

# DO YOU TRUST TRAVEL INFLUENCES? EXPLORING WITH SELF-CONGRUITY AND FUNCTIONAL-CONGRUITY

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## ABSTRACT

The use of travel influencers, often referred to as internet travel celebrities or YouTube vlogger travelers, has been found to be an effective way to promote tourism products and destinations through internet marketing, which is a growing trend in modern times. The influence of internet celebrities has been found to be more significant than traditional advertising. This research aims to investigate the factors that influence individuals to choose to travel online celebrities and their impact on purchase intention. A total of 509 valid responses were collected from viewers of travel influencer videos. The results showed that self-congruity and functional-congruity consistence positively influenced trust in travel online celebrities. Trust positively influenced the travel celebrity's visit or revisit intention and follower cohesiveness. This research provides important insights for developing more effective online marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** Travel influencer, self-congruity, functional-congruity, Trust

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Video or information about travel on social media is a popular hashtag and search topic. According to Data Reportal's Global Overview 2021 report, the number of new social media users worldwide will reach nearly 5 billion by 2021, spending 1.3 billion years on the Internet (Franco et

a l., 2022). In the era of social media, travel-related content is immensely popular among youtuber worldwide. The rapid rise and proliferation of social media platforms has led to an exponential increase in new users. This trend has created a golden opportunity for travel enthusiasts to create and share their content that caters to the public's interest in leisure and entertainment. The abundance of information on social media platforms has also created various business opportunities, including travel agency promotions, airline ticket discounts, and a wide range of movie and television show videos (King et al., 2021; Lin & Huang, 2006). Although social media has created a fertile ground for travel-related content, travel online celebrities face challenges in keeping their followers and influence. The success of travel online celebrities depends on their connection with their followers, as it directly affects their popularity. Online celebrities use short videos to display the beauty, local customs, food, culture, and historical sites of travel destinations, providing their followers with an immersive experience that sparks their curiosity about new places to visit (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

In addition, social psychologists suggest that self-congruence influences consumer buying and selection behavior. Consumers tend to buy products or services that match their personality traits (Gardner, 1999). Similarly, followers choose online celebrities that align with their interests, hobbies, and personal image, as well as functional congruence based on their personal expectations, such as food, car displays, daily life, rural life,

beauty care, fitness, and sports (Miller et al., 2016). Maintaining congruence with followers is essential to sustain the popularity and influence of travel online celebrities in the highly competitive internet environment (Gretzel, 2017). Cohesion plays an important role in determining customer repurchase intention, especially in the context of self-congruity and functional congruity. Self-congruity refers to the degree of compatibility between the consumer's self-concept and the brand's image, while functional congruity refers to the match between the product type and the consumer's needs. Cohesion refers to the alignment of these congruities in terms of brand attributes, features, and functionality. A higher level of cohesion between these congruities results in a higher likelihood of repurchase intention. When consumers identify with a brand (in this occasion is the online celebrities itself) that is consistent with their self-concept and meets their functional needs, they are more likely to develop a long-term relationship with the brand. Therefore, cohesion plays a critical role in building brand loyalty (loyalty to the youtuber) and driving repurchase intention (visit or revisit intention).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Traveler influencer

Youtuber have usually established a certain level of prestige and influence in their specific field of focus. This means that when a youtuber endorses a brand in their area of expertise or in line with their personal style, they have reference value and influence from the followers' perspective (Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021). The endorsement of a product by an internet celebrity can increase brand awareness among the target consumers and influence their purchasing behaviors.

### 2.2 Self-congruity

The concept of self-congruity originated in the 1960s from the concept of self in psychology (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). The concept of self is divided into two aspects, namely the real self and the ideal self (Sirgy, 1982). The real self is the reality that one perceives (i.e., who I am as a person). The ideal self is the image that one builds and shapes according to the ideal goals in one's mind (Rogers, 2012; Dai, 2017). Self-congruity refers to a person's personality and image (Fein & Spencer, 1997). Self-congruity is

based on the image of people looking to keep the integrity of the self. That is, social and moral perceptions and adaptability. An individual's self-congruity is redefined by the influence of those around them (Steele et al., 1993). Self-congruity are influenced by the perceptions and reactions of others (Cooley, 2017). There is a large amount of visual imagery circulating on social media and communities that can significantly influence personal imagery through negative social comparisons and communication (Markus, 1977). Self-congruity has the potential to lead people to make biased negative evaluations of others (Perloff, 2014).

- H1: When followers' self-congruity is consistent with those of travel online celebrities, it positively affects the trust in travel online celebrities.

### 2.3 Functional-congruity

Functional congruity refers to the consistency between the default expectations and needs and the actual experience. The concept of functional congruity is derived from expectation value theory. It refers to the discrepancy between the consumer's perception of the product's functional attributes and the customer's pre-purchase requirements or the functional attributes of the target product. This is the gap between imagined expectations and reality (Sirgy et al., 1997). Functional-congruity congruence refers to the perception of tourists that the activities and facilities they expect to experience when they go to a destination will meet their expectations and needs after the actual experience (Dai, et al., 2021). Functional-congruity consistency focuses on the actual function of the product for the consumer (Sirgy & Samli, 1985).

H2. When the Functional-congruity of the followers is consistent with that of the travel online celebrity, it will positively affect the trust in the travel online celebrity.

### 2.4 Trust

Trust is composed of two components, meaning confidence in ability and intention (Deutsch, 1960). Trust is having confidence in another person and generating enough confidence to be relied upon (Moorman et al., 1993). Trust itself depends on three variables: shared values, communication, and

opportunistic behavior (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust is a multifaceted concept that combines economics, marketing, sociology, psychology, organizational thinking and behavior, strategy, information systems, and decision science (Spekman, 1988; Sztompka, 1999). The videos created by youtuber often show their personal abilities and intentions. Commitment and trust are key to building long-term and stable relationships (Luhmann, 1979). Shared values increase the sense of mutual association, build connections, and cultivate long-term associations, which gradually lead to trust (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Therefore, when online users see a video of interest, they become interested in the video creator and become followers after watching the same internet celebrity for a period of time, and trust begins to develop (Fang et al., 2014). Trust is explained by ethics, which requires a sense of moral responsibility (Hosmer, 1995).

## 2.5 Cohesion

Cohesion combines responsibility for people, nature, and society as an emotional force that brings all parties together (Dai et al., 2021; Woosnam, 2011). Cohesion is an emotional bond with others. The concept refers to a group of people who identify with others in the group and have some level of contact with each other (Frank, 1957). Just like the relationship between followers and youtuber, followers have a common feeling and recognition of the individuals and content created by youtuber. Cohesion is the bonding of a group with a common goal that brings everyone together (Carron, 1988). As a result, followers will continue to follow and pay attention to youtuber because of their common values or ideas. Cohesion is like cement that binds all parties together, and cohesion can be accompanied

by a sense of unity and harmony. Internet works combine perceptual and entertainment values (Gross & Martin, 1952). When a consumer chooses to like or subscribed at a tourist attraction or restaurant introduced by a youtuber, it represents a behavior that meets the consumer's personal characteristics, uniqueness, and recognition reputation to satisfy the consumer's brand perception (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

- H3. The trust of the followers to the travel influencer will positively affect the cohesion.

## 2.6 Repurchase intention

Repurchase intention refers to consumers' satisfaction with the brand or service they purchased (Francken, 1983), and their preference to purchase the same company's service or product again on their next purchase. There is a direct positive relationship between consumer satisfaction with the consumer experience and repurchase intention (Hellier et al., 2003). Purchase intention refers to a person's conscious effort to purchase a brand through planning and effort (Cronin Jr & Taylor, 1994; Swan & Oliver, 1989; Woodside et al., 1989). Consumers have the intention and idea to buy before they make a purchase (Spears & Singh, 2004). Consumers' trust in the brand affects their willingness to repurchase (De Magistris & Gracia, 2008). In addition, a high level of satisfaction with the consumer experience triggers repurchases intentions (Fang et al., 2014).

- H4. Followers' trust in travel celebrities will positively influence their willingness to repurchase.

## 3. METHOD

### 3.1 Conceptual Framework

The framework and hypothetical pathway of this study are illustrated in Figure 1:

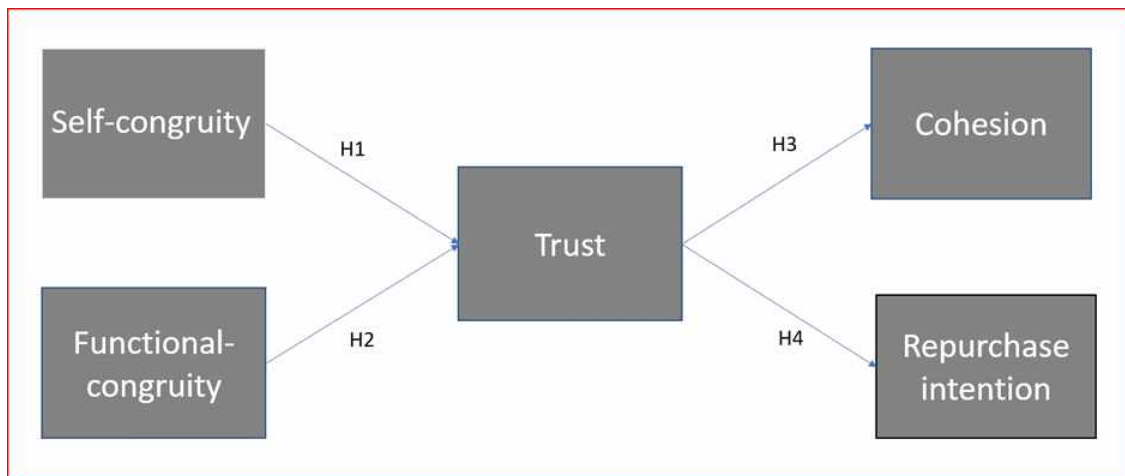


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

### 3.2 Participants and Sampling Methods

The target population of this study is people who have watched the travel information produced by youtuber and generated consumption behaviors. A total of 540 questionnaires were distributed, 344 were returned online and 170 were returned in paper form. After deducting 31 invalid questionnaires, 509 questionnaires were valid, with a valid return rate of 94.25%. The online questionnaire was created through Survey Cake and distributed randomly on Instagram, targeting tourists and travel youtuber who had visited tourist spots. Paper-based questionnaires were distributed in Sun Moon Lake, and the target respondents were tourists.

### 3.3 Measurement

#### 3.3.1 Self-congruity

In this study, the self-congruity congruity scale developed by Chon (1992) was used. This scale was used to measure "actual self-congruity" and "ideal self-congruity". There were 3 questions on the actual self-measure and 2 questions on the ideal self-measure.

#### 3.3.2 Functional-congruity

Supek et al. (2011) defines the operationalization of functional-congruity as the degree of consistency in the quality of facilities, hardware, and services provided by a tourism destination to meet tourists' expectations of the destination, Functional Consistency Scale was used to measure the degree of functional consistency among tourists.

#### 3.3.3 Trust

The scale used was adapted from Gefen and

Karahanna's (2003) and trust measurement model by Wu (2008) to incorporate the characteristics of online shopping in Taiwan. In order to make the scale localize, the questions of the scale were pilot tested by three experts with experience in the field of online shopping, followed by a pretest. The content of this questionnaire is theoretically based, tested by experts, and pre-tested, which is considered to have considerable content validity. There are eight questions in total.

#### 3.3.4 Cohesion

According to Woosnam (2011) and Lehto et al. (2009), the operationalization of cohesion is defined as the expression of positive power of connection between youtuber and their followers. And Dai et al. (2017) were used to measure the formation of cohesion between tourists and residents, and the constructs included "emotional connection", "liking Internet" and "understanding", including two questions on emotional connection, five questions on liking Internet and five questions on understanding, for a total of 12 questions.

#### 3.3.5 Repurchase intention

According to Ruyter et al. (1998), repurchase intention was defined as the likelihood that consumers would repurchase a brand after buying it. The repurchase intention scale proposed by Ruyter et al. (1998) was used and consisted of four questions.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Regarding the gender of the respondents, the majority of the respondents were female, accounting for 57.2% of the overall sample, with 291 people, while 218 were male, accounting for 42.8% of the overall sample. As for the age of the test subjects, they were under 18 years old, accounting for 7.9% of the overall sample, with a total of 40 people. 257 people aged 19-24 years old, accounting for 50.5% of the overall sample, accounted for the largest number. A total of 165 people aged 25 to 34 accounted for 32.4% of the overall sample, 35 people aged 35 to 44 accounted for 6.9% of the overall sample, and 12 people aged 45 to 54 accounted for 2.4% of the overall sample. Regarding the marital status of the respondents, unmarried people accounted for 89.2% of the overall sample, with a total of 454 people. Married people accounted for 9.6% of the overall sample, with a total of 49 people. Others accounted for 1.2% of the overall sample, with a total of six people. As for the educational level of the respondents, the overall sample of the respondents with education level below junior high school accounted for 4% of the total sample, with a total of 2 persons. The high school level accounted for 7.9% of the overall sample, with a total of 37 people. College level accounted for 80% of the overall sample, with 407 people. The degree of graduate school or above accounted for 12.4% of the overall sample, with a total of 63 people. In terms of monthly income, the largest number of respondents had a monthly income of less than \$20,000, accounting for 56.6% of the overall sample, with a total of 288 respondents. Monthly income of \$20,001-40,000 accounted for 21.4% of the overall sample, with 109 respondents. Monthly income of \$40,001-60,000 accounted for 12% of the total sample, with 61 people. Monthly income of \$60,001 or more accounted for 10% of the overall sample, with a total of 51 respondents.

#### **4.4 Regression Analysis**

The regression coefficients for both models are .000 for significance. When both self-congruity and trust are put into the regression analysis, the relationship between self-congruity and trust becomes weaker. The standardized coefficient of Functional-congruity in response to trust was 0.617, while the standardized coefficient of Functional-

congruity was 0.465. The standardized coefficient value was lower compared to the value of trust. Both regression coefficients were .000 for significance. When both Functional-congruity and trust were included in the regression analysis, the relationship between Functional-congruity and trust was weakened.

Trust affects cohesion. A standardized coefficient value of 0.713 shows a positive effect, and a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates a significant effect. Therefore, trust positively affects cohesion. Trust affects repurchase intention. A standardized coefficient value of 0.770 represents a positive effect. p-values greater than 0.05 are significant. Therefore, trust positively affects cohesiveness.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Based on the research hypotheses of this study, the details of why the hypotheses are valid are inferred and their connotations are explained, which are described below with the research questions as the main axes of development: When the self-congruity of the followers is consistent with the travel influencer the functional-congruity is consistent with the travel online celebrity, it will positively affect the trust in the travel online celebrity. Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported. It means that when the image of travel online celebrities and their entertainment information content meet the expectation of the followers, the more the trust of the followers towards travel online celebrities will increase. Thus, it can be seen that self-congruity congruence and functional-congruity congruence have a positive effect on trust.

Trust positively affects repurchase intention and cohesiveness. Therefore, hypotheses 3 and 4 hold. The results showed that when the trust level of the stalkers towards the traveler's online friend was higher, it would increase the repurchase intention of the stalkers. When the trust level of the followers is higher, the trust level between the followers and the travel networkers will be increased. Therefore, trust has a positive effect on repurchase intention and cohesiveness.

### **5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study investigated the reasons why followers follow the travel destination introduced by the travel influencer. Of the 509 valid questionnaires, 288 were from students and 221 were from students with a monthly income of 20,000 or less, more than half of the questionnaires. Although all the hypotheses of the study are valid, students have limited financial ability and their source of money is limited by their parents, so their spending power is not high. Although most of the young people have the habit of using social media or Netflix, they do not have enough purchasing power. Those who are more mature and have buying power are not as familiar with social media and are not as keen to use it as the younger age groups. The consumption habits of different age and income groups are not the same. It is suggested that future research could be extended to study the purchasing intentions and spending habits of other income groups and age groups.

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