

At the start of 2024, Malaysia's internet penetration rate reached 97.4 percent of the overall population (Kemp, 2023b). According to a press statement on November 26 citing eltwater.com, as of January 2024, Malaysia had 28.68 million social media users, representing 83.1% of the total population of 34.49 million. According to the Kepios analysis, the number of internet users in Malaysia increased by 357 thousand between January 2023 and January 2024 (Kemp, 2023b). Recent data from Rakun Insight identifies convenience as the primary driver of social commerce in Malaysia, motivating 63% of consumers to make a purchase. This is closely followed by price sensitivity, with 62% of respondents attributing their purchasing decisions to attractive discounts and promotional campaigns available on these platforms (Insight, 2023).

Recent media reports highlight a critical disconnect between an influencer's large social media following and their ability to convert online engagement into sustained purchase intentions. This failure is often due to a mismatch in pricing and perceived quality. For example, Addison Rae's Item Beauty was withdrawn from Sephora partly because its pricing exceeded the budget of its target audience(Brown, 2023; Madeline Berg, 2023), while other creators have faced backlash over high prices and low-quality materials (Dogson, 2023). This negative feedback on pricing and performance can significantly reduce purchase intentions, even when the product is endorsed by a popular influencer (Hart, 2024). These failures reveal a practical problem: a positive attitude toward an influencer does not automatically translate into a purchase.

This practical problem is mirrored in the academic literature. Scholars have established that antecedents like congruence, brand authenticity, and celebrity involvement (Tseng & Wang, 2023) are effective at building positive brand attitudes. However, the link between these positive attitudes and the final purchase intentions is less clear, particularly in the unique context of internet celebrity self-brands and the Malaysian market.

Emerging research in Malaysia presents a complex landscape. For instance, a study by Leong et al. (2024) on Malaysian Gen Y men revealed a counter-intuitive finding: traditional influencer traits like credibility and expertise had no significant effect on purchase intentions. This divergence suggests that unique factors may govern purchase decisions among Malaysian Gen Y, and that established models may be incomplete.

This disconnect is particularly puzzling given the economic profile of Malaysian Gen Y. Unlike younger cohorts, this generation has largely achieved financial independence and possesses significant purchasing power. Yet, a paradox persists: despite having the financial means and

forming favourable attitudes toward internet celebrities, many Gen Y consumers still do not proceed with a purchase. This suggests that the barrier to conversion is not a lack of ability to pay, but a lack of willingness to pay premium price.

Consequently, the most significant gap in the literature and the most likely explanation for the real-world problem is the treatment of willingness to pay premium price. Despite forming favourable attitudes, many consumers do not proceed with a purchase because the price of self-branded products exceeds what they are willing to pay. This indicates a critical disconnect where positive attitudes fail to become intentions.

Academically, WTPPP is almost always treated as a simple outcome (i.e., a good attitude leads to a higher WTPPP), as seen in Al Mamun et al. (2023). However, no known study in the Malaysian context, has tested WTPPP for its more realistic role: as a moderating variable. This research posits that WTPPP acts as a financial threshold, determining if and how strongly a positive brand attitude is translated into a purchase intention.

While recent models have moderated the attitude-intention link using constructs such as product involvement (Thuy et al., 2024), brand knowledge (Siyal et al., 2021), or loyalty (Ramachandran & Balasubramanian, 2020), these studies overlook financial constraints. Unlike these psychological drivers, WTPPP is a transactional construct.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to address this gap by proposing and testing a comprehensive model that examines the moderating role of willingness to pay premium price on the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions for internet celebrity self-brands among Malaysian Gen Y consumers.

Literature Review
Internet Celebrity–Brand Congruence
Internet celebrity–brand congruence refers to the "degree to which the image of the celebrity matches the image of the cooperating brand" (Choi & Rifon, 2012). Many studies show that a celebrity has a greater impact on consumers in terms of attitude and purchase intentions than a non-celebrity spokesperson (McCormick, 2016). Ayelet Israeli, a professor at Harvard Business School, explains that successful celebrity brands often share a strong, authentic alignment between the celebrity and the product category. For example, sports stars often embody athletic attributes that enhance sports brands. Research in sports marketing finds that celebrity athletes have "a strong level of recognition that influences customers' perception toward the endorsed brand and alters their purchase intentions" (Rai et al., 2021). If a fitness influencer launches a sportswear line, the high congruence facilitates a transfer of trust; however, if they launch an unrelated product (e.g., financial services), the misalignment creates cognitive dissonance. Scholars generally state that congruence between a celebrity and the endorsed brand positively influences brand image, with a stronger association having a greater impact on the brand (Min et al., 2019). Indeed, Pradhan et al. (2016) show that brand–celebrity personality congruence has a significant impact on brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Thus, the more congruent a celebrity and brand appear, the more favourable the consumer's brand evaluation and intent to buy.

Internet Celebrity–Consumer Congruence

The concept of internet celebrity–consumer congruence refers to how closely a celebrity's image aligns with the consumer's ideal self-image (Choi & Rifon, 2012). Consumers tend to favour endorsers they can identify with. For instance, influencers who share lifestyles, values, or appearance with their followers create a sense of kinship. Research confirms this, Venciute et al. (2023) found that when an influencer and follower are perceived as congruent, the influencer's endorsements become much more persuasive. Specifically, when congruence exists between an influencer and a follower, the influencer's experience and the perceived usefulness of their content exert a stronger influence on purchase behaviour (Venciute et al., 2023). In other words, perceived similarity amplifies influencer effectiveness. Expanding on this, Liu and Zheng (2024) demonstrate that this congruence fosters parasocial interaction which a one-sided emotional bond where the follower feels a genuine friendship with the influencer. This bond is crucial for self-brands: when a consumer sees an influencer as a reflection of their ideal self, purchasing the influencer's brand becomes a way to enact that identity. Similarly, Belanche et al. (2021) found that strong influencer–consumer congruence initiates a series of congruence effects that lead to highly favourable outcomes. Specifically, high congruence between the consumer and the product results in more positive product attitudes and greater purchase intentions. In sum, when consumers see a celebrity as "one of us," the celebrity's endorsements have a stronger positive effect on attitudes and buying intentions.

Brand–Consumer Congruence

Brand–consumer congruence describes the extent to which the perceived image, values, or personality of a brand correspond with a consumer's self-concept or identity (Sirgy, 1982). Consumers develop an emotional connection with a brand when they see it as a reflection of their own identity or aspirations. This connection leads to a more favourable brand attitude, which in turn increases the likelihood of purchase. Aaker (1997) supports this, noting that brands which align with consumers' self-concept tend to build stronger loyalty. People prefer brands that reflect their self-concept. For example, a consumer who values environmentalism will feel more positive toward a "green" brand. Research shows this congruence builds emotional bonds and loyalty. Michel et al. (2022) consumers tend to favour brands that align closely with their self-identity, and such self–brand congruity serves as a key determinant in building enduring brand connections. Likewise, earlier work notes that when consumers perceive a brand's image as matching their own self-image, their attitude toward that brand is much stronger (Zhu et al., 2019). Indeed, Zhu et al. (2019) found that the congruence between a brand's image and a consumer's self-image significantly influences consumers' attitudes toward the brand. In practice, this means if a brand exudes qualities (e.g. fun, prestige, adventure) that a consumer aspires to, the consumer's brand attitude is more favourable and loyalty grows. As Aaker (1997) and later studies note, such identity fit often translates into higher willingness to pay premium price and repeat purchase.

Brand Authenticity

Celebrities demonstrate authenticity when they remain true to themselves, engaging in product creation primarily for the intrinsic satisfaction derived from the process (Moulard et al., 2014). Authentic brands are seen as consistent, original, and credible. For example, an internet celebrity who truly cares about a cause or personally uses the product can make a brand feel authentic. Consumers reward authenticity with trust and positive attitudes. As one

review notes, authenticity is viewed as a brand's "consistent reflection of its values" and makes it seem supportive, credible, and trustworthy (Papadopoulou et al., 2023). In turn, authentic brands encourage consumers to express themselves through the brand and deepen their commitment. Ahmed et al. (2024) further note that authenticity mediates the relationship between influencer attributes and brand loyalty, suggesting that without a perception of "realness," even high-congruence products may fail. Conversely, when authenticity is questioned, brand attitudes suffer. Audrezet et al. (2020) highlight this risk: influencer–brand partnerships can create tensions for influencers' authenticity because followers highly value the influencer's intrinsic (non-commercial) motivations. In other words, if an influencer appears to endorse only for money, consumer trust drops. Maintaining transparent authenticity is thus key. In the context of celebrity self-brands, perceiving the brand as authentic, as if the celebrity genuinely designed or uses it to boost consumer favourability. These authentic cues can raise both brand attitude and trust, which in turn strengthen purchase intentions.

Internet Celebrity Involvement
Internet celebrity involvement refers to the extent of celebrities' engagement in activities such as designing, producing, and marketing their self-branded products (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012). The perception of celebrity involvement can have a greater impact on consumer attitudes than actual celebrity involvement (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012). Thus, consumers typically favour the self-brand when they perceive that internet celebrities demonstrate a greater degree of involvement in their self-branded products. For instance, Yang et al. (2025) emphasizes that genuine celebrity involvement is "crucial to successful celebrity endorsements". In a way, this involvement imparts the brand with the celebrity's passion. Although actual involvement may be limited, the mere notion of involvement might enhance consumers' perceptions of circumstances. If customers perceive that the celebrity was significantly involved in the development of the product, they are likely to develop stronger emotional connections to the brand, viewing the product as an extension of the celebrity's identity.

Willingness to pay premium price (WTPPP)
Willingness to pay premium price (WTPPP) is the most effective way to measure brand equity. A price premium is different from a regular willingness to pay premium price because it shows how much more a customer is willing to pay for a brand compared to a similar product from a competition or a private label. Aaker (2012) asserts that this variable indicates consumer loyalty to a brand, influenced by perceived distinctive benefits which justify more financial investment. Netemeyer et al. (2004) stated WTPPP is conceptualized as a primary facet of customer-based brand equity, representing the amount a consumer is willing to pay above the price of comparable brands for their preferred brand. It is reflecting consumer perceptions of quality, value, and uniqueness. In the context of internet celebrity self-brands, WTPPP does not intrinsically signify a luxury price point; rather, it indicates the consumer's readiness to pay a premium beyond the conventional market rate for the symbolic value attributed to the influencer.

Brand Attitudes
Brand attitude is formed by consumers' beliefs about brand attributes and experiences, and it represents a summary judgment (liking/disliking) of the brand (Ko et al., 2021). Brand attitude can be defined as consumers' evaluative judgment regarding the quality and performance of

a brand (Thomson et al., 2005). Meta-analytic research indicates that brand attitude is a key intermediate step: influencers' attributes (credibility, attractiveness) impact brand attitudes, which in turn drive engagement and purchase behaviours (Barari et al., 2025). For example, Barry (2002) discusses that positive ad and brand attitudes ultimately lead to purchase intentions (Barari et al., 2025). Empirically, brand attitude has been consistently linked to purchase intentions in numerous studies. Dodds (1991) stated that brand attitude has a positive impact on the quality of products or services and a positive impact on purchase intentions. Pagla (2014) stated that age affects the development of brand attitude, with younger individuals showing higher purchase intentions for products or services when their attitude toward the brand is positive.

Purchase Intentions
Purchase intentions reflects how likely and unlikely a customer makes a purchase (Wang et al., 2018) and is formed based on the interaction between customer needs, attitude, and perception towards the product or service (Mothersbaugh & Hawkins, 2016). Other studies found purchase intentions is formed by factors affecting or composing product image, such as brand equity (Chang & Liu, 2009), brand image, product quality (Haque et al., 2015), country image, product image (Wang et al., 2012), functional aspect, emotional aspect, symbolic aspect of products (Vijaranakorn & Shannon, 2017); product performance, durability or quality , and online review (El-Said, 2020; Park et al., 2007). Positive brand attitudes (driven by congruence and authenticity) generally lead to stronger purchase intentions. Prior research on related contexts confirms this: for example, Rai et al. (2021) note that a celebrity's traits can alter their purchase intentions via changing brand perceptions.

Marker Variable
This study utilised a theoretically unrelated construct known as a marker variable to control the effect of common method variance by analysing the correlation between the marker variable and other constructs within the model. (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Podsakoff et al., 2003). To address common method bias in PLS-SEM studies of consumer behaviour, it is common practice to incorporate a marker variable, a construct that is theoretically unrelated to the primary constructs, and to account for its effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In marketing contexts, cognitive rigidity has been used as such a marker since it is unrelated to influencer effects or purchase intentions. Cognitive rigidity is the "frequency and ease with which people change their minds"(Oreg, 2003), i.e. an individual's inflexibility in thinking. A recent study on Halal cosmetics purchase intentions likewise adopted four cognitive rigidity items from Oreg (2003) as a marker variable (Liew et al., 2025).

Hypothesis Development
Congruence dimension effects on brand attitudes
According to the theory of cognitive consistency, when people are in a positive psychological state, they tend to behave consistently. A person's assessment of a phenomenon (or object) should shift in the direction of greater congruity with their preexisting frame of reference (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). Individuals tend to align with others who share similar frames of reference, which may be reflected across various dimensions. Congruence dimensions in the context of internet celebrity self-brands include the consistency of the self-brand to the consumer, the self-brand to the consumer, and the internet celebrity to the self-brand. According to the congruence principle and Cognitive Consistency Theory, consumers are more

likely to evaluate an internet celebrity self-brand favourably when there is a high level of congruence among the internet celebrity, the brand, and the consumer (Tseng & Wang, 2023). When an internet celebrity's image and the endorsed brand's image are highly congruent, consumers evaluate the brand more positively. This reflects a classic match-up or consistency effect: a sporty celebrity with an athletic apparel brand, for example, seems more credible and appealing than a mismatched combination. Empirical research confirms this effect. Min et al. (2019) found that Millennial consumers who perceive strong congruence between a celebrity and a brand exhibit more favourable attitudes toward the brand, which subsequently enhances their purchase intentions. In other words, congruent celebrity endorsements act as a persuasive cue that boosts brand favourability. Min et al. (2019) further revealed that the effect of celebrity–brand fit surpasses the influence of positive publicity, indicating that congruence holds greater significance than fame. Consistent with cognitive balance theory, matching a celebrity's persona or expertise to a brand's image enhances perceived authenticity and quality, leading consumers to judge the brand more favourably (Min et al., 2019). In short, greater internet-celebrity-brand congruence predicts stronger brand attitudes and loyalty.

Congruence between an internet celebrity and the consumer is similarly important. When followers see themselves reflected in or aligned with an internet celebrity's values, lifestyle, or identity, they form a closer connection and trust the internet celebrity's recommendations more. Belanche et al. (2021) demonstrate this in the influencer context: when influencer–consumer congruence is high (the influencer's persona fits the target audience's identity), it amplifies consumer–product congruence, leading to much more favourable attitudes toward the product or brand. In their experiment with a fashion influencer, they found that high influencer–consumer fit, combined with high influencer–brand fit, drove strong consumer–product fit and "more favourable attitudes toward the product" (Belanche et al., 2021). Likewise, Zhu et al. (2019) noted that a greater level of congruence between influencers and prospective consumers indicates favourable attitudes, consumers like and trust influencers who seem similar to themselves, which then translates into positive attitudes toward the influencer's endorsed brand. In practice, this means that when an influencer feels like a peer or role-model to the consumer such as sharing personality traits, values or style, audiences are more receptive: they develop stronger identification with the promotion and form more positive brand attitudes as a result (Belanche et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2019).

Brand-consumer congruence is the fit between a brand's image and how a person sees themselves, and it has a big effect on how people feel about brands. When a brand seems to understand who the customer is, customers feel validated and value the brand more. Contemporary studies support this. For example, Holmes (2021) shows that ads designed for high self-brand congruity which brand cues matching the viewer's self-image elicit significantly more favourable attitudes toward the brand than low-congruity ads. In other words, when brand personality aligns with a consumer's self-view, the brand is judged more positively. Tseng and Wang (2023) likewise find that stronger brand–consumer congruence correlates with stronger consumer attitudes toward the brand in the context of internet-celebrity self-brands. More broadly, Zhu et al. (2019) summarize the literature by noting that congruence between a brand's image and the consumer's self-image strongly impacts their attitude toward the brand.

Previous studies on celebrity endorsement have shown that both celebrity–consumer and celebrity–product congruence exert direct or indirect effects on consumers' attitudes toward the brand (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Paul & Bhakar, 2018; Pradhan et al., 2016). Teng et al. (2020) stated that if consumers perceive a congruence between a celebrity and the celebrity's business venture, they will have a more positive attitude toward the internet celebrity's self-brand. Previous literature indicates that consumers' positive attitudes toward a product influence their behavioural intentions, such as the willingness to purchase, pay premium prices, or recommend the product to others (Belanche et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2014; Zeithaml et al., 1996).

Thus, based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Internet celebrity-brand congruence is positively correlated with brand attitudes.

H2. Internet celebrity-consumer congruence is positively correlated with brand attitudes.

H3. Brand-consumer congruence is positively correlated with brand attitudes.

Brand authenticity and brand attitudes

Yang and Battocchio (2021) show that transparency (a proxy for authenticity) in brand communication significantly raises consumers' trust, attitudes, and intentions. Recent research finds that all aspects of perceived brand authenticity build consumer-brand relationships. Individuals who associate the authenticity of a specific brand with their self-concept may exhibit a more favourable attitude towards that brand (Park et al., 2007). Recent empirical research shows that consumers perceive more favourably those brands deemed authentic. For example, Deng et al. (2025) report that each dimension of brand authenticity (true-to-ideal, true-to-fact, true-to-self) significantly increases consumers' attachment, trust, and loyalty toward a brand. In other words, consumers develop more favourable attitudes and behaviours towards a brand when they perceive it as authentic in terms of its quality, heritage, or ethics. Likewise, Safeer et al. (2023) find that higher perceived brand authenticity (quality commitment, heritage, sincerity, etc.) boosts brand love, which in turn raises purchase intentions. These patterns hold for personal and social-media brands as well: Osorio et al. (2023) show that "human brand" authenticity strongly predicts consumers' brand love, and Cabeza-Ramírez et al. (2022) demonstrate that an influencer's authentic messaging markedly improves follower attitudes toward the endorsed brand while reducing perceived risk. In sum, recent peer-reviewed studies converge on the conclusion that higher perceived brand authenticity leads to more positive consumer brand attitudes, manifesting in greater trust, brand love, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth intention (Deng et al., 2025; Osorio et al., 2023). Thus, based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4. Brand authenticity is positively correlated with brand attitudes.

Internet Celebrity Involvement and Brand Attitudes

The perception of celebrity involvement can have a greater impact on consumer attitudes than actual celebrity involvement (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012). Research shows that when an influencer is highly involved with a brand (e.g. actively promoting or co-creating products), consumers tend to form more positive attitudes toward that brand (Tseng & Wang, 2023). Malaysian Generation Y customers, in particular, perceive online endorsers as more persuasive; qualitative research indicate that Malaysian young adults regard social media influencers as more relatable, authentic, and credible compared to traditional television celebrities (Li & Chan, 2025). Similarly, Malaysian millennials exhibit a robust response to credible endorsers; a study revealed that a Korean celebrity's expertise and self-satisfaction

substantially enhanced the perceived brand image among Malaysian customers (Rosli et al., 2025). Thus, when consumers realize that internet celebrities demonstrate greater engagement with their self-branded products, they are more likely to assess the self-brand positively. Thus, based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5. Internet celebrity involvement is positively correlated with brand attitudes.

Brand Attitudes and Purchase Intentions
Attitude is a key determinant of behavioural intentions. (Ajzen, 1991). A meta-analytic study by Brown and Stayman (1992) demonstrated a positive relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Brand attitudes have been shown to facilitate purchase intentions in the context of celebrity endorsement in previous studies (Brown & Stayman, 1992). Research conducted by Paul and Bhakar (2018) and Pradhan et al. (2016) in the context of celebrity endorsement also indicated that brand attitudes facilitate purchase intentions. Tseng and Wang (2023) show that the positive consumer attitudes generated by internet celebrities "then positively correlate with purchase intentions". Al-Mu'ani et al. (2023) similarly showed that influencer characteristics, including trustworthiness and knowledge can influence brand attitude, which partially mediates their impact on purchase intentions. According to one review, a positive brand attitude is essential for the formation of purchase intentions (Hameed et al., 2023). In other words, Malaysian Gen Y who hold a favourable view of a brand (often due to a trusted influencer's promotion) are significantly more likely to intend to purchase it. In the present research context, consumers who hold positive attitudes towards the self-brand of internet celebrities are more likely to make purchases related to that self-brand. Thus, based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6. Brand attitudes are positively correlated with purchase intentions.

Willingness to pay premium price (WTPPP)
Empirical research shows that being willing to pay a price premium significantly strengthens the correlation between brand attitude and purchase intention. When consumers exhibit a robust willingness to pay premium price per product, the transformation of their positive perceptions into actual purchase intentions is less likely to be hindered by price barriers. This aligns with the research of Mehraj and Qureshi (2022), who identified the willingness to pay premium price as a catalyst that amplifies the impact of positive brand attitude on purchase intention. When people are willing to pay a lot for something they think is valuable, brand loyalty is more important than money problems when they decide to buy anything. This makes their purchase intentions more consistent and predictable. Thus, based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7. Willingness to pay premium price moderates the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

The hypothesized relationships are summarized in Figure I, which illustrates the proposed conceptual model.

Proposed Conceptual Model
Guided by the literature review, a new and thorough research model is constructed to examine the key antecedents of brand attitudes and their subsequent impact on purchase intentions in the context of internet celebrity endorsements. The proposed conceptual model (Figure 1) is formulated based on the principles of Cognitive Consistency Theory. This theoretical lens posits that individuals strive for internal psychological consistency (iResearchNet, n.d.). In the

context of this research, if a consumer holds a positive view of an internet celebrity, they are psychologically driven to align their attitude toward the celebrity's created brand with their positive regard for the individual, thereby maintaining cognitive balance.

The model includes three dimensions of fit include internet celebrity–brand, internet celebrity–consumer, and brand–consumer congruence. These variables represent the "perceived fit" necessary to validate the endorsement. Brand authenticity is included to capture the credibility and genuineness of the self-brand, which is critical in an era of scepticism toward influencer marketing. Internet celebrity involvement is formulated as a predictor to capture the depth of the celebrity's connection to the product, moving beyond superficial endorsement to active creation.

The framework identifies brand attitudes as the central mediator. Rather than assuming that congruence or authenticity leads directly to purchase, the model formulates these variables as antecedents that first build a favourable psychological disposition.

The formulation extends traditional attitudinal models by incorporating an economic constraint: willingness to pay premium price. While traditional models assume a linear relationship between attitude and intention, this framework proposes that this relationship is conditional. WTPPP is introduced as a moderator to explain the "attitude-intention gap", the phenomenon where consumers like a brand but do not intend to purchase it due to price sensitivity.
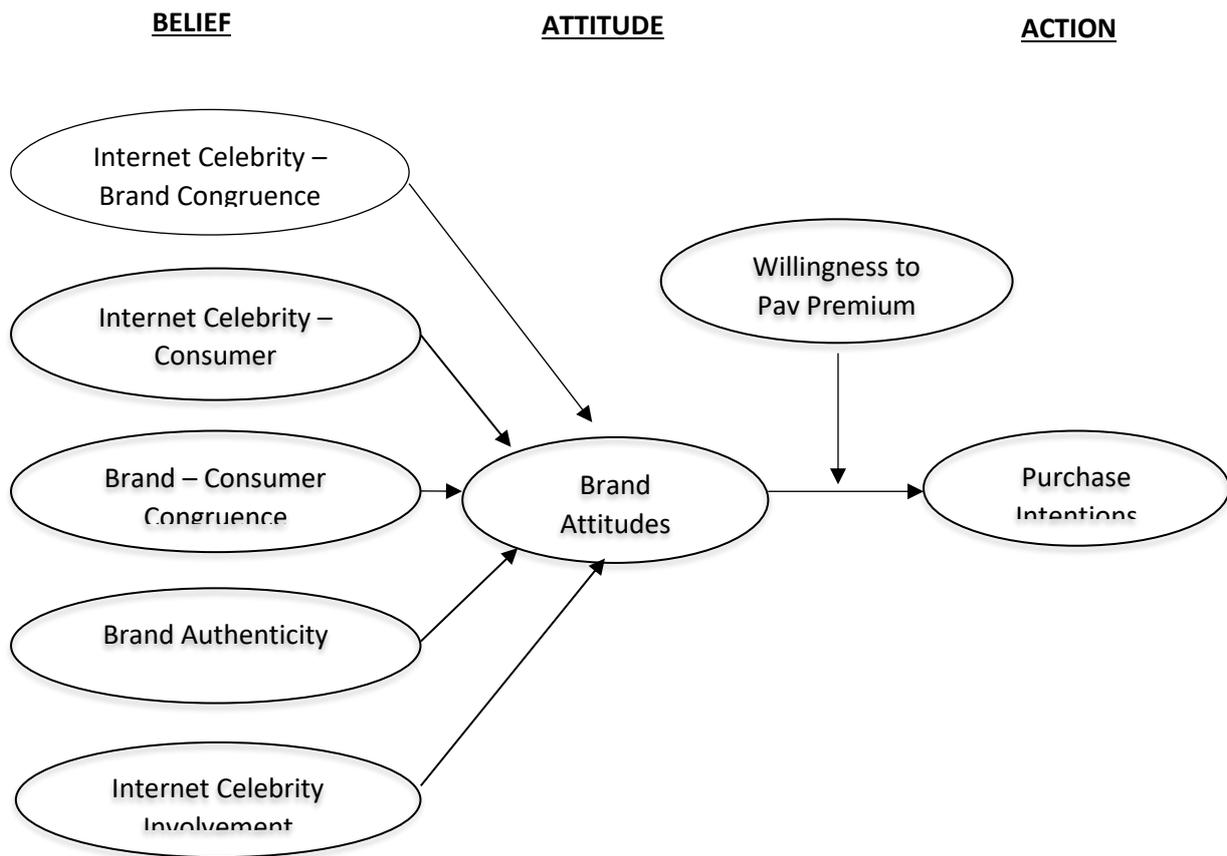
Figure I: Proposed Conceptual Model

Methods

Statistical Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 27) will be employed as the primary tool for data entry, definition, and preparation during the initial phase of data analysis. All data will be entered directly into the software. The researchers will utilize SPSS to facilitate data cleansing and the identification of logical dataset inconsistencies. Responses will be assigned numerical values, which will then be entered into the software to code the questionnaire data. Subsequently, the data will be defined and cleansed to identify errors; issues such as blank responses, straight-lining, and data entry errors will be addressed during this screening process. Finally, the Expectation-Maximization (EM) algorithm will be employed to identify and address any missing data.

In this research, the conceptual model will be conducted by using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4 to analyze the relationships between variables. PLS-SEM is chosen due to its suitability for exploratory research, handling complex models with multiple constructs, and its ability to work with small to medium sample sizes. This method enables the examination of both the measurement model and the structural model. A measurement model specifies the relationships between observed items and their underlying constructs. Its assessment involves examining internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The structural model, on the other hand, is used to test the research hypotheses through a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure that determines the significance of path coefficients (Mumtaz et al., 2017). This

research seeks to develop a model that predicts consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions toward internet celebrity self-brands, grounded in Cognitive Consistency Theory and supported by prior literature on brand authenticity and internet celebrity involvement; therefore, PLS-SEM is deemed an appropriate analytical approach.

Target Respondent

This research targets Malaysian Generation Y (Gen Y) consumers who actively engage with internet celebrity self-brands on social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram. Gen Y forms a substantial consumer segment (≈17.6% of Malaysia's population was age 25–34 in 2025 (Kemp, 2025)) and combines financial independence with deep familiarity with digital channels. Members of Gen Y grew up alongside the internet and value personal uniqueness in their purchases; researchers note Gen Y's pronounced need for uniqueness and self-determination in consumption (Junker et al., 2016), making them an influential demographic for marketers due to their financial independence and responsiveness to digital branding strategies. Their online behaviour indicates a growing responsiveness to digital branding strategies, including those involving internet celebrities. As such, they are likely to consider internet celebrity self-brands when making purchasing decisions. For these reasons, we exclude younger Gen Z (typically under 25, still building income) and older cohorts (Gen X/Boomers, who generally engage less with social media celebrities) from our scope and concentrate on Gen Y. This generation is therefore the most relevant group for studying how internet celebrity self-brands influence purchase decisions.

Facebook and Instagram are selected as the primary platforms for data collection due to their widespread usage among Malaysian Gen Y consumers. According to recent digital statistics, these platforms continue to rank among the most popular social networking sites in Malaysia, offering diverse content formats that support influencer marketing strategies. Malaysia has among the highest social media penetration in Southeast Asia. Malaysian Gen Y consumers are overwhelmingly active on Facebook and Instagram (Howe, 2024), which remain the country's dominant social platforms (Taslaud, 2025). By early 2024, 97.4% of Malaysians (33.59M people) were online, and users spend on average over 8 hours daily on the Internet, and 28.68M (83.1% of the population) used social media (Kemp, 2024). Industry surveys confirm that Instagram and Facebook are strategic marketing channels: about 83% of Malaysian brands now use Instagram for influencer campaigns (Taslaud, 2025) (with Facebook a close second) (Taslaud, 2025). Facebook remains a dominant platform for social interaction, community engagement, and product discovery, while Instagram is especially effective for visual storytelling and influencer-brand collaborations. Together, they provide a comprehensive view of how internet celebrity self-brands engage and influence purchasing decisions among this demographic. Facebook and Instagram have been by far the largest platforms. For example, DataReportal found:

- 2022: Facebook ~21.7M users (≈65.8% of Malaysians); Instagram ~15.55M (≈47.2% of Malaysians (Kemp, 2022).
- 2023: Facebook ~20.25M (≈59.3%); Instagram ~13.90M (≈40.7%)(Kemp, 2023a).
- 2024: Facebook ~22.35M (≈64.8%); Instagram ~15.70M (≈45.5%) (Kemp, 2024).

Sampling Technique
To effectively reach the target population and ensure the selected respondents satisfy the pre-determined inclusion criteria, a purposive sampling technique will be employed. According to Aguinis (2023), purposive sampling is defined as a non-probability technique where the researcher exercises professional judgment to select specific participants from a population. Because this method relies on deliberate selection rather than random chance, Bryman (2016) emphasizes that the chosen units whether individuals, organizations, or documents must be strictly aligned with the study's specific research questions and overall scope. In quantitative research, purposive sampling can improve precision and validity by allowing researchers to focus on specific subgroups germane to the hypotheses, regardless of cross-sectional, experiment, or longitudinal designs (Memon et al., 2024). Purposive sampling will be employed using the criterion sampling technique, which involves selecting participants based on specific, predefined criteria aligned with the research objectives (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). This approach ensures that the sample consists of individuals who possess relevant characteristics central to the study, thereby enhancing the research's focus and validity (Andrade, 2021).

Sample Size
Ticehurst and Veal (2000) argues that sample size determination should be independent of the total study population, advocating specifically for the use of statistical power tests. Similarly, Cohen (2013) emphasizes that determining sample size based on statistical power is essential for methodological rigor. Defined as the probability of correctly rejecting the null hypothesis at a specific effect size and alpha level, statistical power ensures the test can detect a genuine difference in the wider population (Cohen, 2013). Furthermore, Ramalu (2010) notes that even when other sampling methods are employed, power analysis remains a valuable tool for explicitly verifying the probability of detecting effects.

To ensure the statistical power of the study, an a priori power analysis will be conducted using G*Power 3.1.9.7 software to calculate the minimum number of respondents required (Faul et al., 2009). The minimum sample size will be calculated based on the structural model's most complex regression, which involves the variable brand attitudes being predicted by five independent variables. Following the recommendations of Cohen (2013) and Hair (2014), the parameters were set to a medium effect size (f^2) of 0.15, a significance level (α) of 0.05, and a power ($1-\beta$) of 0.80. The analysis indicated that a minimum sample size of 92 respondents is required to detect a medium effect size.

Data Collection Procedure
The data for this research will be gathered through an online, self-administered questionnaire. The digital survey platform Google Forms will be utilized for this purpose. The 'Responses' tab will be monitored daily to track the sample size. Once the target sample size of 92 (which was pre-determined using a G*Power analysis) is achieved, the researchers will continue to collect more than 100 responses to ensure robustness. Next, the survey will be closed by toggling the 'Accepting responses' feature in Google Forms. The complete dataset will then be exported directly into a Google Sheet. This raw data will be screened for completeness and any potential issues. Finally, the cleaned dataset will be downloaded as a Comma Separated Values (.csv) file, making it ready for statistical analysis using SmartPLS 4.

Measurement Items

Variables	No. of Items	Scale
Internet Celebrity-Brand Congruence (Choi & Rifon, 2012)	4 items	Five-Point Likert Scale
Internet Celebrity-Consumer Congruence (Belanche et al., 2021)	3 items	Five-Point Likert Scale
Brand-Consumer Congruence (Sirgy, 1997)	3 items	Five-Point Likert Scale
Brand Authenticity (Moulard, 2016)	3 items	Five-Point Likert Scale
Internet Celebrity Involvement (Tseng & Wang, 2023)	6 items	Five-Point Likert Scale
Brand Attitudes (MacKenzie, 1989)	4 items	Five-Point Likert Scale
Purchase Intentions (Alalwan, 2018)	4 items	Five-Point Likert Scale
Willingness to Pay Premium Price (Netemeyer et al., 2004)	4 items	Seven-Point Likert Scale
Marker Variable (Oreg, 2003)	4 items	Five-Point Likert Scale

Findings

This research proposes that congruence among the internet celebrity, their self-brand, and the consumer significantly shapes brand attitudes, which in turn influence purchase intentions. Prior studies have demonstrated that millennial consumers who perceive a high degree of fit between a celebrity and a brand have significantly more positive attitudes toward the brand, which in turn raises purchase intentions (Min et al., 2019), while celebrity–consumer congruence leads to much more favourable attitudes toward the product or brand (Belanche et al., 2021). Similarly, brand–consumer congruence has been found to positively impacts consumer's attitude toward the brand (Zhu et al., 2019).

Brand authenticity and perceived celebrity involvement are also expected to reinforce favourable brand attitudes. Individuals who associate the authenticity of a specific brand with internet celebrities' self-concept may exhibit a more favourable attitude towards that brand (Park et al., 2007). Empirical research indicates that when an influencer is highly involved with a brand, consumers tend to form more positive attitudes toward that brand (Tseng & Wang, 2023). Research by Yap and Ismail (2022) confirms that authentic engagement, specifically parasocial interaction significantly enhances purchase intentions among Malaysian Generation Y consumers by building a positive attitude toward the influencer.

Finally, consistent with prior findings, willingness to pay premium price is posited to moderate the relationship between brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Mehraj & Qureshi, 2022). When consumers exhibit a robust willingness to pay premium price per product, the transformation of their positive perceptions into actual purchase intentions is less likely to be hindered by price barriers.

Discussion and Conclusion
Theoretical Implications
First, this research will contribute to Cognitive Consistency Theory to understand the attitudes and purchase intentions of Malaysian Gen Y consumers toward internet celebrity self-brands. Cognitive consistency as the preference for alignment among one's thoughts, beliefs,

attitudes, and behaviours suggest that individuals naturally seek congruence among these facets to avoid contradictions. When inconsistencies arise, such as conflicting beliefs about an internet celebrity and their brand, individuals experience psychological tension, prompting them to seek alignment to restore comfort and balance.

Secondly, the introduction of willingness to pay premium price as a moderator in understanding the relationship between consumer attitudes towards internet celebrity self-brands and purchase intentions. Previous models have largely assumed a linear path from attitude to purchase intentions. This research challenges that assumption by identifying WTPPP as a boundary condition. The findings reveal that favourable attitudes only translate into purchase intentions when the consumer's financial valuation aligns with the product's price point. This theoretical contribution bridges the gap between psychological motivation (liking the brand) and economic reality (affording the brand), offering a more holistic model of consumer behaviour.

Next, this research addresses a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the unique consumer segment of Malaysian Gen Y, who represent a large and dynamic population shaped by rapid social, economic, and technological changes. As a generation moulded by shared life experiences and evolving cultural values, they have developed distinct attitudes, motivations, and expectations as consumers. Their growing purchasing power and behavioural complexity make them an increasingly important focus for marketers and brand managers seeking to engage this evolving demographic through internet celebrity-branded products (Moreno et al., 2017).

Practical and Social Implications
The findings of this research can provide valuable insights for internet celebrities who aim to establish their own self-branded products. By understanding the attitudes and purchase intentions of Gen Y consumers, internet celebrities can tailor their branding strategies to align more closely with the values, preferences, and motivations of this demographic. This alignment can lead to the development of authentic and congruent self-brands, increasing their appeal and perceived value among millennials. Additionally, the research sheds light on the pricing challenges of internet celebrity-branded products, as consumers are often price-sensitive, particularly in the Malaysian context. Insights into factors such as willingness to pay premium price and the role of promotions can guide internet celebrities in crafting competitive pricing strategies.

Promotions should be designed to temporarily lower the WTPPP barrier for fence-sitters such as consumers who like the brand (high attitude) but find it slightly too expensive (moderate WTPPP).
- The Early Follower Discount: Using the scarcity principal, influencers can offer special pricing for the first 24 hours of a launch. This triggers a Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) that can override price sensitivity, effectively converting high-attitude/low-WTPPP followers into buyers.
- Value-Based Bundling: Instead of simply lowering prices which might damage brand authenticity, internet celebrities should use bundling (e.g., "The Full Skincare Set"). This increases the total transaction value while making the "per-unit" price seem lower, aligning better with the consumer's internal reference price.

To proactively raise the audience's WTPPP, internet celebrities should leverage their content creation skills to practice price transparency. By showing behind the scenes content of the manufacturing process, high-quality material sourcing, or ethical labour practices, the internet celebrity provides a rational justification for a higher price point. This educational content shifts the consumer's reference price upward, making the actual price tag seem more acceptable and reducing the negative moderating effect of WTPPP.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research
One limitation of this research lies in the rapidly changing nature of social media and influencer marketing. As new platforms such as TikTok, XiaoHongShu (RedNote), and Threads continue to grow in popularity, user behaviours and content consumption patterns are constantly evolving. Because of this, the proposed model may not fully capture emerging features, marketing practices, or audience dynamics on these newer platforms. Over time, the relevance and strength of certain constructs may also shift as technologies advance and consumer engagement trends evolve. Future scholars should conduct comparative platform studies (e.g., Instagram vs. TikTok) to investigate whether the strength of internet celebrity-consumer congruence varies by medium. Specifically, does the high-velocity nature of TikTok reduce the need for deep cognitive congruence, or does it heighten the need for quick, authentic cues?

Another limitation lies in the specific industry scope of this study. The current research is exclusively focused on internet celebrity self-brands within the fashion and beauty sectors. While these categories represent the most dominant sectors for internet celebrity entrepreneurship, this narrow focus limits the generalizability of the findings to other product categories. In reality, consumer decision-making processes often vary significantly across different product types. For instance, the willingness to pay premium price (WTPPP) observed in this study may be driven by the hedonic and aesthetic nature of fashion and beauty products. It remains unclear whether this same willingness would exist for low-involvement or functional products, such as food and beverage or consumer electronics, where price sensitivity might outweigh brand attachment. Therefore, future research should extend this framework to varying product categories beyond fashion and beauty. It would be valuable to conduct a comparative analysis to determine if the impact of brand authenticity and WTPPP remains consistent across different industries, or if it is unique to the high-involvement nature of the beauty and fashion lifestyle.

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