

The Influence of Internet Celebrities on Rational Consumption Behavior

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Abstract. In the era of rapid digital technology development and internet platform growth, online celebrities are playing a critical role in shaping consumers' behavior. This paper discussed the general concept of rational and irrational behavior and the internet celebrity economy, analyzing the reasons why sometimes people are irrational through the literature review. This paper reviewed the research presented in the preceding study, which centered on rational and irrational consumption patterns, the influence mechanisms of social influencers, and consumers' rational decision-making behaviors. Ultimately, this paper identifies that celebrities shape consumers' rational consumption behaviors through three pathways: establishing emotional bonds with audiences, reinforcing conformity tendencies, and facilitating impulsive purchasing behavior. In addition, limitations and expectations of this research were also pointed out in the conclusion section, such as a lack of numerical data analysis and some typical examples, which require further discussion and more precise segmentations of the consumer group.

Keywords: Internet Celebrities, Influencer, Rational Consumption, Impulse Purchase

1. Introduction

In the era of big data and the internet environment, the great development of social media platforms has a significant influence on all sorts of aspects in public life and has become one of the major channels of e-commerce capital [1]. Drawing on data aggregated by Datareportal, as of the start of July 2025, the global user base of social media platforms stands at 5.41 billion individuals—equivalent to 65.7% of the world's total population [2]. There will be a huge market for the e-commerce economy. Due to the consistent increase in capital, people are starting to shift from off-store purchasing to online consumption [1]. According to Rohanaraj, there is a potential positive influence from the culture and social factors on consumers' purchasing process, indicating that, for the selling side, sellers should focus on the social factors that may have an impact on the product, such as the internet celebrities' effect, rather than some traditional marketing factors [3].

Currently, several scholars have researched the effect of internet celebrity consumers' behaviors. For instance, Lu and Chen found that consumer pleasure and motivation are positively effective with impulsive consumption behavior [4].

Given the great development of the online celebrity economy, it will be really meaningful and useful to discuss its impact on consumers' rational Behavior in theoretical and practical terms. This

paper will mainly discuss how Internet celebrities influence customers' rational consumption. This study employs a literature review and theoretical analysis as its core methodological approaches. These methods are utilized to systematically organize and synthesize existing research findings, thereby providing evidence-based strategic recommendations for brands and sellers to design and refine their operational strategies amid the influence of internet celebrities—with the aim of circumventing the uncritical adoption of online influencer-driven trends.

2. General overview of the influencer economy and rational consumption

2.1. The characteristic differences between rational and irrational ideas

Rational behavior usually stands for the individuals will make the choice that will maximize personal utility or satisfy their personal needs based on logical, rational, and sufficient information background, and this concept is widely applied in various fields, including economics, psychology, and sociology. And it is the basis of rational consumption research in economic development. Consumers' rational purchasing behavior has long stood as a pivotal focal point in both classical economics and Keynesian economics—a concept that retains its theoretical and practical significance within contemporary economic systems. Based on previous research, the general definition of rational consumption can be recognized as the actions taken by individuals in order to make the “best choice”, which aims to maximize personal utility [5]. In this given situation, there is another assumption of this critical concept called perfect information, and it indicates that information about all the goods and services in the market is easily to be accessed for individual consumers, which enables them to make rational calculations of their utility to make a decision that is suitable to satisfy their personal utility optimization [5]. The perfect information involves all sorts of aspects, for instance, the market value of products in different sellers and As a result, in this paper, the rational consumption is defined as: in the decision-making process, given all the necessary information and premises, referring to the individual needs and preferences, and through considering rational calculation and proper reasons, consumers are likely to make their best choice without being interrupted by other irrational factors.

As for the basic theoretical foundation of rational consumption, it can be traced back to the “utility theory” of classical economics. As behavioral economics developed, the “expected utility theory” and “prospect theory” became additional support for the research of rational consumption. More precisely, the classical utility theory stated the basis of rational consuming behaviors, assuming the final goal of customers is to maximize their satisfaction and happiness from receiving goods and services, which is known as utility. Afterwards, Daniel Bernoulli presented the expected utility theory, since there was a suspicion in the academic area towards the classical ideas, which was developed as bounded rationality [6]. Referring to Briggs, expected utility theory introduced the factors of risk and uncertainty and calculates the weighted average of the utility of all potential results to find out the expected result to make a prediction of the consumer's utility, which makes it a profitable strategy in the long run [7].

In contrast to rational behavior, irrational purchasing behavior refers to instances where individuals are influenced by non-utility-maximizing factors—including personal emotions, cognitive biases, and social influences—which ultimately steer their consumption decisions toward illogical outcomes, deviating significantly from rational analytical frameworks. Irrational consumption behavior is impulsive, blind, and follows a general trend without any deep consideration [8].

Then the differences can be seen from the concept easily. Firstly, motivations are different; Rational consumption is driven by satisfying the demand and maximizing the utility, while irrational one will be guided by external factors like mood and bias. Secondly, the two types of decision-making processes also diverge in their underlying mechanisms: while the former relies on systematic logical analysis and evidence-based research, the latter is shaped by impulsive tendencies and other affect-driven psychological responses. Admittedly, all actions taken by individuals are aimed at satisfying their needs. However, the irrational action might lead to regret, depression, and other economic and emotional pressures. After all, rational behavior emphasizes the logical and reasonable analysis of certain goods and services.

2.2. Online celebrity economy

With the great development of the internet and the enhancement of data digitalization, there is a certain group of people who keep existing and stay actively and famous on the internet, particularly on social media platforms, who are recognized as the “internet celebrities”. It can be noticed that internet celebrities can promote online consumption by transferring their fans into customer groups through brand promotion and marketing [1]; Therefore, the network economy has been focused on by the sellers for the first time in China, just after the first advertisement of PAPI, worthing 22 million yuan, igniting the online celebrity economy industry and attracting consumer’s attention [9]. Furthermore, scholars conceptualize the “internet celebrity economy” as a socio-economic phenomenon, which refers to a scenario where internet influencers tend to convert traffic into commercial conversion via fans’ purchasing behavior through diverse strategic pathways—including crafting a tailored media persona for precision marketing, facilitating group interactive engagement, and launching experiential marketing initiatives [1,9]. However, there are different standards to distinguish and classify the types of the internet celebrity economy, since the general background of each can be totally different. To be precise, on the online social media platform, there are several approaches and ways to be popular and become an influencer, which means that there is no certain requirement to be an “internet star”, anything that has a strong representativeness and dissemination power is able to be success on the internet, no need to be a human being or an animal, even an amusing image can fit the general concept of internet celebrity.

Referring to Zuo and Pan’s conclusion of Liu’s work in 2021 [9], this paper can contribute a figure that gives a primary classification of the “online celebrity” marketing model (Figure 1), which also illustrates the present different methods to distinguish the types of internet influencers.

Table 1. The composition diagram of the marketing model of the Internet celebrity economy

Online Celebrities' Economy				
Marketing approaches	Monetization methods	Platform used	Type of internet celebrities	Content marketing
Interactive Marketing	E-commerce traffic diversion	Comprehensive social platforms	Live-streaming influencers	Pictures and Text
Precision marketing	Advertisement	Graphic and text-based social platforms	Event-related Internet celebrities	Short video
Personification Marketing	subscription-based payment for content viewing	Audio-based social platforms	Online writer-type influencer	Live broadcast
Experience Marketing	Participate in offline activities	Live streaming platforms	Expert-type influencer	Audio

3. Internet celebrities influence rational consumption

The approaches of how online celebrities influence customer purchasing can be categorized into various aspects, such as conformity behavior, trust transferring, and stimulation-organism-response theory. Firstly, the influence of internet influencers on consumers' rational consumption behavior manifests as conformity behavior—a psychological and behavioral tendency wherein individuals, under perceived group pressure, tend to abandon their personal independent critical thinking and align their consumption decisions with the behavioral norms of the reference group. Given the internet celebrity economic background, internet influencers are likely to guide their fans to make consistent decisions with others to achieve profit maximization through their great social influence. For instance, when someone famous on the internet recommends a certain kind of product, there will be a group of fans and followers affected by the conformity effect, believing blindly in this influencer and stopping following individual needs, and making their consumption follow the trend. Furthermore, when those around them also see their consumption choice, they might also follow the insistence to make purchases even though they don't really need the products, which will eventually lead to the trend of comparison, since most people's lives and studies take place in a group environment [10]. It is obviously an unhealthy consumption concept, and also another manifestation of herd mentality.

In addition, influencers can also affect people's rational decision-making process by affecting the trust transfer process. For instance, the recommendations and suggestions from some famous and expert internet celebrities can enhance the brand's attraction for a certain group by shifting the belief in influencers to a preference for the recommended brands. More precisely, their followers will choose to keep purchasing the product recommended due to the enjoyment and belief in specific famous people [11]. This means that brands can enhance their competitiveness to compete with their rivals through the celebrity economy. However, the brand should not be overly reliant on a particular influential person and is required to focus on some other factors that really matter, like customer service and product quality. After all, when the consumer starts to rethink rationally in the long run, poor-quality products will be predicted to give up.

Moreover, stimulation-organism-response theory is generally applied in the online celebrity economy, especially in the Chinese e-commerce livestreaming field, which is also a derivative industry of the internet celebrity economy. This concept is introduced to research the influence of the external environment on individual activities and feelings. According to Chen , Chinese influencers are keen on creating a lively atmosphere in the broadcasting room and developing relationships with others by getting in touch with people's general preferences [12]. Consequently, followers will turn to consume due to the idea of being in the same socializing network, while the strangers will be attracted by the sense of nervousness and scarcity. Besides, other staff are arranged to communicate with the anchors to mislead the consumers and emphasize the pricing advantage of their products to create a different shopping environment compared to the traditional approach, which will significantly enhance the buying eagerness.

4. Other potential intermediate factors

Besides, some potential intermediate elements will be significant in the process. The celebrity characteristic is also a key factor that influences consumers' rational behavior. It can be predicted that customers will acknowledge the recommendation provided by influencers with high-level credibility, and during that period, the decision-making process is also reasonable and logical. Previous research has emphasized that celebrities' traits, such as credibility and attraction, played a

crucial role in developing consumer trust, while the trust will further affect the perceived product quality and intention to purchase [13]. Credibility of influencers not only depends on the individual images but also is connected with the expertise of the content, transparency, and the connection with certain brands. If internet influencers' recommendations align with followers' personal preferences or resonate with the value orientations of the follower community, the efficiency of commercial conversion will be enhanced. This outcome arises because such alignment facilitates the establishment of emotional bonds between influencers and consumers, which in turn strengthens consumers' brand trust and conviction [13]. However, it should be recognized that the expertise knowledge cannot always be transferred to the perceived security of the customers, which indicates that the endorsement of internet celebrities is not always effective in building up consumer confidence, especially when it comes to a field that does require a professional technical background. Otherwise, the drawbacks of improper advocacy will be extremely large to afford.

The influence of different consumer groups on Internet celebrities also varies. In general, differences due to factors as gender, age group, and the living area will also cause different ideas and the ability to consume [14]. To be more specific, customers' levels of controlling buying desire also vary, when some people like to seize the day, others prefer to delay the satisfaction of consumption desires [14].

5. Conclusion

Overall, amid the era of rapid advancement in internet and social media platforms, internet celebrities have emerged as a pivotal force within the contemporary consumption ecosystem. Leveraging their substantial social influence, these influencers drive consumers' purchasing behaviors; concurrently, they also provide innovative marketing channels for the e-commerce sector.

For the theoretical implications, this paper discussed the definition and distinction of rational and irrational consumption behaviors, concluding with the theoretical foundations of this topic, like expected utility. Based on the deep research in the previous work, this paper presents how internet celebrities can affect people's rational consumption, indicating that creating an emotional connection with followers and inducing decision-making without enough logical analysis are the basic underlying logic of influencer effect. For the practical level, some available services are suggested for the sellers to apply when doing marketing, such as finding a balance of brand preference and celebrity effect, avoiding following the trend blindly, as well as focusing on the guidance of consumers' rational behavior, like cooperating with high credibility influencers, and making some accurate promotions.

This paper has discussed the relationship between internet celebrity and rational consumption, but there are still some limitations. For instance, it only relies on the literature review and logical analysis without numerical support or specific data. In future research, some quantitative services and research should be further developed to prove the actual effect of the online celebrity economy. In addition, the differences in consumer groups are only summarized in general without providing a deep analysis, which requires further guidance for research direction. Moreover, the new form of internet celebrities is also overlooked, but is worth talking about, like the digital spokesperson.

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