

Emotional Intelligence as a Mediator between Celebrity Endorsement and Gen-Z Consumer Behavior in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between celebrity influence and the purchasing behavior of Generation Z in Malaysia. In an era dominated by social media, celebrities have emerged as influential figures in shaping consumer preferences, particularly among younger generations. Despite the growing significance of celebrity endorsements, there remains limited research on the extent to which emotional intelligence influences or mediates this impact on consumer decision-making. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how emotional intelligence affects the decision-making processes of Gen-Z consumers when exposed to celebrity endorsements. A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing a survey to collect data from a representative sample of Gen-Z individuals in Malaysia. The survey assessed the levels of emotional intelligence, the impact of celebrity endorsements, and purchasing behavior. Statistical analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between these variables and to determine whether emotional intelligence acts as a mediator between celebrity influence and consumer purchasing decisions.

The results of the study reveal that emotional intelligence significantly mediates the relationship between celebrity influence and the purchasing behavior of Gen-Z consumers. Specifically, the study found that emotional intelligence enhances the perceived credibility and emotional appeal of celebrity endorsements, which, in turn, influences purchasing decisions. This suggests that the emotional connection fostered through celebrity endorsements is crucial for Gen-Z consumers, and that marketers should consider the role of emotional intelligence when crafting celebrity-based marketing campaigns. The findings of this study have practical implications for marketers and brands seeking to engage effectively with the Gen-Z demographic. By understanding the mediating role of emotional intelligence, brands can refine their marketing strategies to better resonate with this consumer group. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence in the context of celebrity endorsements, offering valuable insights into the psychological mechanisms that drive purchasing behavior among Gen-Z consumers in Malaysia.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Celebrity Influence, Purchasing Behaviour, Gen-Z, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement and widespread adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) has led to the emergence of live streaming commerce, a phenomenon that integrates live broadcasting with consumer interaction and purchasing opportunities. Popular social media platforms such as YouTube Live, Facebook Live, and TikTok Live facilitate this dynamic commerce model, where broadcasters promote products in real-time and viewers can make direct purchases and engage through various forms of interaction, such as virtual gift-giving (Fei et al., 2021). In this evolving commerce landscape, retailers must adapt to technological innovations to remain competitive (Bradlow et al., 2017). Additionally, the increasing

availability of big data and real-time consumer information has equipped retailers with valuable insights to understand and cater to consumer preferences more effectively (Kawaguchi et al., 2019). At the same time, consumer behavior is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by the omnipresence of electronic commerce, making consumers more susceptible to impulsive buying tendencies (Kumar et al., 2021).

In Malaysia, the live streaming commerce industry is rapidly growing, driven by the country's increasing digital penetration and widespread use of social media platforms. What sets Malaysia apart from other markets is its diverse demographic, with a blend of Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures, each with unique preferences and consumption patterns. This diversity creates an opportunity for live streaming commerce to cater to varied tastes, making influencer marketing and celebrity endorsements highly effective in engaging different ethnic groups. The Malaysian consumer is also highly social media-savvy, with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube being integral to daily life, making live streaming an ideal medium for product promotion (Yolanda et al. (2023).

Furthermore, Malaysia's young population, particularly Generation Z, is more likely to embrace live streaming as a shopping tool, making them a prime audience for influencers. This younger demographic is also highly engaged with social causes, making the credibility and authenticity of celebrity influencers even more crucial in determining purchasing decisions. This generation, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is deeply embedded in social media and celebrity culture, with social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube playing a major role in shaping their purchasing decisions. Celebrities exert considerable influence over Gen-Z consumption patterns, through product endorsements, brand collaborations, and lifestyle portrayals.

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions and those of others, plays a crucial role in moderating how Gen-Z consumers respond to celebrity endorsements. High-EI individuals are more discerning in evaluating celebrity endorsements, making informed decisions based on personal preferences rather than simply following celebrity influence. They are better equipped to distinguish between genuine product value and superficial persuasion. In contrast, individuals with lower emotional intelligence are more vulnerable to emotional appeals, social validation, and the desire to emulate celebrities, which may lead to impulsive or uninformed purchasing decisions. Thus, EI acts as a critical filter through which celebrity influences are processed and translated into consumer behavior.

In the Malaysian context, where celebrity endorsements and influencer marketing play a significant role in shaping consumer choices, understanding the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on Gen-Z purchasing behavior is essential for marketers, brands, and policymakers. By recognizing varying levels of emotional intelligence, brands can tailor marketing strategies that resonate with different segments within the Gen-Z population, taking into account their emotional and cognitive processing when exposed to celebrity endorsements.

This essay provides a descriptive analysis of how emotional intelligence mediates the impact of celebrity influence on Gen-Z purchasing behavior in Malaysia. The findings suggest that marketers must consider emotional intelligence when crafting strategies aimed at this demographic. By acknowledging the diverse emotional intelligence levels, brands can create personalized campaigns that engage Gen-Z consumers more effectively, potentially enhancing their decision-making and fostering brand loyalty.

In conclusion, the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on celebrity influences on Gen-Z purchasing behavior in Malaysia is a complex and important area for future research. Understanding how emotional intelligence shapes consumer responses to celebrity marketing can provide valuable insights for businesses seeking to engage this generation. This study highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in consumer behavior and offers implications for marketers aiming to effectively target Gen-Z in the Malaysian consumer market. Future research should explore broader cultural contexts, emerging technologies, and the changing dynamics of e-commerce to further understand how emotional intelligence interacts with celebrity influence in shaping consumer decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study is situated within several interconnected fields: Consumer Behaviour, Emotional Intelligence (EI), Celebrity Endorsement, Influence Marketing, and Social Psychology.

Consumer Behaviour focuses on the decision-making processes of Geo-Z consumers in Malaysia, particularly in relation to how celebrity endorsements shape their purchasing decisions. This field explores psychological and behavioral factors, such as brand loyalty, product preferences, and the criteria Gen-Z uses to evaluate purchases.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) serves as a moderating factor in this study, examining how individuals with different levels of EI respond emotionally to celebrity endorsements. EI includes the abilities to recognize one's own emotions and those of others, to regulate emotions, and to use this awareness in making decisions and managing relationships. This aspect influences how Gen-Z consumers process and act upon marketing messages delivered by celebrities.

Celebrity Endorsement examines the effectiveness of celebrities as promotional tools. This field investigates how factors such as credibility, relevance, and attractiveness of celebrities impact the purchasing behavior of Gen-Z in Malaysia, providing insights into the extent to which celebrity endorsements affect consumer attitudes and purchasing intentions.

Influence Marketing focuses on how brands use influencers, including celebrities, to affect consumer behavior. By studying how endorsements from high-profile figures influence perceptions and behaviors, this field sheds light on how marketers leverage celebrity power to drive engagement and purchasing decisions.

Social Psychology investigates the social dynamics that influence consumer behavior, including the role of social influence, persuasion, and group behaviors. This field helps understand how celebrities' influence over Gen-Z is shaped by broader social contexts, including peer relationships and societal norms.

Purchasing Behaviour

The purchasing behavior of Gen-Z consumers in Malaysia is crucial in understanding consumer trends. This review synthesizes literature that emphasizes the moderating role of emotional intelligence in consumer decision-making. The theoretical framework developed integrates Consumer Behaviour Theory and Emotional Intelligence Concepts, proposing that EI mediates the relationship between factors such as brand authenticity, peer influence, and purchasing behavior. Consumers with higher EI are more likely to make rational, informed decisions, critically assessing marketing stimuli (Luo et al., 2019). In contrast, consumers with lower EI may be more prone to impulsive, emotion-driven purchasing decisions (Szczygiel et al., 2020).

Despite growing interest, there is a lack of research exploring how emotional intelligence specifically moderates purchasing behavior among Malaysian Gen-Z consumers. Previous studies tend to focus on broad consumer groups, without addressing the unique traits of Gen-Z or the interplay between emotional intelligence and other factors influencing purchasing behavior.

Celebrity Expertise

Celebrity expertise has increasingly become a crucial element in shaping consumer perceptions and driving purchasing behavior, especially in industries where trust and authority are key. Celebrities who possess a recognized level of expertise in a specific field—such as sports, beauty, or health—are more likely to persuade consumers to engage with the products they endorse. For example, fitness influencers promoting workout gear or skincare experts endorsing beauty products are perceived as more credible due to their specialized knowledge, which in turn enhances the effectiveness of their endorsements. Studies indicate that consumers place a higher value on products endorsed by celebrities who are seen as experts in the relevant area, as their authority adds legitimacy to the product's quality (Khamis et al., 2020).

In the digital age, social media platforms allow celebrities to interact directly with their audience, sharing their expertise and deepening their influence. By offering valuable content, such as tutorials, product demonstrations, or expert tips, celebrities can establish themselves as reliable sources of information, which fosters trust among their followers. Recent research has shown that celebrity influencers who actively demonstrate their knowledge and expertise in an engaging way tend to achieve higher levels of consumer trust and higher purchasing intent (Ki et al., 2020). This direct engagement not only helps build credibility but also creates a sense of authenticity that is particularly important to today's consumers.

Celebrity expertise is especially influential among younger consumers, who value authenticity and transparency when it comes to endorsements. Generation Z, in particular, is known for prioritizing real, knowledgeable individuals over traditional celebrity endorsements that appear disingenuous. Research shows that younger audiences are more likely to trust and engage with influencers who offer genuine advice based on their expertise, rather than merely promoting products for profit (Marwick, 2019). This shift in consumer behavior underscores the growing importance of celebrity expertise in digital marketing, where knowledge-based endorsements often result in greater influence over purchasing decisions.

Celebrity Influence

In the digital era, the influence of celebrities on consumer behavior is particularly significant among Gen-Z, especially in Malaysia, where social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube play a central role in shaping consumer decisions. Celebrities are perceived as role models, influencers, and trendsetters, and their impact on Gen-Z's purchasing behavior is profound. They shape consumer attitudes and emotional responses to products through their endorsements.

Celebrity Influencers, a subset of celebrities, are individuals who maintain active engagement across various social media platforms. They operate in tandem on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, making them accessible and relatable to their followers. Influencers shape consumer attitudes and emotional responses to products through ads and promotions (Ahmed et al., 2015). Research into micro-celebrities highlights how these influencers foster a sense of close communication with followers, leading to stronger emotional connections and more significant influence on purchasing decisions (Mohamad, 2021).

The power of celebrity influence is evident in the way consumers follow celebrities' lifestyles, emulating their habits and preferences. A study by Lotonina (2019) found that followers form parasocial relationships with celebrities, enhancing their trust and reliance on celebrity opinions when making purchasing decisions. This effect is especially prevalent among female consumers in Russia, who feel that by adopting their idols' lifestyles, they can gain social status or attractiveness. Similarly, "Instafamous" influencers, despite lacking traditional fame, have become highly influential due to their relatable content and strong online presence (Jin et al., 2019).

Celebrities not only influence purchasing behavior by showcasing their lifestyles but also create emotional bonds with their audience. This emotional attachment fosters trust and loyalty, making it more likely that consumers will act on the recommendations of these figures, particularly when the products align with their values or desires (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Therefore, understanding celebrity influence is key for businesses aiming to engage with Gen-Z in Malaysia.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of celebrities is a significant factor influencing Gen-Z's purchasing behavior. When celebrities endorse products, they serve as brand ambassadors whose perceived trustworthiness impacts consumer attitudes and purchasing intentions. Gen-Z consumers rely on celebrity endorsements to assess the credibility of products. Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in this evaluation process. Those with higher EI are better able to discern sincerity in celebrity endorsements, while those with lower EI are more likely to fall for superficial or persuasive tactics (Luo et al., 2019).

The theoretical framework suggests that EI mediates the relationship between celebrity trustworthiness and Gen-Z purchasing behavior. Consumers with higher EI levels are more skeptical of celebrity endorsements, whereas those with lower EI are more easily swayed by perceived trustworthiness and credibility. This highlights the complex relationship between emotional intelligence, celebrity trustworthiness, and purchasing behavior among Gen-Z consumers in Malaysia.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has garnered attention for its role in various domains, including leadership and interpersonal relationships. Studies suggest that individuals with high EI are more adept at managing emotions, leading to better decision-making in professional and personal contexts (Bar-On et al., 2020). Salovey and

Mayer (1990) originally conceptualized EI as an ability-based construct, emphasizing the ability to reason with emotions and use emotional knowledge to enhance thought. They argued that high EI allows individuals to make more adaptive decisions by regulating and utilizing emotions effectively. This multidimensional conceptualization of EI highlights its significance in moderating consumer behavior, particularly in relation to celebrity endorsements.

Relationship between Purchasing Behaviour and Celebrity Influence, Trustworthiness and Expertise

This research explores the interaction between celebrity endorsements and consumer behavior, specifically focusing on the role of celebrity expertise, trustworthiness, and influence. When these influencers build credibility and show a genuine understanding of the products they endorse, they can capture the attention and spark greater interest among Gen Z consumers purchasing behavior. This trust, in turn, increases the likelihood of consumers acting on endorsements (Khamitov & Salganik, 2019).

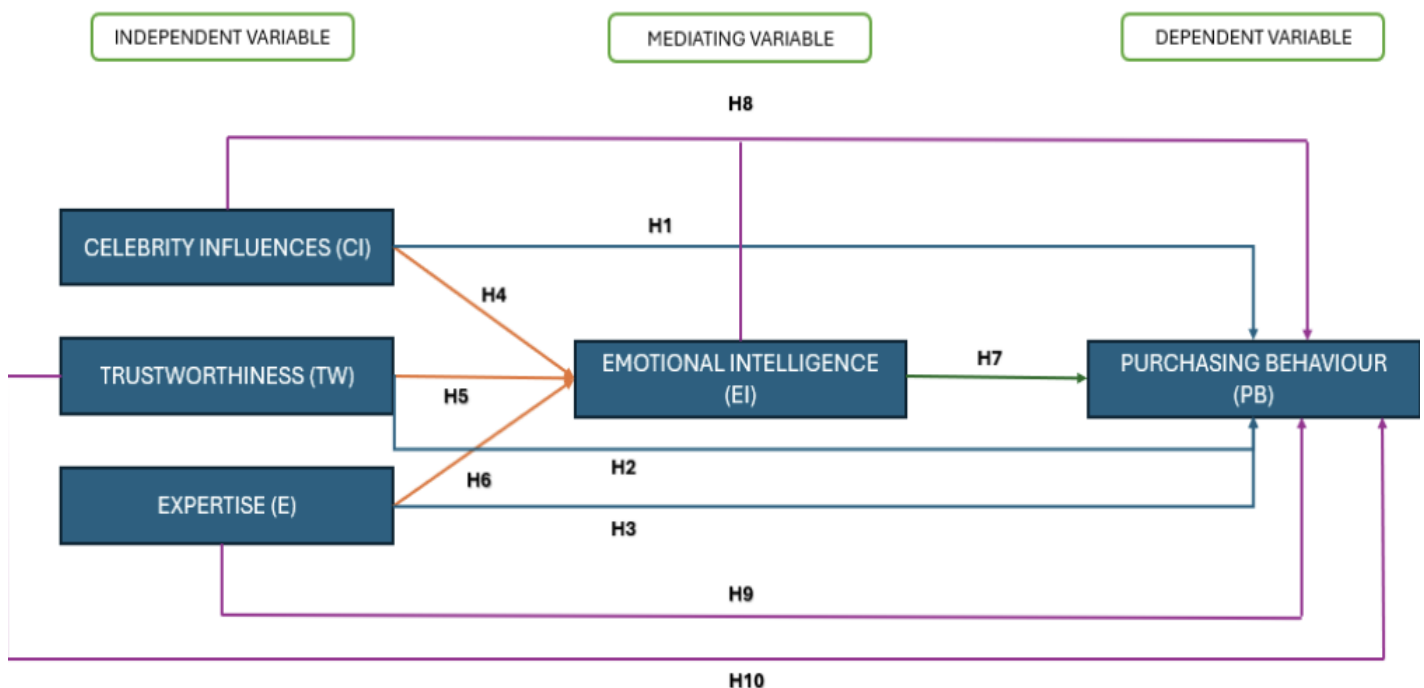
Furthermore, a celebrity’s physical appeal, performance, and knowledge contribute to their ability to influence purchasing decisions. A strong visual presence can amplify a product’s impact, particularly when there is alignment between the celebrity’s image and the brand’s values. Marketers must consider these factors when selecting celebrities to promote products, ensuring a strategic fit between the brand ethos and the celebrity’s image.

Relationship between Dependent Variable, Independent Variable and Mediating Variable

Celebrity influences play a significant role in shaping Gen-Z’s purchasing behavior in Malaysia, but emotional intelligence serves as a moderating factor in this relationship. Factors such as celebrity expertise, trustworthiness, and influence shape consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions (Khamitov & Salganik, 2019). Celebrity reputation and expertise are particularly important in product categories that resonate with Gen-Z consumers, such as fashion, beauty, and technology (Kim & Han, 2021).

The physical appeal of celebrities continues to be an important factor in their ability to attract and influence consumers (Lin & Wang, 2020). However, emotional intelligence moderates this process by making consumers with higher EI more skeptical of celebrity endorsements, whereas those with lower EI are more influenced by the endorsement’s perceived trustworthiness. Understanding how these factors interact is essential for understanding the mechanisms influencing Gen-Z consumer behavior in Malaysia.

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, both primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study. Secondary data, which refers to valuable information obtained from existing literature and past research, was primarily used in Chapter Two for the literature review. These secondary sources included books, journals, e-journals, newspapers, and online portals, and were carefully processed and analyzed before being incorporated into the study, with clear citations for reference (Abdul Halim, 2007).

Additionally, primary data was collected to provide a more up-to-date and accurate perspective of the study. Primary data, which is firsthand information obtained through direct investigation (Abdul Halim, 2007), was gathered using a quantitative approach. Questionnaires were distributed to collect the necessary data, and a survey method was adopted for distribution. The survey approach is commonly used to gather data from a large group of respondents, providing generalized results (Naoum, 2012).

The research focuses on this specific group of people, known as "digital natives", since they are the first to have grown up with the internet ingrained in their daily lives. Based on data from the Department of Statistics, Gen-Zs accounted for 26% of Malaysia's 32.6 million population in 2019. That equates to over 8.476 million Gen-Zs in Malaysia alone. (J.S.Vincent & Ahmad, 2021). However, due to time and resource constraints, a sample was selected from the larger population. Sampling size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's Table, which specified a sample size of 180 respondents.

The questionnaires designed for this study included both open-ended and close-ended questions. The close-ended questions consisted of multiple-choice, ranking, and Likert-scale types. The performance appraisal method chosen for this research was a rating scale. The rating scale method was selected due to its ease of preparation, low cost, and the ability to evaluate a large number of employees quickly. While this method is subjective, it can be made more objective by carefully selecting the criteria for evaluating work performance.

The criteria for evaluating work performance were chosen after reviewing five studies that investigated the performance of employees in the construction industry. Among these studies, Hanna and Brusoe's model was adopted because it provided more detailed and comprehensive performance criteria. Their model evaluates work performance across six categories: knowledge of work, capabilities in work, management skills, attitude toward work, personal skills, and other job-related skills.

For analyzing the collected data, different techniques were applied based on the types of questions in the questionnaire. Frequency distribution was used to analyze multiple-choice and yes-or-no questions, while Likert-scale questions were analyzed using a specific Likert scale analysis. These methods allowed for a clear interpretation of the data, providing valuable insights into the subject matter.

In conclusion, the research employed both secondary and primary data collection methods to gather valuable information. By utilizing a combination of literature review and empirical data obtained through surveys, this study offers a comprehensive examination of the research topic, guided by established performance appraisal models and appropriate data analysis techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis on Demographic Profile of the Respondents

A total of 226 individuals participated in the study, with 180 responses from Gen-Z, the primary target group. The analysis of their demographic profile reveals several key trends. Among the 180 Gen-Z respondents, 115 were female (63.9%), while 65 were male (36.1%), indicating a higher female participation rate. The respondents were classified into three age groups, with the majority (79.6%) falling within the Gen-Z category, born between 1995 and 2010. Smaller percentages were represented by those born between 1980-1994 (17.7%) and 2011-2024 (2.7%).

In terms of education, most participants held a degree (68.3%), while a smaller group had completed a diploma (23.9%). Other educational qualifications included 4 respondents with a Master's degree (2.2%), 5 with an

SPM qualification (2.8%), 3 with an STPM qualification (1.7%), and 2 with other qualifications such as Foundation in Arts and CBS (1.1%).

Regarding shopping preferences, a significant majority of respondents (88.3%) favored online shopping platforms, while 11.7% preferred physical stores. These findings reflect the demographic characteristics and shopping habits of Gen-Z, providing valuable insights into their behavior and preferences within the context of this research. (Refer Table 1)

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents: n=180

Variables		n=180	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	115	63.9
	Male	65	36.1
Year of Birth	1980 - 1994	180	79.6
	1995 - 2010	40	17.7
	2011 - 2024	6	2.7
Highest Education Qualification	SPM	5	2.8
	STPM	3	1.7
	Diploma	43	23.9
	Bachelor's Degree	123	68.3
	Masters's Degree	4	2.2
	Others	2	1.1
Shopping Platform	Online Stores	159	88.3
	Physical Stores	21	11.7

Reliability Analysis

A reliability test was conducted to ensure the consistency and accuracy of data collected for the study on emotional intelligence mediating the impact of celebrity endorsements on Gen-Z purchasing behavior in Malaysia. Internal consistency of the survey items, including celebrity influence, emotional intelligence, purchasing behavior, and demographics, was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. This statistical measure, ranging from 0 to 1, evaluates how well items measure the same construct, with values of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable for reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The test confirmed the survey's reliability for studying the targeted constructs.

Cronbach's alpha values for the study's variables ranged from 0.656 to 0.894, indicating varying levels of internal consistency. Purchasing Behavior (0.700) and Emotional Intelligence (0.696) fell within the lower acceptable range, demonstrating reasonable reliability but with potential for improvement. Celebrity Influence (0.810) and Trustworthiness (0.894) exhibited good to excellent reliability, reflecting strong internal consistency in measuring these constructs. Expertise (0.656), slightly below the acceptable threshold, suggests the need for item revision to enhance reliability. Overall, most constructs displayed satisfactory to exceptional consistency, supporting the reliability of the survey instrument (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 2: Coefficient of Purchasing Behaviour, Celebrity Influence, Trustworthiness and Expertise

Variables	Case Processing Summary	n	%	Cronbach's Alpha	No. Of Statements
Dependent Variables					
Purchasing Behaviour	Valid	180	0.	0.700	5
	Excluded	1048349	100.0		
	Total	1048529	100.0		
Independent Variables					
Celebrity Influence	Valid	180	0.	0.810	5
	Excluded	1048349	100.0		
	Total	1048529	100.0		

Trustworthiness	Valid	180	0.	0.894	5
	Excluded	1048349	100.0		
	Total	1048529	100.0		
Expertise	Valid	180	0.	0.656	6
	Excluded	1048349	100.0		
	Total	1048529	100.0		
Mediator					
Emotional Intelligence	Valid	180	0.	0.696	5
	Excluded	1048349	100.0		
	Total	1048529	100.0		

Analysis of Research Questions

RQ1: Does celebrity influence relate to purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia?

Celebrity influence is strongly positively related to purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia, as indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.706 ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that higher celebrity influence is associated with an increase in purchasing behavior.

RQ2: Does trustworthiness relate to purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia?

Trustworthiness is strongly positively related to purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.605 ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that greater trustworthiness correlates with higher purchasing behavior.

RQ3: Does expertise relate to purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia?

Expertise is moderately positively related to purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia, as shown by a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.410 ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that higher perceived expertise is linked to an increase in purchasing behavior.

RQ4: Does celebrity influence relate to emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia?

Celebrity influence is not significantly related to emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.057 ($p = 0.446$). This indicates that celebrity influence does not have a meaningful correlation with emotional intelligence.

RQ5: Does trustworthiness relate to emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia?

Trustworthiness is not significantly related to emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia, as indicated by a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.052 ($p = 0.490$). This shows that trustworthiness does not have a meaningful correlation with emotional intelligence.

RQ6: Does expertise relate to emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia?

Expertise is moderately positively related to emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.365 ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that higher perceived expertise is associated with higher emotional intelligence.

RQ7: Does emotional intelligence relate to purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia?

Emotional intelligence is not significantly related to purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.080 ($p = 0.284$). This indicates that emotional intelligence does not have a meaningful correlation with purchasing behavior.

RQ8: Is the relationship between celebrity influence and purchasing behavior mediated by emotional intelligence?

Based on correlations, emotional intelligence does not significantly correlate with either celebrity influence or purchasing behavior. Thus, it is unlikely that emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between celebrity influence and purchasing behavior.

RQ9: Is the relationship between trustworthiness and purchasing behavior mediated by emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence does not significantly correlate with either trustworthiness or purchasing behavior. Therefore, emotional intelligence is unlikely to mediate the relationship between trustworthiness and purchasing behavior.

RQ10: Is the relationship between expertise and purchasing behavior mediated by emotional intelligence?

While expertise is related to both emotional intelligence and purchasing behavior, the lack of a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and purchasing behavior suggests that emotional intelligence does not mediate the relationship between expertise and purchasing behavior.

Analysis of Hypotheses

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between celebrity influences and purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

The correlation coefficient between celebrity influence and purchasing behavior is 0.706 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a strong, positive, and significant relationship.

H2: There is a positive and significant relationship between trustworthiness and purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

The correlation coefficient between trustworthiness and purchasing behavior is 0.605 ($p < 0.001$), showing a strong, positive, and significant relationship.

H3: There is a positive and significant relationship between expertise and purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

The correlation coefficient between expertise and purchasing behavior is 0.410 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a moderate, positive, and significant relationship.

H4: There is a positive and significant relationship between celebrity influences and emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

The correlation coefficient between celebrity influence and emotional intelligence is -0.057 ($p = 0.446$), indicating no significant relationship.

H5: There is a positive and significant relationship between trustworthiness and emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

The correlation coefficient between trustworthiness and emotional intelligence is -0.052 ($p = 0.490$), indicating no significant relationship.

H6: There is a positive and significant relationship between expertise and emotional intelligence among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

The correlation coefficient between expertise and emotional intelligence is 0.365 ($p < 0.001$), indicating a moderate, positive, and significant relationship.

H7: There is a positive and significant relationship between emotional intelligence and purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

The correlation coefficient between emotional intelligence and purchasing behavior is 0.080 ($p = 0.284$), indicating no significant relationship.

H8: Emotional Intelligence mediates positively and significantly the relationship between celebrity influences and purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

Given that emotional intelligence is not significantly related to either celebrity influence or purchasing behavior, it cannot mediate the relationship between them.

H9: Emotional Intelligence mediates positively and significantly the relationship between trustworthiness and purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

As emotional intelligence is not significantly related to either trustworthiness or purchasing behavior, it does not mediate the relationship between them.

H10: Emotional Intelligence mediates positively and significantly the relationship between expertise and purchasing behavior among Gen-Z in Malaysia.

Although expertise is related to both emotional intelligence and purchasing behavior, the lack of a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and purchasing behavior suggests that emotional intelligence does not mediate the relationship between expertise and purchasing behavior.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis, a statistical method for examining relationships between independent variables and dependent variable, is employed in this study to investigate the effects of celebrity influence and emotional intelligence on Malaysian Gen-Z purchasing behavior. Specifically, multiple linear regression is used to explore how these factors interact and influence consumer behavior.

Recent advancements in marketing research highlight the growing role of psychological characteristics, such as emotional intelligence, as mediators in consumer decision-making. Gountas et al. (2020) emphasize emotional intelligence as a key factor in moderating the effects of external influences on purchasing decisions. Similarly, studies by Kim and Youn (2021) reveal the substantial impact of celebrity endorsements on shaping consumer perceptions and actions.

This research contributes to existing literature by analyzing the direct and indirect effects of celebrity influence, including trustworthiness and expertise, on purchasing behavior, with a focus on emotional intelligence as a mediating variable. The findings aim to provide deeper insights into the interplay between these factors, offering a nuanced understanding of their influence on consumer decisions, particularly within Generation Z. This study advances the field by linking external marketing strategies and intrinsic psychological traits to purchasing behavior, thereby addressing a critical gap in literature.

Celebrity Analysis

The data below represents the relationship between Celebrity Influence (X), Purchasing Behavior (Y), and Emotional Intelligence (M).

Total Effect (X on Y)

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1. (Constant)	5.492	.750	0.706	7.328	<.001
celebrity influence	.643	.048		13.302	<0.01

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour

Celebrity influence strongly predicts Malaysian Gen-Z purchase behavior ($\beta = 0.706$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting its significant role in shaping consumer decisions. This relationship is highly statistically significant.

Direct Effect (X on M)

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	18.569	1.034	-0.057	17.964	<.001
celebrity influence	-.051	.067		-.763	.446

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence

Celebrity influence shows no significant impact on emotional intelligence ($B = -0.051$, $\beta = -0.057$, $p = 0.446$), indicating a weak negative but statistically insignificant relationship.

Direct Effect (X and M on Y)

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	3.195	1.242		2.572	.011
celebrity influence	.649	.048	.713	13.572	<0.01
emotional intelligence	.124	.054	.121	2.303	.022

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour

Celebrity influence significantly impacts purchasing behavior ($B = 0.649$, $p < 0.001$) even with emotional intelligence as a minor mediator ($B = 0.124$, $p = 0.022$), showing limited reduction.

Trustworthiness

The data below represents the relationship between Trustworthiness (X), Purchasing Behavior (Y), and Emotional Intelligence (M).

Total Effect (X on Y)

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	7.687	.766	0.605	10.041	<.001
trustworthiness	.521	.051		10.140	<0.01

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour

Trustworthiness strongly predicts Gen-Z purchase behavior ($\beta = 0.605$, $t = 10.140$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating a significant, consistent impact on purchasing decisions with high statistical reliability.

Direct Effect (X on M)

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	18.431	.939	-0.052	19.621	<.001
trustworthiness	-.044	.063		-.692	.490

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence

Trustworthiness shows no significant impact on emotional intelligence (B = -0.044, β = -0.052, t = -0.692, p = 0.490), indicating a weak, statistically insignificant negative relationship.

Direct Effect (X and M on Y)

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	5.578	1.352		4.126	<0.01
trustworthiness	.526	.051	.611	10.296	<0.01
emotional intelligence	.114	.061	.112	1.887	.061

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour

Trustworthiness significantly influences purchasing behavior through emotional intelligence (B = 0.526, p < 0.001), while emotional intelligence shows a smaller, marginally significant effect (B = 0.114, p = 0.061).

Expertise

The data below represents the relationship between Expertise (X), Purchasing Behavior (Y), and Emotional Intelligence (M).

Total Effect (X on Y)

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	6.893	1.402	0.410	4.916	<.001
expertise	.418	.070		6.005	<0.01

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour

Expertise significantly influences Gen-Z purchasing decisions (β = 0.410, t = 6.005, p < 0.001), highlighting its role as a strong predictor of consumer behavior among Malaysian Gen-Z buyers.

Direct Effect (X on M)

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	10.565	1.401	0.365	7.543	<.001
expertise	.364	.070		5.227	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: Emotional Intelligence

Expertise significantly impacts emotional intelligence (B = 0.364, β = 0.365, t = 5.227, p < 0.001), demonstrating a strong positive correlation between perceived expertise and emotional intelligence among consumers.

Direct Effect (X and M on Y)

Coefficients^a					
Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	7.758	1.610		4.819	<0.01
Expertise	.448	.075	.440	5.993	<0.01
emotional intelligence	-.082	.075	-.080	-1.092	.277

a. Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour

Expertise directly influences purchasing behavior (B = 0.448, p < 0.001), but its indirect effect through emotional intelligence is insignificant (B = -0.082, p = 0.277), showing no improved purchasing likelihood.

Regression analysis highlights that celebrity influence, trustworthiness, and expertise significantly affect Malaysian Gen-Z purchasing behavior. Among these, celebrity influence emerges as the most influential predictor, followed by trustworthiness and expertise, all of which positively impact purchasing decisions. Both trustworthiness and expertise strongly influence Emotional Intelligence. However, Emotional Intelligence does not substantially mediate the relationship between these variables and purchasing behavior. Specifically, its mediation effect is minimal or statistically insignificant, particularly concerning Expertise, which shows a minor, non-significant negative association with purchasing behavior when mediated through Emotional Intelligence.

The findings underline that Celebrity Influence, Trustworthiness, and Expertise exert their effects directly and significantly, underscoring their critical role in shaping Gen-Z purchasing decisions in Malaysia. Emotional Intelligence, while influential in other contexts, does not significantly alter the direct impact of these factors in this study. These results emphasize the importance of leveraging direct marketing strategies focusing on celebrity endorsements, trust-building, and expertise to effectively engage this demographic, providing actionable insights for developing targeted marketing tactics in the Malaysian market.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the role of emotional intelligence as a mediator between celebrity endorsement and Generation Z consumer behavior in Malaysia. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in how consumers respond to celebrity endorsements, particularly in terms of their emotional connection and decision-making processes. By examining how celebrity endorsements resonate emotionally with Generation Z, the study highlights that emotional intelligence not only enhances the perceived credibility of the celebrity but also influences the consumer's purchase intentions. This is especially important in Malaysia's diverse cultural landscape, where emotional resonance with celebrities can drive deeper engagement and influence consumer behavior.

Ultimately, the study reinforces the idea that emotional intelligence is a key factor in understanding how Generation Z in Malaysia responds to celebrity endorsements. The emotional connection fostered by celebrities with high emotional intelligence may create stronger brand loyalty and more significant consumer behavior shifts. Hence, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on influencer marketing and emotional intelligence, providing valuable insights for marketers targeting the Gen Z demographic in Malaysia. The study's findings underline the importance of aligning celebrity endorsements with emotionally intelligent communication to effectively influence purchasing decisions.

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