

The Role of Internet Celebrities in Shaping Compulsive Buying Behaviour in China: The Meaning Transfer Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how internet celebrities drive compulsive buying behaviors in Chinese consumers underpinned by the Meaning Transfer theory. The study expands upon the MTM by investigating how the combination of consumer knowledge and internet celebrity identity determines internet celebrity meaning which affects consumer trust and brand attitude and stimulates compulsive buying behaviour. The researchers used a quantitative approach through a structured online survey that reached 309 Chinese social media users. The research utilized Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed that consumer knowledge and internet celebrity identity have significant effects on perceived internet celebrity meaning. The effect of internet celebrity meaning generates a strong consumer trust foundation that leads to brand attitude development and triggers compulsive buying behaviour. The research reveals that trust functions as a central intermediary element in the meaning transfer process.

Keywords: Internet Celebrities, Compulsive Buying Behaviour, Internet Celebrity Meaning.

INTRODUCTION:

The phenomenon of internet celebrity (IC) known as internet fame or Wanghong functions as an influential element transforming consumer culture online. Internet celebrities establish their fame through social media platforms which allows businesses to influence consumer behavior in a cost-effective manner (Chen et al., 2021). The rise of social media has enabled influencers to perform dual roles as commercial persuaders and retail distributors (Chang & Woo, 2020). In China digital marketing is dominated by ICs who promote products through real-time interactive content on Weibo and TikTok and through live-streaming commerce (Sun, Gao, & Geng, 2021). Current business models which focus on Influencer Commerce now extend to social media advertising alongside online retailing with fan-funded rewards while revenue-sharing strategies gain widespread adoption.

Internet celebrities are common in China's digital economy yet we still lack comprehensive knowledge on how they affect consumer psychology and drive compulsive buying behaviors. The meaning transfer model (MTM) which has been traditionally applied to analyze conventional celebrity endorsement effects creates a fundamental framework for understanding (Bauer et al., 2022; Balasubramanian, Karrh, & Patwardhan, 2006; Roy & Moorthi, 2012; Wong, Fock, & Ho, 2020). Traditional celebrity fame stems from institutional exposure whereas ICs build their popularity through their own content production and direct engagement with fans. The variation identified implies unique mechanisms for meaning transfer from

celebrities to brands and consumers (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). The dynamic interaction on TikTok amplifies the urgency and emotional resonance in brand endorsements which can lead to compulsive purchasing patterns that challenge traditional consumer behavior models (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013; Yoo, Lee, & Jin, 2018). There is a research gap because dedicated theoretical frameworks to capture these nuances remain absent despite the substantial economic scale and psychological effects of IC-led marketing.

The study addresses the identified research gap by applying an advanced MTM framework to examine the meaning transfer process between internet celebrities and consumers within synchronised online retail contexts. The analysis investigates how consumer knowledge and identity shape ICs' perceived meaning which then influences trust and brand attitudes leading to compulsive buying behavior. The distinctive interactive and relational aspects of internet celebrity marketing require a new conceptual framework beyond traditional celebrity endorsement research. The impact of product involvement as a moderating factor between internet celebrities and consumers has not yet been fully investigated. The purpose of this study is to advance theoretical knowledge and practical comprehension related to consumer actions within social media retail environments in China.

This research seeks to understand the effect of meanings attributed to internet celebrities on compulsive buying behaviour of Chinese consumers within social media

platforms. This study follows several specific research objectives to guide this investigation.

- ❖ To examine the influence of consumer knowledge (CK) and internet celebrity identity (ICI) on the perceived internet celebrity meaning (ICM).
- ❖ To determine the influence of internet celebrity meaning (ICM) on consumers' trust (toward the internet celebrity).
- ❖ To explore the influence of internet celebrity meaning (ICM) and consumers' trust on the perceived brand attitudes (BA) by consumers.
- ❖ To examine the influence of brand attitudes (BA) toward consumers' compulsive buying behavior (CBB).
- ❖ To determine whether product involvement (PI) moderates the relationship between brand attitudes (BA) and consumers' compulsive buying behavior (CBB).

This research contributes valuable theoretical knowledge alongside practical significance. The research builds upon the MTM theoretical framework by adapting its principles to analyze the developing trend of internet celebrity endorsements through Chinese social media which leads to fresh perspectives on consumer psychology and product endorsement (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). The research delivers practical guidance to internet retailers who wish to use ICs as part of their digital marketing strategies. The research findings reveal critical factors like trust and brand attitude which help businesses develop effective strategies for selecting ICs and designing marketing content (Saffer, Sommerfeldt, & Taylor, 2013). The research contributes to both academic understanding and practical digital marketing approaches in dynamic online retail contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

McCracken's Meaning Transfer Model (MTM) serves as this study's theoretical backbone by examining the way celebrities transmit brand meanings to consumers through endorsement processes. In 1989 McCracken expanded his model by identifying flaws in established theories such as source credibility and match-up hypothesis and stated that endorsed brands gain meaning through celebrities' personal successes and maintained public personas. The MTM suggests consumers adopt the meanings celebrities convey through product endorsements and incorporate them into their personal identity. Traditional celebrity endorsement studies have extensively employed this model (Jay & Roy, 2016) yet researchers have not fully applied it to internet celebrity endorsements. Fame gives both traditional and online celebrities social power but they achieve this power through different methods. Internet celebrities achieve recognition through the presentation of fabricated personas and lifestyles to gain followers instead of relying on traditional career achievements (Wong, Fock & Ho, 2020). The changing landscape modifies how meaning is transmitted across digital platforms because trust levels and consumer knowledge play major roles in shaping brand perception. The research expands MTM

to explore the effects of internet celebrities' conveyed meanings on consumer attitudes and compulsive purchasing tendencies in synchronized social media selling settings.

Psychological research defines compulsive buying behaviour as a mental health condition involving persistent and excessive impulsive purchasing despite leading to serious psychological, social, occupational and financial consequences (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011; McCracken, 1989; Roy et al., 2018). The condition is commonly understood as an uncontrollable drive to purchase items immediately upon feeling an inner compulsion (Fleck, Korchia, & Le, 2012). Traditional behavioural theories including the theory of planned behaviour fail to explain compulsive buying because this behaviour skips rational decision-making processes (Jourard, 1971). The last twenty years have witnessed a substantial increase in compulsive buying behaviour which experts attribute to internet technology advancements that expanded product information availability and shopping platform access (Kim & Lennon, 2013). The trend of compulsive buying has grown stronger due to synchronous online selling platforms and internet celebrity influences which push consumers toward instant purchasing through virtual environments (Jain & Roy, 2017). Recent advances demonstrate that compulsive buying should be studied both as a mental health condition and as an activity influenced by digital marketing techniques and social media interactions.

The perceptions consumers form about internet celebrity meaning depend heavily on consumer knowledge within digital selling contexts. Consumers' prior exposure to an internet celebrity's content builds familiarity which influences their decision to engage with promotional live broadcasts. Internet celebrities establish their fame through social media which allows their audience to learn about their personal values and character before these celebrities begin any commercial promotions (Kim & Lennon, 2013). Internet celebrities use social media content and interactions to shape a distinctive persona for their audience to interpret. The constructed attributes of internet celebrities from personal values to communication style shape consumer perceptions about their meaning (Liu et al., 2020; Frankling & Marshall, 2019). The continuous gathering of perceived values results in a knowledge repository for followers which becomes essential for evaluating authenticity and credibility during live selling sessions. Consumers interpret promotional content meaning based on their prior knowledge about the internet celebrity they follow (Chen & Lin, 2018). The understanding enables effective assessment of both the influencer's product fit and their ability to influence consumer actions.

- ❖ H1: There is a significant relationship between consumer knowledge (CK) and internet celebrity meaning (ICM).

Consumers derive meanings from internet celebrities based largely on their unique personality traits and

characteristics which form their identity. Internet celebrities frequently create particular identities within digital spaces through their social media presence, identities that either reflect or differ from their real-world selves (Kim & Lennon, 2013). Internet celebrities purposefully construct their public image to gain loyal followers and build a strong personal brand. Online celebrities consciously build their digital identities to advance distinct values and aesthetics which their audiences interpret as symbolic meanings (Frankling & Marshall, 2019). Jain and Roy (2017) demonstrate that the identities created by celebrities shape how consumers interpret their meanings in commercial environments. Liu et al. (2020) demonstrates that authentic and relatable identities are crucial for achieving positive meaning transmission to consumers. Internet celebrities project identities that serve as interpretive lenses for consumers when determining authenticity as well as emotional and relevance factors which establish meaning transfer foundations in digital marketing contexts.

- ❖ H2: There is a significant relationship between internet celebrity identity (ICI) and internet celebrity meaning (ICM).

Consumers develop their trust levels for internet celebrities based on the meanings they associate with these individuals. Through repeated exposure to the content, appearance, values, and communication style of the celebrity consumers develop meanings that are communicated either via social media posts or live product promotions (Kim, Lee, & Prideaux, 2014). Audience members tend to develop trust in an internet celebrity when they recognize that the celebrity's expressed values are both consistent and genuine. The research by Sun, Gao, and Geng (2021) demonstrates that audience trust levels depend directly on how strong and clear transferred meanings from celebrities appear. Yoo, Lee, and Jin (2018) demonstrated that consumer trust develops from how individuals receive and interpret messages which determines the endorser's credibility. Audience perception of the promoted product as reliable or worthwhile depends on this trust (Zhang, Zhang, & Li, 2021). Live-stream selling requires authentic communication and instantaneous connection, making the internet celebrity's conveyed meaning fundamental for establishing audience trust which leads to purchase intentions.

- ❖ H3: There is a significant relationship between internet celebrity meaning (ICM) and consumers' trust toward the IC.

The perceptions consumers form about internet celebrities heavily impact their evaluation of the brands they promote. The image consumers create about internet celebrities originates from their displayed personality traits, appearance choices, values and lifestyle habits which together affect how their audience perceives them (Chen & Lin, 2018). The Meaning Transfer Model demonstrates that internet celebrities serve as carriers of symbolic meanings which brands can

adopt during endorsement activities. Through this process brands achieve higher perceived value which strengthens consumer emotional ties. Walker et al. (1992) found that celebrity characteristics serve as meaning stand-ins which brands adopt through the endorsed products. Internet celebrities function similarly to traditional celebrity endorsements by transmitting their personal characteristics and symbolic meanings to a brand. The meanings transferred through celebrity influence can either modify or amplify brand attitudes which affect consumer assessments of the brand's identity along with its quality and emotional appeal. When consumers view a celebrity as both favorable and meaningful they tend to develop positive attitudes toward brands that the celebrity endorses.

- ❖ H4: There is a significant relationship between internet celebrity meaning (ICM) and consumers' brand attitudes (BA).

Consumers develop brand attitudes primarily through their trust in internet celebrities who promote these brands. A strong trust bond between followers and internet celebrities leads to the same trust being transferred to products or brands the celebrities endorse. The study by Zhang, Zhang, and Li (2021) indicates that transference happens because trust functions as a mental shortcut that helps consumers judge both the influencer and their promoted product's credibility. The positive perception of a brand among consumers increases when they view the endorsing celebrity as trustworthy and sincere. The research by Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020) demonstrated that consumer attitudes are more strongly affected by their trust in internet celebrities than by existing knowledge about the brand. The perceived integrity and consistency of an influencer can have greater impact than the brand's own reputation. Endorser trust reinforces promotional messages while diminishing perceived risk and improving consumer attitudes toward the brand. The degree of trust becomes critically important for creating positive brand perceptions because consumers depend on mediated interactions in digital environments.

- ❖ H5: There is a significant relationship between consumers' trust toward the IC and their brand attitudes (BA).

The way consumers feel about brands significantly affects their buying decisions during online shopping when internet celebrities are involved. When consumers develop a favorable view of a brand this generally boosts their buying intentions which shows ongoing engagement and probable future purchases (Kim, Lee, & Prideaux, 2014). The study conducted by Wu and Lo (2009) revealed that consumers' purchasing intent can be predicted by brand attitudes which are strengthened through brand awareness and social influence. The impact of brand perception as a signal for quality grows stronger in digital marketplaces because consumers frequently use brand image to judge trustworthiness. According to Wong, Fock, and Ho (2020), internet celebrities develop consumer attitudes by projecting

their personal associations onto the brands they promote which in turn affects consumer sentiment. Chan, Leung, and Luk (2013) discovered that celebrities help enhance brand recognition while building positive emotional and cognitive associations. Consumers who form strong positive connections with brands due to celebrity endorsements tend to buy products impulsively or compulsively especially when shopping online where fast decisions are promoted.

- ❖ H6: There is a significant relationship between brand attitudes (BA) and consumers' compulsive buying behaviour (CBB).

Product involvement functions as a key moderating factor between brand attitude and compulsive buying behaviour. Product involvement shows how much personal importance and attention consumers place on a product or service. According to Wongkitrungrueng and

Assarut (2020) consumers who show greater product involvement tend to translate positive brand attitudes into purchase actions more readily during emotionally intense buying situations. The consumer's product involvement level plays a significant role in determining whether their positive brand attitude will result in compulsive buying behavior. According to Wong, Fock, and Ho (2020), product involvement serves as a decision-making filter which speeds up or slows down impulsive buying tendencies. Sun, Gao, and Geng (2021) found that involvement shapes purchasing decisions while also affecting how brand attitudes lead to direct action. For internet celebrity endorsements to move fans from admiration to purchase behavior product involvement stands as the crucial element. Online selling environments that move quickly make this moderating effect important because they amplify emotional triggers.

- ❖ H7: Product involvement moderates the effect of consumers' brand attitudes on consumers' compulsive buying behaviour.

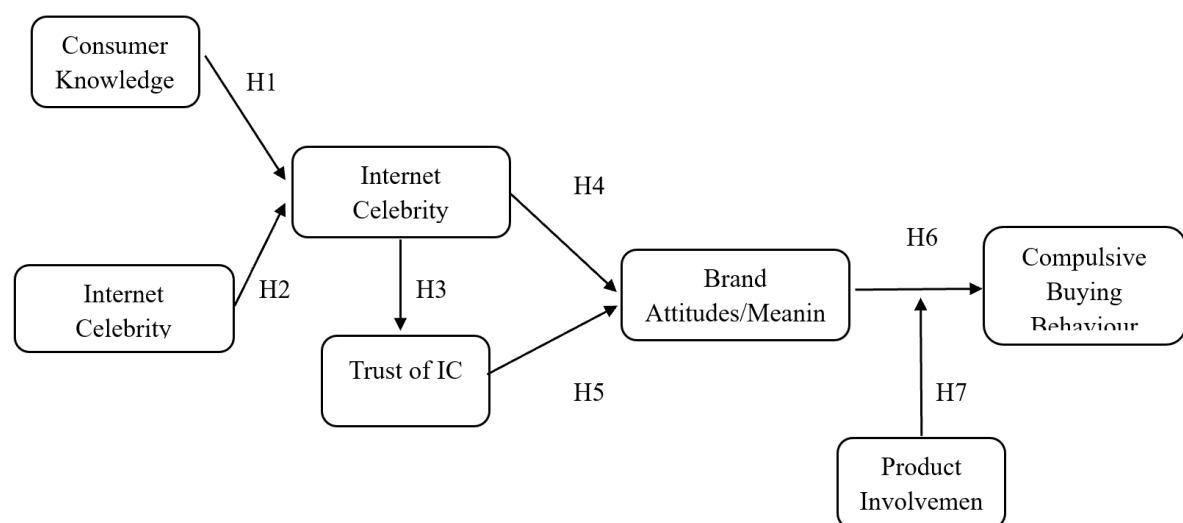


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework. Source: Authors' illustration.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

This research implemented a quantitative design which utilized deductive methods to assess the conceptual framework based on established theory. The researchers collected primary data through a structured online survey to study consumer behavior when exposed to internet celebrity endorsements on Chinese social media platforms. The study targeted Chinese general consumers between 20 and 60 years old who had previously shopped online using social media platforms like TikTok (douyin, Xiaohongshu, etc.). Because of restricted time availability and access issues the study implemented a non-probability convenience sampling approach. The digital distribution of the survey (Wen Juanxing platform) limited eligibility to individuals who actually shopped online. The research has collected 309 responses from online shoppers in China who have the experiences of purchasing products from internet celebrities across diverse platforms such as TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and WeChat. Written consent was obtained from each participant and one filtering question was used to exclude those online shoppers who have no prior experiences of shopping from internet celebrities to participate in the research. The data were collected spanning from August 2024 to December 2025. Before rolling to the full data collection, the researchers performed a preliminary test using 50 participants to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability and confirmed that all constructs achieved a Cronbach's Alpha score above 0.7 before starting full data collection.

3.2 Measurement

The survey instrument consisted of two sections including demographic profile and measurements for the key research constructs. The research used measurement items that had been adapted from past studies which had already undergone

validation. The study measured constructs such as internet celebrity identity together with consumer knowledge (Roy & Jain, 2017), trust (Roy & Jain, 2017), brand attitude (Zhang, Zhang & Li, 2021), product involvement (Sun, Gao & Geng (2021), internet celebrity meaning (Roy & Jain, 2017), and compulsive buying behaviour (Valence, d'Astous & Fortier, 1988). Multiple items assessed each construct on a five-point Likert scale to determine respondents' level of agreement from 1)strongly disagree to 5) strongly agree. The questionnaire received expert evaluation followed by a pilot test with 50 participants before its complete distribution. Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the 0.7 threshold which confirmed internal consistency and established the questionnaire items' reliability and validity for the main study.

3.3 Data Analysis

Researchers analysed the data with SmartPLS 3. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to detail demographic data of participants. The researcher used Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) to examine the hypothesized relationships described in the proposed conceptual framework shown in Figure 1. Researchers selected this method because it effectively analyzes complex causal models that include multiple latent variables. The analytical approach included two stages starting with the measurement model evaluation which verified composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha alongside Average Variance Extracted (AVE) using thresholds of 0.7 and 0.5. The discriminant validity were assessed using Fornel-Lacker and HTMT ratios. The structural model evaluation formed the second stage which determined the significance and power of relationships between constructs.

RESULT

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants.

Item	Options	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	126	40.8	40.8
	Female	183	59.2	100.0
Age	Below 25 years old	93	30.1	30.1
	26 to 35 years old	185	59.9	90.0
	36 to 45 years old	23	7.4	97.4
	46 to 50 years old	4	1.3	98.7
	51 years old and above	4	1.3	100.0
Income	Below RMB 8,000	172	55.7	55.7
	RMB 8,001 to RMB 15,000	94	30.4	86.1
	RMB 15,001 and above	43	13.9	100.0
Level of Education	High School/Diploma	80	25.9	25.9
	Undergraduate/Bachelor's Degree	172	55.7	81.6
	Postgraduate/Master's Degree	51	16.5	98.1
	PhD or Other Professional Qualifications	6	1.9	100.0
Online Shopping Frequency	Three Times a Week/More Frequent	150	48.5	48.5
	Once a Week	112	36.2	84.8
	Once a Month	41	13.3	98.1
	Never	6	1.9	100.0

Source: Authors' Compilation, extracted from Smart PLS.

Table 1. illustrates the distribution of participants' demographic profiles. The results show that women composed 59.2% of the 309 participants while men made up 40.8%, indicating higher female engagement in online shopping along with greater susceptibility to internet celebrity endorsements. The sample showed a strong concentration of 26 to 35-year-olds who made up 59.9% of participants while those below 25 years old comprised 30.1% of the group showing that younger consumers make up more than 90% of the sample. The study results align with the idea that younger populations show greater technological engagement and responsiveness towards social media influencers. The survey data revealed limited representation from older age groups with only 7.4% of respondents aged 36 to 45 years and even fewer individuals aged 46 to 50 (1.3%) and above 51 years old (1.3%). The disproportionate representation of younger consumers highlights the importance of analyzing compulsive buying behavior within this age group while noting that younger people demonstrate the most digital activity in China.

More than half of the respondents (55.7%) received less than RMB 8,000 monthly income and 30.4% earned between RMB 8,001 and 15,000 while only 13.9% reported incomes above RMB 15,001. The survey results indicate that many respondents fall under lower- to middle-income levels which could affect their spending habits and make them more prone to impulsive buying influenced by internet celebrities. The largest educational group among participants held

undergraduate or bachelor's degrees (55.7%), with high school or diploma holders composing 25.9% and postgraduate degree holders making up 16.5%. The sample displayed high educational attainment because just 1.9% held PhDs or professional qualifications. A large group of participants frequently engaged in online shopping with 48.5% doing so three times weekly or more while another 36.2% made purchases weekly. A minority of participants made purchases online monthly (13.3%), while 1.9% of them never engaged in online shopping at all. The strong level of participant engagement validates both the applicability and dependability of their feedback on online consumer behaviour patterns influenced by internet celebrities.

4.2 Assessment of Measurement Model

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Attitude/Meaning	0.704	0.805	0.522
Compulsive Buying Behaviour	0.811	0.869	0.572
Consumer Knowledge	0.750	0.788	0.584
Internet Celebrity Identity	0.702	0.815	0.526
Internet Celebrity Meaning	0.828	0.874	0.538
Product Involvement	0.767	0.856	0.606
Trust of IC	0.732	0.832	0.556

Source: Authors' Compilation, extracted from Smart PLS.

Table 2 displays the measurement reliability and convergent validity of all constructs which were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha along with Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The internal consistency of all constructs was confirmed as acceptable since their Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70 according to Hair et al. (2022). Compulsive Buying Behaviour demonstrated the highest reliability score at $\alpha = 0.811$ with Internet Celebrity Meaning trailing at $\alpha = 0.828$ while Brand Attitude and Internet Celebrity Identity both met the reliability threshold with scores of $\alpha = 0.704$ and $\alpha = 0.702$ respectively. The Composite Reliability scores for all constructs ranged from 0.788 to 0.874 which exceeded the standard threshold of 0.70 demonstrating robust construct reliability. AVE values for all constructs exceeded the 0.50 benchmark required by Fornell and Larcker (1981) which demonstrates convergent validity for the research model. Product Involvement achieved the highest AVE score of 0.606 showing that its items account for over 60% of the construct's variance.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

	BA	CBB	CK	ICI	ICM	PI	T
BA	0.722						
CBB	0.367	0.756					
CK	0.518	0.548	0.695				
ICI	0.442	0.355	0.374	0.725			
ICM	0.380	0.609	0.398	0.515	0.734		
PI	0.413	0.668	0.405	0.351	0.574	0.778	
T	0.438	0.586	0.327	0.352	0.458	0.704	0.746

Source: Authors' Compilation, extracted from Smart PLS.

The evaluation of discriminant validity involved applying both the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (Table 3) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio (Table 4). The Fornell-Larcker criterion demands that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct must surpass the correlations with other constructs. Table 3 shows that diagonal elements represent the square roots of AVEs which surpass their corresponding off-diagonal correlation values demonstrating sufficient discriminant validity. The square root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for Compulsive Buying Behaviour (CBB) stands at 0.756 which surpasses its correlation coefficients with Brand Attitude (0.367), Consumer Knowledge (0.548), and Product Involvement (0.668). The square root of Internet Celebrity Meaning (ICM) stands at 0.734 which surpasses its correlation values with Trust (0.458) and Consumer Knowledge (0.398). The empirical analyses demonstrate that each construct stands as a separate entity. Table 4 presents HTMT ratios for construct pairs which all stay below the conservative 0.85 threshold thus supporting discriminant validity according to Hair et al., (2022). The HTMT ratio between Product Involvement and Consumer Knowledge stands at 0.815 while Trust and Internet Celebrity Meaning shows 0.762 meeting acceptable standards. All HTMT ratios for all constructs are below the threshold level of 0.85. The discriminant validity has been established through combined results from Fornell-Larcker and HTMT analyses which prove each construct measures a distinct construct in the model.

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

	BA	CBB	CK	ICI	ICM	PI	T
BA							
CBB	0.422						
CK	0.716	0.559					
ICI	0.627	0.478	0.566				
ICM	0.434	0.738	0.818	0.667			
PI	0.565	0.840	0.815	0.494	0.722		
T	0.543	0.754	0.615	0.526	0.762	0.850	

Source: Authors' Compilation, extracted from Smart PLS.

4.3 Assessment of Structural Model

Table 5. Path Coefficients.

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
BA -> CBB	0.130	2.869	0.004
CK -> ICM	0.587	13.819	0.000
ICI -> ICM	0.296	7.211	0.000
ICM -> BA	0.112	1.285	0.199
ICM-> T	0.758	30.133	0.000
PI Moderates BA and CBB	0.074	1.800	0.072
T -> BA	0.353	5.352	0.000

Source: Authors' Compilation, extracted from Smart PLS.

Table 5 presents the direct path coefficients together with their corresponding t-statistics and significance levels for each hypothesized relationship. The findings show that Consumer Knowledge (CK) impacts Internet Celebrity Meaning (ICM) strongly and significantly ($\beta = 0.587$, $p < 0.001$) while Internet Celebrity Identity (ICI) predicts ICM with significant effects ($\beta = 0.296$, $p < 0.001$). The research outcomes demonstrate that Internet Celebrity Meaning (ICM) exerts a strong effect on Trust (T) ($\beta = 0.758$, $p < 0.001$) while Trust (T) significantly influences Brand Attitude (BA) ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.001$). The research demonstrates that Brand Attitude produces a significant impact on Compulsive Buying Behaviour (CBB) with statistical evidence ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = 0.004$) which proves that brand perception directly triggers impulsive purchasing actions. ICM's direct impact on BA ($\beta = 0.112$, $p = 0.199$) and Product Involvement's moderating effect between BA and CBB ($\beta = 0.074$, $p = 0.072$) proved to be statistically insignificant according to the 0.05 threshold. The research supports some aspects of the proposed hypotheses especially in the ICM, Trust and BA pathways but also identifies instances where direct effects are mediated or conditional.

Table 6. Specific Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
ICI -> ICM-> BA	0.033	1.207	0.228
ICI -> ICM -> T -> BA -> CBB	0.010	2.493	0.013
ICM -> BA -> CBB	0.015	1.017	0.310
ICI -> ICM -> T-> BA	0.079	4.857	0.000
CK -> ICM -> BA	0.066	1.275	0.203
ICI -> ICM -> T	0.224	7.255	0.000
ICM -> T -> BA-> CBB _	0.035	2.468	0.014
CK -> ICM -> T	0.445	12.050	0.000
T -> BA -> CBB	0.046	2.483	0.013
ICI -> ICM -> BA -> CBB	0.004	0.981	0.327
CK -> ICM -> BA -> CBB	0.009	0.994	0.321
ICM -> T -> BA	0.268	5.277	0.000
CK -> ICM -> T -> BA	0.157	4.544	0.000
CK -> ICM -> T -> BA-> CBB	0.020	2.275	0.023

Source: Authors' Compilation, extracted from Smart PLS.

The results of the mediation analysis displayed in Table 6 focus on specific indirect paths in the proposed model. The identified significant indirect effects demonstrate that Internet Celebrity Meaning (ICM) and Trust (T) serve as mediators. The data shows that both $ICI \rightarrow ICM \rightarrow T \rightarrow BA$ ($\beta = 0.079$, $p < 0.001$) and $ICM \rightarrow T \rightarrow BA$ ($\beta = 0.268$, $p < 0.001$) have significant statistical results which demonstrate that trust serves as the primary mediator in how identity and meaning influence brand attitude. The models $T \rightarrow BA \rightarrow CBB$ ($\beta = 0.046$, $p = 0.013$) and $ICI \rightarrow ICM \rightarrow T \rightarrow BA \rightarrow CBB$ ($\beta = 0.010$, $p = 0.013$) showcase multistep indirect processes that lead to compulsive buying behaviour. CK demonstrates an important indirect effect through trust and brand attitude with a pathway from CK to ICM to T to BA to CBB ($\beta = 0.020$, $p = 0.023$). The statistical insignificance of various direct indirect paths (e.g., $ICM \rightarrow BA \rightarrow CBB$, $CK \rightarrow ICM \rightarrow BA$) reveals that intervening constructs play a major role in mediating their effects on outcomes. Our findings demonstrate that trust plays a central role in meaning transfer and confirm the theoretical framework of our model.

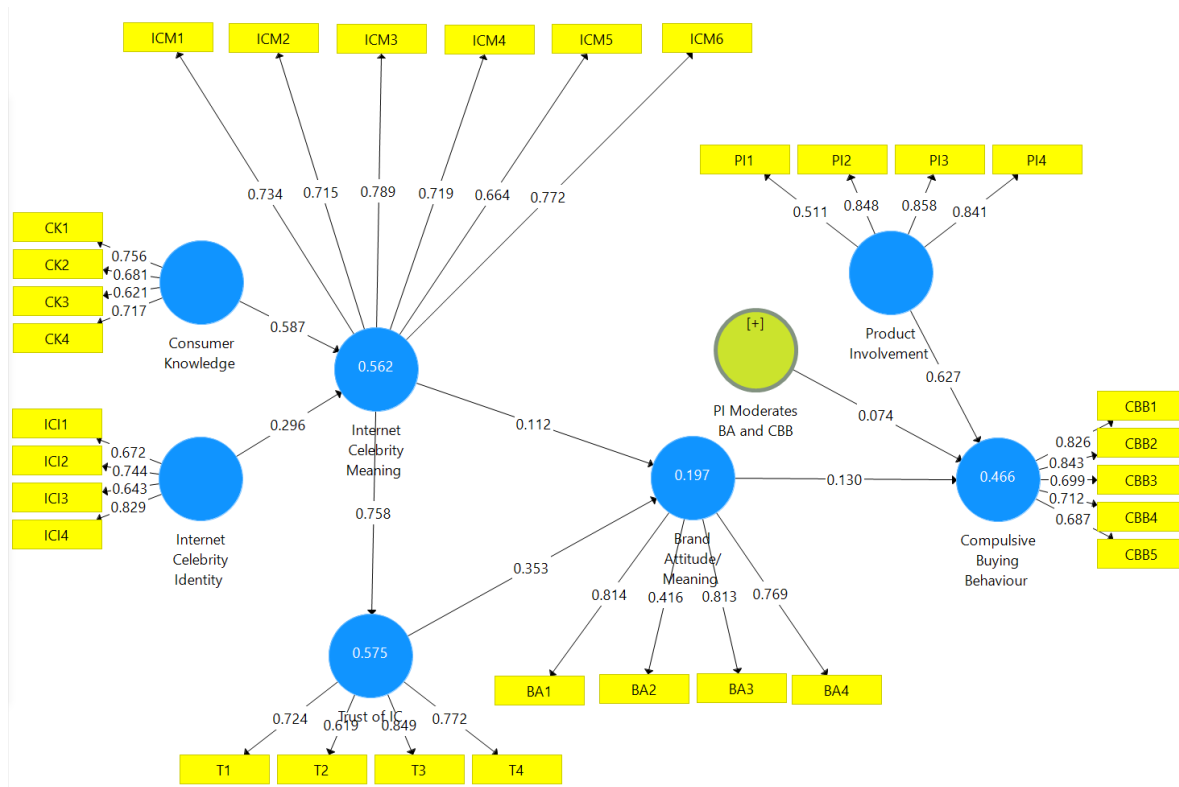


Figure 2: SEM path analysis results of the structural relationship between research variables. Source: Authors' illustration, extracted from Smart PLS.

Table 7. Hypothesis Summary and Decisions

Hypothesis	Path: From→To	T-value	P-value	Decision
H1	CK → ICM	13.819 > 1.96	0.004 < 0.05	Supported
H2	ICI → ICM	7.211 > 1.96	0.000 < 0.05	Supported
H3	ICM → T	30.133 > 1.96	0.000 < 0.05	Supported
H4	ICM → BA	1.285 < 1.96	0.199 > 0.05	Not Supported
H5	T → BA	5.352 > 1.96	0.000 < 0.05	Supported
H6	BA → CBB	2.869 > 1.96	0.004 < 0.05	Supported
H7	PI* BA → CBB	1.800 < 1.96	0.072 > 0.05	Not Supported

Source: Authors' Compilation, extracted from Smart PLS.

The results from hypothesis testing illustrated from Table 7 gives essential understanding of the structural relationships suggested in this study. The statistical evaluation covered six out of seven hypotheses with five found to be supported and two not supported. The analysis shows that hypotheses H1 and H2 demonstrate significant effects of consumer knowledge and internet celebrity identity on internet celebrity meaning with high t-values and p-values less than 0.05. The findings from H3 demonstrate that internet celebrity meaning has a strong significant influence on trust which bolsters the fundamental concept of meaning transfer. The research findings showed no support for H4 which claimed a direct connection between celebrity meaning and brand attitude thus suggesting meaning impacts brand perceptions through indirect pathways. Research supports H5 and H6 which demonstrates trust's strong impact on brand attitude and the subsequent effect of brand attitude on compulsive purchasing behaviour. The analysis showed that H7's prediction about

product involvement's moderating effect was not significant because product involvement did not enhance the relationship between brand attitude and compulsive buying according to this model.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research examined how internet celebrity meaning affects compulsive buying patterns through psychological and perceptual factors among Chinese online shoppers. The research demonstrated that internet celebrity meaning development depends heavily on consumer knowledge and internet celebrity identity according to the principles of the Meaning Transfer Model (McCracken, 1986; 1989). Consumer knowledge has a substantial impact because previous knowledge about internet celebrities and their endorsements helps shape meaning perception (Liu et al., 2020; Chen & Lin (2018)). This research outcome confirms that social media interactions serve as a basis for consumers to assess both symbolic value and credibility of internet celebrities. The meaningful connection between internet celebrity identity and audience perception establishes that influencer authenticity and personality remain crucial for shaping viewer perceptions which previous studies have shown (Jain & Roy, 2017; Frankling & Marshall, 2019). The results of this research confirm empirically that meaning transfer begins during the initial stages of influencer-led marketing.

The research shows internet celebrity meaning significantly impacts consumer trust which supports previous findings about perceived meaning as a core factor in relational credibility development (Yoo et al., 2018; Kim, Lee, & Prideaux, 2014). During live selling events or interactive e-commerce experiences followers assess influencers based on their symbolic value projections in addition to appearance and product promotion (Sun, Gao & Geng, 2021). The connection between internet celebrity meaning and trust reveals that followers tend to trust influencers whose meaning elements like creativity and credibility match their own personal values. The findings support earlier research which suggests emotional and symbolic connections drive meaning transfer between celebrities and consumers rather than simple transactional exchanges (Roy et al., 2018). The significant connection between trust and brand attitude demonstrates that trust functions as an essential mediator in creating favorable brand perceptions. According to Zhang, Zhang, and Li (2021), trust in an endorser leads consumers to transfer that trust to the product or brand when they lack direct experience with the product.

Besides, findings of this research has shown that internet celebrity meaning does not directly affect brand attitudes and this finding challenges previous studies that recognized celebrity meaning as a direct influence on brand perception (Walker et al., 1992; Chen & Lin, 2018). Internet celebrity meaning appears to affect brand attitudes indirectly by building trust rather than through a direct influence. The performative characteristics of internet celebrities combined with their fluid online identities lead followers to evaluate the influencer's trustworthiness prior to establishing their brand opinions. The research extends the understanding of the

Meaning Transfer Model by demonstrating that trust functions as an essential intermediary within the perception chain. The model's focus on trust becomes more evident through significant indirect paths that show consumer knowledge leads to meaning which develops into trust and culminates in brand attitude. The empirical evidence from mediated relationships confirms the structural complexity of the extended MTM framework (Figure 2) during live-stream selling operations which require rapid interaction.

Findings of this research has also revealed a strong link between consumer brand attitude and compulsive buying behavior while supporting prior research on the emotional and impulsive nature of online transactions prompted by celebrity endorsements (Kim & Lennon, 2013; Chan, Leung & Luk, 2013). Consumers who form positive brand perceptions through trust and emotional connection with celebrities tend to exhibit increased immediate and repetitive buying behavior. The study confirms that compulsive buying stems from psychological and emotional cues instead of being based on logical analysis (Fleck, Korchia, & Le, 2012). The digital commerce environment amplifies these tendencies due to its quick and convincing product promotion methods. The research did not find support for the moderating effect of product involvement between the variables examined. Previous research indicated that consumer product relevance strengthens brand attitude impact on buying behaviour (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020) yet the latest findings show brand attitude affects compulsive buying directly and without much need for personal relevance on highly interactive digital platforms. The influence of product involvement appears to be decreasing in contexts where social cues and emotional appeals drive purchasing decisions.

Marketers and e-commerce companies who work with internet celebrities to promote their brands can benefit from the important conclusions this research presents. The study shows that consumer knowledge and celebrity identity shape internet celebrity meanings which affect consumer trust that drives brand attitude and compulsive buying behaviour. Successful businesses need to partner with internet celebrities who maintain genuine and relatable persona consistency to build deeper emotional connections with their target audiences. Product involvement plays no significant moderating role because brand attitude by itself prompts impulsive buying decisions in rapid digital marketplaces regardless of consumer engagement levels with products. This understanding enables marketing professionals to dedicate more resources towards emotional branding strategies and influencer partnerships instead of only emphasizing product relevance. The research indicates that trust functions as a vital mediator which directs upcoming influencer marketing plans towards building authentic relationships instead of superficial

endorsements to establish enduring brand worth alongside increased purchase conversions.

Apart from contributions, this research has several limitations in which future research need to address. Sample bias emerges from non-probability convenience sampling because participants are chosen based on their accessibility rather than through random selection. The study employed cross-sectional data but consumer perceptions and compulsive buying behaviours may change over time which indicates that future research should include longitudinal studies. The conceptual framework rests on the Meaning Transfer Model but stands to gain depth through the addition of emotional and situational factors like peer pressure and time limitations that could enhance our understanding of compulsive buyings. Upcoming research should investigate how different social media platforms like TikTok and Xiaohongshu affect outcomes while analyzing traditional versus internet celebrity endorsements across various demographics and products. Real-time interaction analysis using experimental or mixed-method methods research can provide more in-depth causal insights into the development of trust and meaning. The suggestions presented work to broaden both theoretical perspectives and practical applications of influencer marketing research in changing digital commerce environments.

The research examined how the meaning derived from internet celebrities influences compulsive buying behaviour by affecting trust and brand attitude through the Meaning Transfer Model. The research shows how consumer understanding along with celebrity identity creates perceived meaning that builds trust in consumers and alters brand attitudes which leads to compulsive buying behaviour. Trust functioned as a key bridge variable which confirmed the emotional and symbolic aspects of meaning transfer in social commerce settings. Although brand attitude emerged as a key predictor of compulsive buying, product involvement failed to serve as the anticipated moderating factor. The findings demonstrate that choosing influencers who exhibit strong identity alignment and credibility plays a key strategic role in developing meaningful consumer-brand relationships. This paper extends MTM application to Chinese internet celebrities and provides both theoretical development and practical knowledge.

Conflict of Interest Statement

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Consent to Participate and Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical consent, participants were provided with detailed information about the research's objectives in the digital survey. Clearly written consent was obtained from each respondent by ticking the consent statement in the digital questionnaire otherwise participants were unable to proceed in filling up the survey.

This study did not undergo formal ethical approval as it was conducted independently and did not involve any

procedures posing risk to participants. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and their voluntary participation was obtained through informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and all data were collected and analyzed in compliance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki and the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Author Contributions Statement

Li Nan: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, writing – review & editing; Associate Professor Dr Nurlida Binti Ismail: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing; Yuan Luyao: Formal Analysis, Methodology.

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Data availability statement

Data and materials supporting this work can be accessed by request. The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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