

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER ATTRIBUTES ON CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES AND PURCHASE INTENTION



By

EL MOUSA HADEEL ALI MOHAMED

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

March 2022

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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March 2022

Chairman : Wong Foong Yee, PhD School : Business and Economics

Brands collaborate with social media influencers to promote their products through influencer marketing. Companies are increasingly depending on social media influencers to promote their brands owing to the potential of influencers in connecting the target audience with the company while maintaining a direct connection with their followers. However, research on influencer marketing is very sparse, particularly in Malaysia. As a result, the purpose of this study is to fill a gap in the literature and the industry by validating the effect of social media influencers on customer attitudes and intentions toward endorsement.

An online questionnaire was distributed to the respondents. Three hundred fifty answers were obtained using the purposive sampling approach. All of the responders were Malaysians from various states. The hypotheses were tested using partial least squares (PLS), a variance-based Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach. In SEM-PLS, statistical analyses were performed and interpreted in two stages: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment.

The findings confirmed the model by validating that source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms were significantly associated with attitude. Also, source credibility, subjective norms, and attitude were significantly associated with purchase intention. Eventually, the attitude was found to strengthen the relationships between source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms with purchase intention towards the endorsed products.

In many respects, this study contributes to the marketing literature and industry. First, the Psychology field's Theory of Reasoned Action was utilized to illustrate

the link between attitudes and behaviours inside human activities, which is currently being extended to an influencer marketing setting in Malaysia. Second, this study adds to the literature on influencer marketing by determining the effect of the variables source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms on attitude and purchase intention in the setting of influencer marketing. Furthermore, one of the study's outcomes is the identification of a relatively new variable, subjective norms, to quantify the impact of social media influencers using the Theory of Reasoned Action.

The results of this study can provide deep insights and guidelines for companies, marketers, marketing agencies, and influencers. Social media influencers cannot only appeal to a broad audience but also act as marketers efficiently. Endorsing products and brands is very beneficial, both for social media influencers themselves and the brands. Empirical proof of the purchase intention of products recommended by social media influencers is required for industry practitioners to make a strategic choice on whether or not to expand investment in influencer marketing. To conclude, influencer marketing is still new to the Malaysian market. However, it has proven its importance as it showed considerable success in affecting consumers' attitudes and intentions toward the endorsed products.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

KESAN PEMPENGARUH MEDIA SOSIAL TERHADAP SIKAP PENGGUNA DAN NIAT PEMBELIAN

Oleh

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Pemasaran pempengaruh melibatkan kerjasama antara jenama dengan pempengaruh media sosial untuk mempromosi produk mereka. Syarikat semakin bergantung kepada pempengaruh media sosial untuk menyokong jenama mereka dengan menggunakan kuasa pempengaruh yang menghubungkan khalayak sasaran dengan jenama sambil berkomunikasi secara langsung dengan pengikut mereka. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian mengenai pemasaran pempengaruh masih terhad, khususnya di Malaysia. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi jurang literatur dan industri dengan mengesahkan kesan pempengaruh media sosial ke atas sikap dan niat pengguna terhadap pengendorsan tersebut.

Borang soal selidik dalam talian diedarkan kepada responden. Dengan menggunakan teknik persampelan tujuan, sebanyak 350 maklum balas telah diterima. Semua responden adalah terdiri daripada warganegara Malaysia yang berasal dari pelbagai negeri di Malaysia. Partial Least Squares (PLS), satu kaedah Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) berasaskan varians telah digunakan untuk menguji hipotesis. Dalam SEM-PLS, data telah dianalisi dan ditafsir berdasarkan kepada satu pendekatan dua- tahap; penilaian model pengukuran dan penilaian model berstruktur.

Hasil kajian menyokong model tersebut dengan mengesahkan kredibiliti sumber, pengalihan makna dan norma subjektif berkait dengan sikap secara signifikan. Di samping itu, kredibiliti sumber, norma subjektif dan sikap juga berkait secara signifikan dengan niat pembelian produk yang disokong oleh pempengaruh media sosial. Akhirnya, sikap juga didapati turut mengukuhkan hubungan antara kredibiliti sumber, peralihan makna dan norma subjektif dengan niat membeli produk yang disokong. Kajian ini memberi nilai tambah kepada literatur dan industri dalam pelbagai cara. Pertama, Theory of Reasoned Action dari bidang psikologi telah digunakan untuk menjelaskan hubungan antara sikap dan gelagat tindakan manusia, kini telah diperluas kepada konteks pemasaran pempengaruh di Malaysia. Kedua, kajian ini menyumbang kepada literatur pemasaran pempengaruh dengan mengenal pasti kesan pemboleh ubah kredibiliti sumber, pengalihan makna dan norma subjektif terhadap sikap dan niat pembelian dalam konteks pemasaran pempengaruh di Malaysia. Selain daripada itu, kajian ini juga menambah nilai kepada literature dengan mengenal pasti satu pemboleh ubah baharu secara relatifnya, iaitu norma subjektif, dalam konteks keberkesanan pempengaruh media sosial dalam Theory of Reasoned Action.

Hasil kajian ini dapat memberi fahaman dan panduan mendalam kepada syarikat, pemasar, agensi dan juga pempengaruh. Pempengaruh media sosial bukan sahaja dapat menarik khalayak yang luas, malahan bertindak sebagai pemasar yang efisien. Pengendorsan produk dan jenama sangat bermanfaat, bukan sahaja kepada pempengaruh media sosial sendiri bahkan kepada jenama tersebut. Bukti empirikal terhadap produk yang disokong oleh pempengaruh media sosial sangat penting kepada pengusaha industri untuk membuat keputusan strategik sama ada untuk meningkatkan pelaburan dalam pemasaran pempengaruh ataupun tidak. Kesimpulannya, pemasaran pempengaruh masih babaru di pasaran di Malaysia. Namun begitu, ia membuktikan kepentingannya di mana ia menunjukkan keberkesanan kejayaan dalam mempengaruhi sikap dan niat pengguna terhadap produk yang disokong.

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Declaration by graduate student

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- UPM Universiti Putra Malaysia
- SMIs Social Media Influencers
- TRA Theory of Reasoned Action
- SM Social Media
- SMM Social Media Marketing
- SNS Social Network Sites
- UPM Universiti Putra Malaysia

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study intends to better understand the impact of social media influencers on customers' attitudes and intentions to purchase items recommended by the influencers in Malaysia. This research is more thoroughly investigated by comprehending the influence of source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms on customer attitudes and purchase intentions. The study's background is presented in chapter one, afterwards the research problem, followed by research objectives and questions, and finally, the significance of the study. Definitions of the essential terms and variables are presented at the end of this chapter.

1.2 Background of Study

Social media has transformed many people's lives in the twenty-first century, attracting significant interest not just from industry but also from academics. Social media is gradually gaining a presence in all aspects of our life. As a result, people are more perceptually and behaviorally engaged with prominent social media sites such as the well-known applications Facebook, Snapchat, Google+, YouTube, and other sites (Alalwan, 2018). With internet technology development, social media has grown into a crucial communication channel in the 21st century and has become a primary source of information and opinions.

This interconnectedness has not only changed social relations and interactions between people but also puts a challenge on the traditional communication model between businesses and customers (Cao, Meister, & Klante, 2014). The evolution of social media has empowered consumers by allowing them to share and access a wide range of informal and social information that was previously out of marketers' control (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Because of the quick flow of new material and content via social media, an intense competition between network members to get maximum attention, and consequent effect on customers who are considered information takers (Arora et al., 2019). As a result, social media platforms are among the most practical, resourceful, and impactful implications involved in the most intimate aspects of people's lives (i.e., social life, business, education, commerce, and politics). In general, this study is targeting marketing practitioners and scholars as well as social media influencers and everyone who wants to learn more about how such applications may be effectively accepted and used. As a result, there is a need to explore the key needs for effective implementation of such technology, as well as the feasibility of investing in such applications (Arora et al., 2019). People's desire for social contacts has been highlighted by the rise of social media. Social media platforms have facilitated social interactions in the virtual online environment. Real-time messaging, for example, allows users to communicate information and facilitate online social relationships among individuals. This phenomenon suggests that organizations consider using social media in their digital marketing strategies (Dann, 2010).

Social media marketing, as Dann (2010) suggests, is commercial marketing processes and events that use social media effectively to favourably influence the purchasing behaviour of consumers. As social media networking sites have emerged and developed rapidly in recent years, so has interest in social media marketing among marketing scholars and organizations worldwide. Executives grew serious about incorporating social media into their marketing communications. They have, in fact, shifted their focus to concerns about the profits of social media might improve corporate performance (Wang, & Kim, 2017). Previous research has looked at the effectiveness of social media marketing and advertising (Jacobson, Gruzd, Hernández-Garca, 2020). Customers who find out that marketing via social media is helpful and more favourable, as Alalwan (2018) suggests, are inclined to purchase the targeted items of these adverts.

As a result, social media has become a centre for market intelligence as marketing specialists obtain thoughts of higher quality about consumer purchasing behaviour and evolve a better understanding of why people have feelings about certain brands. As a result, marketers have a fantastic opportunity to engage with customers, adjust the marketing message, and sustain the visibility of the brand online (Balakrishnan, Dahnil, & Yi, 2014). In light of the rapid rise of virtual social networking websites, many businesses have already explored how to rely on these sites to deepen their interactions and relationships with users in order to generate a sense of intimacy and closeness and to build brand communities in the virtual world (Kaplan, 2015).

In practice, the term "social media influencer" (SMI) is widely used, while scholarly definitions are limited. Scholars, namely Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg (2011), defined SMIs as a new wave and generation of independent third-party endorsers who have a huge impact on the audience's perceptions via tweets, blogs, postings, and other social media platforms. Arora et al. (2019) defined social media influencers as those who express their thoughts, ideas, experiences, and even their everyday routine activities on social media in order to impact their audience, who are known as fans and followers all around the world. These influencers used a variety of social media channels to create content and increase their reach. Senft (2013) defined SMIs as a type of micro-celebrity who are engaged in self-presentation on social media networks by branding themselves and creating an online image to attract and appeal to the maximum number of followers (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017).

One could say that using SMIs to recommend a product is a similar marketing tool for using celebrity endorsement. Celebrity endorsement can be defined as when businesses use celebrities to be part of their marketing communication strategies to influence the purchasing behaviours of customers (Erdogan, 1999; Pate & Adams, 2013). Using celebrities can influence advertisement effectiveness and the purchase behaviour of consumers (Spry, Pappu, Cornwell, 2011). Social media platforms give micro-celebrities the opportunity to have a self-presentation practice in which they view themselves as a public entity that uses communication to engage a large number of followers and consider them as valued fans (Marwick, 2011; Senft, 2013).

The similarities between traditional celebrities and SMIs are highlighted in these definitions. However, micro-celebrities are more influential in terms of consumer purchase intention because their followers regard them as more relevant than traditional celebrities, regardless of whether their potential influence on their followers may influence their decision to buy the endorsed product (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). These micro-influencers have a smaller niche, yet they are incredibly passionate, engaged, and connected to their audience (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019).

SMIs provide their followers with the most recent information and update them with the most recent knowledge they need (Lim et al., 2017). Customers who look up for online recommendation before making a purchase on a social network consist of eighty-one percent (81 percent), and 74% of those customers are persuaded to make a purchase. As a result, blogging has become an important component to consider before making a buying choice (Hsu, Lin, Chiang, 2013).

Influencer marketing is notably growing fast, and it has no signs of slowing down. In 2020, 93% of businesses used social media influencers. Around 70% of marketers used influencers for content promotion and new product endorsements. Social media influencers will undoubtedly continue to help brands connect with their customers in a significant way (Landers, 2020). Influencer Marketing (2020) conducted a survey in 2019 that highlighted the profitability of influencer marketing for brands who engaged in it (Figure 1.1). Most businesses got positive results from influencer marketing; on the other hand, only 25% failed to generate any revenue, and the failure is due to the wrong choice of influencers for their brand. They failed to choose influencers who have followers similar to the targeted customers of the brand. Figure 1.1 shows the profitability of influencer marketing for brands.

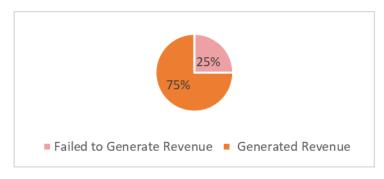


Figure 1.1 : The profitability of influencer marketing for brands (Source: Influencer Marketing 2020)

By 2022, brands are prepared to spend up to \$15 billion on influencer marketing. Influencers will progressively evolve into dynamic intermediates, assisting companies in connecting with customers on social media in a real, resonant manner that may result in instant benefits to the business (Schomer, 2019). Figure 1.2 shows that in 2016 the influencer marketing ad spend reached 3 billion dollars, and it continued to grow until it reached 15 billion dollars in 2022 gradually. The influencer marketing ad expenditure is depicted in figure 1.2.

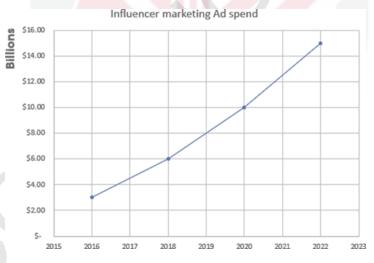


Figure 1.2 : Influencer marketing Ad spend (Source: Schomer 2019)

Social media platforms significantly influence online shopping decisions. Social media channels have been well-proven and have swiftly become one of the most crucial components in a shopping decision. At least half of Malaysians purchase products and services after visiting social media sites. Figure 1.3 shows the 10 top social media sites in Malaysia with the percentage of people using those

applications. The most used social media sites in Malaysia are YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram (Malaysian Online Shoppers' Profiles, 2019).

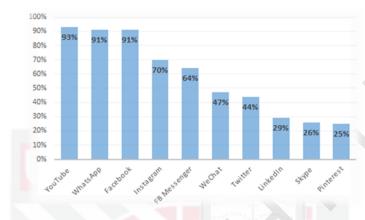


Figure 1.3 : The top ten social media sites in Malaysia (Source: Malaysian Online Shoppers' Profiles, 2019)

Among the Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia is considered an attractive market for social media marketing because of its volatile economy and advanced digital technologies built into the infrastructure. According to the Malaysian Online Shoppers' Profiles (2019), 80% of the Malaysian population are active internet users, having very high mobile phone penetration rates. Of the 32.25 million Malaysian citizens, 25 million are social media users. Moreover, 88% of Malaysians make an online search to buy a product or service, while 75% of them have already made an online purchase. 80% of the customers shopped on their smartphones.

According to an influencer marketing agency in Malaysia, marketers are gradually embracing influencer marketing as customers become exposed to influencers' endorsements and are using social media for their purchases as their favourite personalities on social media influence them. Influencer marketing is rising in Malaysia. According to the Influencer Marketing in Malaysia (2020), the SMI market size is between RM280.46 million and RM560.91 million. Hence, it is essential to consider how social media influencers use social media sites to influence users in several ways. Based on the information mentioned above thus, it is worth studying Malaysian purchasing behaviours through SMIs.

1.3 Problem Statement and Research Gaps

Influencer marketing involves brands and SMIs collaborating together to endorse products (De Veirman, Cauberghe, Hudders, 2017; Sokolova & Kefi,

2019). Companies are increasingly relying on SMIs to endorse their brands due to influencers' power that connects the target customers who are following the SMI with the brand while maintaining direct contact with the followers (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2018; Mallipeddi, Kumar, Sriskandarajah and Zhu, 2022). SMIs possess the ability to convince customers to buy the recommended brands (Childers et al., 2018). Therefore, firms heavily invest in influencer marketing (Lou & Yuan, 2018). Influencer marketing became an essential part of social media marketing to directly connect with consumers. Despite the fact that it is relatively new to the Malaysian market, it is unquestionably expanding (Influencer Marketing in Malaysia, 2020).

Social media influencers are effective in motivating consumers' purchase intention (Lim et al., 2017). According to Influencer Marketing in Malaysia (2020), 70% of YouTube users trust the opinions of influencers, and 71% of customers are more expected to purchase products and services based on a recommendation from social media. Morwitz (2014) interpreted that marketing effectiveness is measured by purchase intention. Attitude is another indicator of advertising effectiveness (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Hence, determining the effectiveness of social media influencers happens when social media influencers' advertising influences the attitudes and purchase intentions of consumers. Nevertheless, more knowledge and studies about the effectiveness of SMIs endorsements are yet to be discovered (Godey et al., 2016; Mallipeddi et al., 2022; Leung, Gu & Palmatier, 2022).

Previous studies provided insights into the effectiveness of advertising using celebrity endorsements (Amos, Holmes, Strutton, 2008; Kumar & Kumar, 2015; Paul & Bhakar, 2018). Some studies focused on social media marketing in general in advertising (Alalwan, 2018; Kamboj et al., 2018). Besides, some of the previous studies were interested to know the factors that drive the success of online brand engagement through social media influencers (Hughes et al., 2019; Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez- Fernández, 2019; Phua, Lin, Lim, 2018). Some studies provided knowledge about consumers' intention to purchase based on the products endorsed (Abreu, 2019; Wei & Li, 2013). This stream of research has established the importance of understanding influencer marketing and the factors that affect consumers. However, studies about influencer marketing are still limited (De Veirman et al., 2017; Leung, Gu, and Palmatier, 2022; Lim et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2018; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), and firms still question the return on their investment (ROI) by using influencers, whether it is profitable and productive or not (Ananda, Lamberti, Hernández, G, 2014).

Even though there is an apparent trend of social media influencers' endorsement, it is still unclear how efficient this way of endorsing products is, and the reported studies of customers' attitudes towards this type of marketing are relatively scarce. Moreover, it is not sure if social media influencers' endorsements can influence consumers' purchase intention (Jargalsaikhan, 2016). Marketing managers need more studies on this topic to make a clear decision of whether to keep using social media influencers in product endorsement. Attitude in this study played as a r between the independent variables (source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms) and the dependent variable, purchase intention. Where attitude significantly affects purchase intention.

Three literature gaps required closure—first, the lack of studies on the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Previous studies investigated celebrity endorsers' effects on advertising (Amos et al., 2008; Munnukka, Uusitalo, & Toivonen, 2016; Phua et al., 2018; Roy & Jain, 2017; Spry et al., 2011; Wang & Kao, 2017). Using celebrities can influence advertisement effectiveness and consumers' purchase behaviour (Spry et al., 2011). Social media influencers, on the other hand, have a greater impact on consumer purchasing intentions since their followers see them as more relevant than traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Social media influencers are more approachable and likeable, with a narrower focus but a strong devotion, engagement, and connection to their audience (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). The literature still does not have sufficient studies on the effectiveness of social media influencers. As a result, there is a need to gain a deeper knowledge of the determinants that make SMIs successful.

Secondly, previous studies discussed marketing communication through SMIs (De Veirman et al., 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Johansen & Guldvik, 2017; Li & Du, 2014; Lou & Yuan, 2018; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Limited studies have directly focused on what makes social media influencers effective that can influence the consumers' attitude and intention to purchase in Malaysia context—considering Malaysia as an attractive market for influencer marketing where 88 percent of Malaysian internet users make an online search to buy products and services, while 75 percent of Malaysian internet users already purchased online. Moreover, online shoppers in Malaysia care about convenience and are motivated to purchase by the availability of reviews (Malaysian Online Shoppers' Profiles, 2019). Therefore, it is motivating to study the impact of SMIs in Malaysia.

Lastly, prior studies examined the effectiveness of social media endorsers using different variables such as image congruence (Paul & Bhakar, 2018; Phua et al., 2018), brand attitude (Ilicic & Webster, 2011; Wang, Kao, Ngamsiriudom, 2017; Wang, Cao, Park, 2019), perceived value (Chen & Lin, 2019), and attractiveness (Hani, Marwan, Andre, 2018; Park & Lee, 2008). However, very few examined the effectiveness of subjective norms on Malaysian consumers. Thus, more research is needed considering subjective norms in the influencer marketing context because, in the Malaysian context, customers are increasingly relying on influencers to decide on their purchases (Wei & Li, 2013). According to Pornpitakpan (2003), people from collectivist cultures have collective interests over individual interests, and they are likely to be influenced by others whom they see as influential and vital (Sun & Wang, 2020). Ramayah, Rouibah, Gopi, & Rangel (2009) indicated that Malaysia exhibited a collectivist culture where norms had great value, and the group influenced peoples' actions to whom they

identified themselves to or who were important to them. Influencer marketing is highly effective in Malaysia. Malaysian consumers are considered risk-averse and increasingly rely on influencers to decide on their online purchases (Influencer marketing in Malaysia, 2020). Hence, this study within the Malaysian context should be perceived as an opportunity to investigate subjective norms' effect on Malaysian internet users and how the influencers' endorsement impacts their attitudes and purchase intentions.

Endorsers, as cultural icons, represent a collection of cultural ideas and images that are frequently popular in society (McCracken 1989). Endorsers have also been seen as indirect or peripheral clues that aid in the subtle conveying of meaning (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). These appeals are consistent with the prevalent form of communication in Malaysian culture, which is high-context messaging that depends on pictures and symbols rather than specific words. Endorsers, by their symbolic features, can assist an implicit mode of communication without openly expressing the messages. That's why it is interesting to know how meaning transfer affects consumers' attitudes and intentions in the Malaysian context.

In most cases, a highly credible source is more successful than a less credible source in shaping audience views and behavioural intentions (Sternthal, Phillips and Dholakia, 1978). Highly credible sources have been proven to create more favourable attitude changes toward the stance supported and to cause more behavioural changes than less credible sources (Ohanian 1991).

This study gives knowledge of how to measure the impact of social media influencers' attributes by utilizing three constructs: source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms. Identifying the effectiveness of social media influencers (i.e., s source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms) on purchase intention through customers' attitudes could thus potentially offer valuable insights to marketing managers and business owners, allow them to develop promotional strategies to effectively shape a positive and impactful customers' decision-making towards their products and services.

This study aims to determine the advantages and effectiveness of using SMIs as a marketing tool by examining the impact on consumers' attitudes. Another focus of this study will be on the impact of SMIs on Malaysian consumers' in which their purchase intention is affected. This study intends to fill the gaps mentioned above by investigating how SMIs affect customers' attitudes and purchase intentions in the Malaysian context using the independent variables: source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms based on three theories: 1) Social Learning Theory (Marketers and academic research broadly applied this theory, mainly in communication and advertising areas, to offer ideas from the socialisation agents that can predict the consumption behaviours of followers (Lim et al., 2017; Pick, 2021). 2) Source Credibility Theory (The quality of argument points out the arguments' persuasion strength of the endorsers'

message (Teng et al., 2014). If customers believe the endorser's message and regard it as credible, they will acquire a positive attitude toward it (Spry et al., 2011)). 3) Theory of Reasoned Action (According to (TRA), personal and societal elements affect the intention to complete a particular behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The personal element, according to TRA, is characterized by an attitude toward the behaviour. The subjective norm, on the other hand, characterizes the social aspect).

1.4 Research Questions and Objectives

The following research questions are formed to understand the effect of SMIs on consumers' attitudes and purchase intention in Malaysia:

RQ1- Do source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms affect consumers' attitudes and purchase intention in the Malaysian context?

RQ2- Does attitude affect purchase intention in the Malaysian context?

RQ3- Does customer's attitude mediate the relationship between the effect of SMIs (i.e., source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms) and purchase intention in the Malaysian context?

The primary goal of this study is to investigate three independent variables. First, source credibility, second, meaning transfer, and third, subjective norms on the mediator attitude and the dependent variable purchase intention. The precise objectives of this study are as follows, based on the primary research goal:

- 1. To evaluate the impact of source credibility (CR), meaning transfer (MT), and subjective norms (SN) on attitude (ATT) and purchase intention (PI) in Malaysia.
- 2. To determine the effect of customers' attitudes (ATT) on purchase intention (PI) in Malaysia.
- 3. To assess the mediating role of attitude (ATT) between the effect of SMIs (i.e., CR, MT, and SN) and PI.

1.5 Significance of Research

This study proposes a conceptual model that takes the variables of source credibility, meaning transfer, subjective norms, attitude, and purchase intention into consideration. The resulting conceptual model will be used, theoretically and practically.

1.5.1 Theoretically

In three respects, this research is conceptually significant. First, in the psychology sector, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was employed in this study to illustrate the link between attitudes and human behaviors and activities, which is currently being expanded to an influencer marketing environment, notably in Malaysia. This theory was proposed by Icek Ajzen (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and is well recognised among researchers, and it has become one of the main theoretical approaches to guide scholars in understanding human-related behaviour. This study will provide empirical evidence on the applicability of the TRA in the context of influencer marketing.

Secondly, the contribution of this study improves the influencer marketing literature by identifying the effect of the variables source credibility, meaning transfer, and subjective norms on attitude and purchase intention in the context of influencer marketing in Malaysia. Previous studies have applied different theories to discuss the influencer marketing concept. The studies examined the effectiveness of endorsers using the Image Congruence Theory (Paul & Bhakar, 2018; Phua et al., 2018). Other studies used the Attribution Theory, Attachment Theory, and Product Differentiation Theory (Ilicic & Webster, 2011; Wang et al., 2017) and Attractiveness Theory (Hani et al., 2018; Park & Lee, 2008). This research's findings will enhance the emerging literature in the marketing field by understanding the effects of SMIs on attitudes and purchase intentions of customers in Malaysia using three theories (Source Credibility Theory, the TRA, and Social Learning Theory).

Lastly, this study contributes by adding knowledge to the literature by identifying a relatively new variable, i.e., subjective norms that have rarely been used in the influencer marketing context, from the TRA. It will support the influencer marketing literature in Malaysia by testing the correlation between subjective norms and attitude /purchase intention.

1.5.2 Practically

The findings can give profound insights as well as guidelines for businesses, marketers, agencies, and influencers. Social media influencers may not only appeal to a large audience but also serve as effective marketers (Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Endorsing goods and brands is extremely helpful for both social media influencers and brands. Collaboration with social media influencers may generate money for brands (Munnukka, Maity, Reinikainen, Luoma-aho, 2019). Collaboration with companies allows social media influencers to monetise their reputation and popularity while also expanding their reach (Liljander, Gummerus, Söderlund, 2015). In Malaysia, the concept of influencer marketing is relatively new. As a result, empirical evidence on the purchase intention of the endorsed products by social media influencers is essential to industry

practitioners for making a strategic decision on whether to increase investment in influencer marketing or not. This study brings practical implications to marketers, brand owners, and influencers. In the Malaysian context, customers are increasingly relying on influencers to decide on their purchases (Wei & Li, 2013), and this is an opportunity for businesses to leverage the available influencers to bring about more sales through the online platform. It can also help businesses establish their social media communication strategy.

This study provides a detailed overview of what makes SMIs effective. by using the constructs of source credibility, meaning transfer, subjective norms, attitude, and purchase intention. Marketers can develop promotional strategies to shape the decisions of customers in a positive and impactful way regarding their products and services.

1.6 Study's scope

This research focuses on influencer marketing and the impact of SMIs on customer attitudes and purchase intentions in Malaysia. Malaysians are heavy social media users, and others can sway their beliefs. When it comes to SMIs, it is vital to understand the consumers' purchasing behavior. This research targeted Malaysian social media users and people who follow social media influencers. This study was planned to be conducted in two years from the beginning to the end. Furthermore, this research is built up on three theories: the Social Learning Theory, the Source Credibility Theory, and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). TRA has a vital construct: subjective norms, and the social learning theory is widely used in social media studies. Furthermore, the Source Credibility Theory. This study will be conducted in Malaysia, targeting Malaysian consumers.

1.7 Terms' Definition

Table 1.1 shows terms' definitions that were used in this study.

Table 1.1 : Terms' definitions

1	Social media (SM)	Social media are Internet-based apps that enable businesses and, in particular, consumers to produce and share information.	Kaplan&Haenlei (2010)						
2	Social media marketing (SMM)	businesses and, in particular, consumers to produce and share information.(2010)Commercial marketing processes and events employ social media to influence consumers' purchasing behaviour positively.Dann (2010)Social media influencers are a unique type of third-party endorsers who change audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other forms of social media.Freberg et (2011)The art and science of enlisting online influencers, such as social media influencers, to communicate brand messaging with their audiences via sponsored content.Sammis et (2015)CR refers to the consumer perception about the endorsed products.Ohanian (19 Ajzen (1991)The term "attitude" relates to an individual's overall assessment of how well he or she performs the behaviour.Ajzen (1991)The cultural meaning of the endorser and the transmission of that meaning is what determines endorsement results.McCracken (1989)The individual's perception of social pressureAjzen (1991)							
3	Social media influencers (SMIs)	Social media influencers are a unique type of third-party endorsers who change audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other forms of social media.	0						
4	Influencer marketing (IM)	influencers, such as social media influencers, to	(2015)						
5	Source credibility (CR)	CR refers to the consumer perception about the source of information based on attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise in the area of the endorsed products.	Ohanian (1990)						
6	Attitude (ATT)	The term "attitude" relates to an individual's overall assessment of how well he or she performs the behaviour.	Ajzen (1991)						
7	Meaning transfer (MT)	The cultural meaning of the endorser and the transmission of that meaning is what determines endorsement results.	McCracken (1989)						
8	Subjective Norms (SN)	The individual's perception of social pressure from the surrounding environment over whether or not to engage in a behaviour.	Ajzen (1991)						
9	Purchase Intention (PI)	"PI" term refers to the likelihood that a person will buy a particular product based on the interaction of the customer's attitude, needs, and perception of the product	Beneke, de Sousa, Mbuyu, & Wickham (2016).						

1.8 Organization of Thesis

To make reading easier, this thesis is organized consistently from chapter to chapter. The study's background, problem statement, research question, research aims, importance, and scope were all covered in Chapter One. The second chapter focuses on the literature on influencer marketing. It also examines the elements that influence the purchase of endorsed products. It also describes the conceptual research framework and the formulation of hypotheses. The third chapter explains the study methodology and the analytical tools that will be used to analyse the data, while the fourth chapter reports on

the results of the data analysis. The vital findings are discussed in Chapter five. Finally, in chapter six, the implications and conclusion are discussed. Figure 1.4 is a Gantt chart that illustrates the thesis's arrangement from chapter 1 to chapter 6 with a time frame for each chapter.

Chantan	Task	2019					2020													2021					
Chapter	1 ask	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6		
	Study's Background																								
	Problem Statement																								
Chapter 1	Research Questions& Objectives Study's significance and scope																								
Chapter	Literature review																								
2	Conceptual Framework																								
Chapter	Methodology																								
3	Questionnaire development																								
Chapter	Data gathering																								
4	Analysis																								
Chapter 5	Discussion																								
Chapter 6	Conclusion																								

Figure 1.4 : Organization of thesis

1.9 Conclusion

The first chapter discussed the study's background, addressed the problem statement, moreover the research questions/ objectives were mentioned. Lastly, this chapter discussed the study's significance. In addition, the chapter defined the variables employed in this research. The next chapter examines significant literature used to build the study's framework.

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