

The Influence of Opinion Leaders on Consumer Buying Behavior Among Millennials in Klang Valley

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Abstract

Opinion leaders have emerged as individuals with social influence who serve as the core of an interpersonal communication network. The social trends have made opinion leaders significantly influence buying behavior, especially among millennials. A deeper understanding of the characteristics of opinion leadership is still needed and based on the two-step flow theory, we developed a research framework to study opinion leaders' influence (trust, credibility, and originality) on consumer buying behavior. A simple random sampling method was used, and the sample comprised 398 millennials in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Data were collected via a self-administered questionnaire. Regarding the relationships involving the opinion leaders' elements, Pearson correlation analysis found that the trust ($r=0.545$; $p=0.00$), credibility ($r=0.518$; $p=0.00$), and originality ($r=0.398$; $p=0.00$) of opinion leaders are significantly related to consumer buying behavior. Multiple regression analysis was then applied to examine the most influential opinion leader factors on millennials' buying behavior. The result showed that this model contributed a total of 30.7% and that trust ($\beta = 0.368$, $p = 0.000$) is the most influencing factor on millennials buying behavior. Marketers will have an updated perspective on the influence of opinion leaders on consumer buying behavior knowing the profiles of opinion leaders is extremely beneficial for consumers to make wise purchase decisions.

Keywords: Credibility, Consumer buying behavior, Opinion leaders, Originality, Trust



1.0 Introduction

Followed by the trends, online stores, and online businesses were springing up on social media, especially during the pandemic of COVID-19. Social media in the present world is not only used for communication but also for business. Social network nowadays serves as an important communication tool that can facilitate interactions between members of society (Hosseini Bamakan et al., 2018). As a result, there is a vast quantity of relevant data accessible in today's era of digitalization with simple accessibility, i.e., easy for the consumers to reach them or get into them hence it may create obstacles for marketers to compete with potential firms. Therefore, several opinion leaders have formed as influential members of online communities as they can affect others' opinions and influence them on different online platforms. Opinion leaders can range from friends and family to well-known actors, politicians, websites, CEOs, and IT enthusiasts. Online opinion influencers play a vital role in promoting products and services through a variety of business and marketing tools (Lin et al., 2018; Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko, 2019). They are usually an enthusiastic individual who love to share their experiences and opinions on the social web with their followers.

Every online opinion leader is not made overnight. All of them begin with a negligible quantity of followers because it takes time to build up their connections. According to Weeks et al. (2017), changes in the media environment generate new and maybe easier chances for people to try to convince or influence others in their social networks. With the development of the Internet and related technologies, the role of opinion leaders has grown even more prominent (Turcotte et al., 2015). Further, social media platforms are fundamentally used to socialize and connect people digitally, and it also opens new spaces for opinion leaders to influence others through their networks (Rachma et al., 2022; Turcotte et al., 2015). As Haron et al. (2016) argued, social media can be a powerful marketing tool and it can be used as a sharing platform among viewers. On the other hand, the Internet including social media platforms is also important for opinion leaders to express their opinions due to the features as user-friendly and having major easy-sharing capabilities (Jalli, 2016). However, the studies that were done on the social media factors of opinion leaders that can influence consumers' buying decisions are still inadequate.

Although there are several types of online platforms used by opinion leaders such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Jin & Ryu,



2019; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Park & Kaye, 2017), this study will further research which of the social factors of opinion leaders (trust, credibility, and originality) will highly influence the consumer's buying behavior. A meta-analysis process used in Kwon and Song's (2015) study proved that consumers not only make their decisions based on the opinion of experts about the products but also the direct information from the mass media. On the contrary, Zhao, Kou, Peng, and Chen (2018) illustrate that an increase in opinion followers' confidence in positive opinion leaders can raise their influencing power. Therefore, Zhao et al. (2018) suggested that there is a need to identify the degree of trust by opinion leaders which can lead to affect consumers' decision-making processes. Different studies have been conducted that have provided a lot of variety relevant information about the influence of opinion leaders on consumers' buying behavior. However, the focus of the above research on the degree of trust toward opinion leaders is needed to investigate.

In addition, there are a few prior findings (e.g., Cui, Jiang, Deng, & Zhang, 2019; Diehl & Lee, 2022; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Sudha & Sheena, 2017) to explain the marketing strategies used by the companies to create the credibility of information in digitally networked media environments. However, the credibility of online information from opinion leaders creates uncertainty regarding consumers whether it should be believed. Thus, future research (i.e., this study) is needed to better understand the credibility of opinion leaders on consumer buying behavior. Also, there are few studies (e.g., Casalo, Flavian, & Ibanez-Sanchez, 2020; Fakhreddin & Foroudi, 2021; Zak & Hasprova, 2020) done on the originality of opinion leaders that will influence consumer buying behavior, however, their focus of the study is inadequate and the level of creativity of opinion leaders whether it can affect millennials. Therefore, the originality of opinion leaders that will influence millennials' consumer buying behavior needs to be further investigated.

Knowing the profiles of opinion leaders is extremely beneficial for consumers to make wise purchase decisions and for businesses looking to employ these individuals to boost product distribution and sales, especially via the advancement of social media. Opinion leaders may have a favorable impact on the use of these firms' goods and services among potential customers. In addition, opinion leaders that influence the intention to purchase among millennials have not been



researched much in the literature. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the characteristics of opinion leadership is still needed.

In particular, the objectives of this study are to examine the influence of opinion leaders on millennials' purchase behavior and to investigate the relationships as well as the contributions of trust, credibility, and originality of opinion leaders to consumer buying behavior among millennials. Subsequently, to determine the most influential social factors of opinion leaders that affect their buying behavior.

2.0 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Based on the two-step flow theory, we mainly review the literature on the theory and explore the research on the influence of opinion leader's elements on consumer buying behavior.

2.1 Research Framework

In the current research framework, the two-step flow theory serves as the foundation for directing the research. The two-step concept was initially proposed by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet (1948) in *The People's Choice*, a study that examined the decision-making process during a Presidential election campaign. Face-to-face interaction, according to Lazarsfeld et al. (1948), has a greater influence on changes in people's political leanings than mass media. Based on the two-step theory, the contents of mass communication filtered down through the opinion leader's own and frequently the group's agenda and beliefs (Soffer, 2019). Similarly, Pang and Ng (2017) discovered an impact in terms of influence on misinformation propagation, which is consistent with the two-step information flow model. This study also explained that if opinion leaders or influencers promote disinformation on platforms where they are more popular, the misinformation will spread across platforms to their followers' social networks. Likewise, the study's findings demonstrated by Chen and You (2019) show that learners in the experimental group with a two-step flow of communication through opinion leaders outperformed those in the control group with one-step communication through website posts on learning performance, peer interaction, and group cohesiveness.

In addition, in online environments, structural criteria such as the number of social relationships do not always correspond to the



potential to initiate broad and far-reaching information cascades, as stated by Ognyanova (2017). According to Powell (2022), many individuals were heavily impacted by opinion leaders in their networks, which included close friends, family, activists, and organizations. Therefore, it is essential to be involved with external environments as well as other social software such as YouTube to enable interaction of the blog with these platforms and utilization of their advances (Kim, 2008). Using these novel communication technologies (Kavanaugh et al., 2006) makes it easier to connect, communicate, and diffuse the message to a bigger group of people who have similar interests. On the contrary, Mohammadi et al. (2016) suggested that the flow of knowledge and influence in word-of-mouth (WOM) spread of energy-saving techniques does not always follow the two-step flow of communication paradigm. This is because of either a lack of opinion leaders employed by organizations and ignoring their potential impact in promoting energy-saving methods or a lack of actual influential values for opinion leaders in disseminating energy themes to the public (Mohammadi et al., 2016).

A spate of studies has been undertaken based on the two-step flow theory. In line with recent literature, the two-step flow theory was a significant model in the diffusion of messages from opinion leaders to their followers via social platforms. Su (2019) expressed that the original two-step flow theory is concerned with the influence of opinion leaders on changes in public opinion; however, without evaluating movements over time, it is difficult to make conclusions about the function of opinion leaders in influencing public opinion. In this study, we assume that the two-step flow theory is essential to be included in the present research framework to determine the relationship between opinion leaders and the two-step flow theory. However, to overcome these gaps, this study tries to analyze whether opinion leaders impact the millennials' thoughts on their buying behavior in the setting of the two-step flow theory. Figure 1 shows the current study's framework, applying the basic concept of the two-step flow theory.



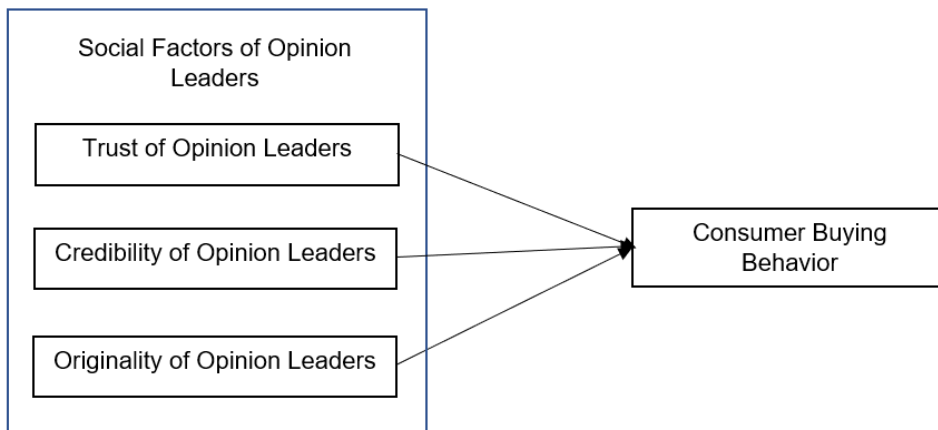


Figure 1 : Research Framework

2.2 Influence of Opinion Leadership

Iyengar et al. (2011) state that the power of an individual to affect the attitudes, views, and overt conduct of others is referred to as opinion leadership. The role of an opinion leader is mainly to establish a link between certain products or brands and consumers as they are considered to have expertise that can contribute to attitude formation or changes in consumers (Fakhreddin & Foroudi, 2021; Godey et al., 2016; Queslati et al., 2021). Much research has been undertaken to discover prospective opinion leaders, discover the qualities that differentiate them from their followers, and identify how they use their influence to affect the beliefs and behaviors of many people (Savolainen, 2021). Hence, according to Jansson et al. (2017), the significance of the interpersonal social impact on the adoption of eco-innovation in general, and opinion leadership and personal norms. The literature review on the personal influence of opinion leaders is presented in the following:

2.2.1 Trust of Opinion Leaders

The suggestions made by opinion leaders typically have a huge influence on product marketing since they are viewed as persuasive testimonies that assist followers in creating trust (Chan & Fan, 2020; Queslati et al., 2020). Numerous studies have found that social trust or mutual trust between individuals is one of the many aspects that contribute to the effectiveness of knowledge-sharing activities. Liu et al. (2019) argued that people desire to learn from each other and share



their expertise and knowledge in an online community where they have social trust. Users in online media who are trustworthy are more likely to respond favorably, share their knowledge, and contribute resources so their attitudes and behaviors are influenced by their level of social trust. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2018) found that the levels of trust of opinion followers in opinion leaders have a greater impact on opinion leaders' influencing power compared with the proportion of the opinion leaders and the confidence levels of the followers towards opinion leaders.

A prior study stated that the trustworthiness of citizen influencers who as consumers with crowds of online followers is the primary driver of their persuasiveness, which mediates and magnifies the effect of the other four traits including expertise, likeability, similarity, and familiarity (Martensen et al., 2018). Levesque and Pons (2020) then argue that trust, the construction of the competence of the opinion leader himself, that is, the degree of confidence in him from the audience, has an essential effect on the perception of a message from opinion leaders. Therefore, we assume that the trust of opinion leaders needs to be considered in this study to determine the specific relationship between trust in opinion leaders and millennials' buying behavior. Social trust from opinion leaders can potentially have a positive impact on the millennials which in turn importantly corresponds to the millennials' purchasing behavior. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Trust of opinion leaders has a positive impact on consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley.

2.2.2 Credibility of Opinion Leaders

According to Jiang and Wang (2021), opinion leaders play an essential role in the aggregation of opinions, and those who have a strong influence and many social links in social commerce platforms or also referred to as 'Big-V' type opinion leaders makes them more influential and capable of gaining more strong supporters than authority-type opinion leaders. The audience must be willing to blindly trust the leader and follow his advice. As a result, the more loyalty, the more probable it is that consumers will pick what the leader suggested to them to choose among numerous alternative products and services (Maldynova, 2021).

Locock et al. (2001) claim that the usefulness of the expert opinion leader lies mostly in the early phases of getting an idea rolling,



validating the evidence, and translating it into a form that people can accept while considering their local experience. However, innovators who go too far beyond current standards in their dedication to a specific topic may become isolated and unable to maintain their credibility. For example, in the study by Shi and Salmon (2018), personal characteristics, professional expertise, and social positions were shown to predict an individual's local opinion leadership in the retweet network of popular organ donation messages. The result showed that personal characteristics and social positions, but not professional expertise, were found to be substantially related to global opinion leadership and informal authority and may alienate others even if they are still recognized as experts. The verification badge shows a user's reliability when those messages posted through verified accounts receive more retweets than messages sent via unverified accounts (Zhang et al., 2014).

Concerns about the reliability of the digital media environment are usually due to there being few standards for quality control and evaluation of the Internet (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). A previous study stated that celebrities were seen as a credible source of information by all users (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Some marketers use influencer marketing to establish market credibility either by creating social conversations about their brand or promoting their products online or in-store. This is because influencer marketing is a unique concept of word-of-mouth marketing with a focus on performing more professionally in a social context and hence it is a very useful form of relationship building for brands that want to expand and rotate their audience through trust and credibility with loyal customers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). For example, the study by Matute et al. (2016) shows that the quantity, reliability, quality, and perceived usefulness of information are key to influencing consumers' repurchase intention by disseminating food safety information using social media. Additionally, Cui et al. (2019) identified that opinion leaders' suggestions are unique characteristics of social media as they play an important role in influencing the behavior of individual consumers due to their ability to effectively disseminate online information. Peer source reliability assessments are also important for current research, as people tend to pay less attention to analyzing information coming from networks (Diehl & Lee, 2022). There are a few prior findings from the above-described research used to explain the marketing strategies used by companies to create the credibility of information in digitally networked media



environments. However, the credibility of online information from opinion leaders creates uncertainty regarding consumers whether it should be believed. Thus, future research is needed to better understand the credibility of opinion leaders on consumer buying behavior. Along the same vein, we proposed the following:

H₂: The credibility of opinion leaders has a positive impact on consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley.

2.2.3 Originality of Opinion Leaders

Individuality is critical in the formation of opinion leaders. A study conducted by Casalo et al. (2020) shows that originality and uniqueness are essential factors for an opinion leader in social media. According to Zak and Hasprova (2020), opinion leaders' creative freedom should not be restricted. Balikcioglu (2018) found that fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership, as well as buying impulsiveness, have a direct impact on impulse shopping behavior, although the need for uniqueness does not have a direct impact on impulse purchase behavior but does correlate to buying impulsiveness characteristics. For example, Zabeen et al. (2017) observed that Muslim women are becoming more socially involved due to their education and careers. As a result, there is a high need for apparel that provides both modesty and attractiveness. From the result of the study, young Muslim women are heavily impacted by opinion leaders who have embraced Muslim clothing and made their mark on society.

Zak and Hasprova (2020) found that the originality of the influencer is significant for the consumer to follow an influencer. It will be beneficial for the business company to draw potential clients or customers to their side with the assistance of an influencer who is educated in the relevant area while also adding fresh material to retain the naturalness and authenticity of the interaction between the influencer and its audience. Opinion leaders understand their followers' demands; hence, companies will cooperate with the opinion leaders to develop original and creative content that accords with the demands of their followers (Fakhreddin & Foroudi, 2021). However, Kwon and Song (2015) found that adolescent purchasing decisions are specific and likely influenced by others. As a result, the original message from the mass media can be distorted before it reaches them. According to Casalo et al. (2020), the originality of the content posted to consumers' Instagram accounts can directly affect their perception when the author



is an opinion leader. There are few studies done on the originality of opinion leaders that will influence consumer buying behavior however their focus of the study is inadequate and the level of creativity of opinion leaders can affect millennials. Therefore, the originality of opinion leaders that will influence millennials' consumer buying behavior needs to be further investigated.

H₃: Originality of opinion leaders has a positive impact on consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley.

3.0 Research Methods

3.1 Location and Sampling Procedure

The research is designed to determine the influence of opinion leaders on the population consisting of millennials in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Klang Valley has an area of roughly 2,832 square kilometers and is located in the center of Peninsular Malaysia's west coast, comprising five major areas: the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Gombak, Hulu Langat, Klang, and Petaling. The respondents were invited to participate in the research survey by filling out the questionnaires with scalable answers that were provided to them. The location was selected because different races of millennials and their age range between 18 to 35 years old and most of them account for half of Malaysia's working-age population can be found in the population in Klang Valley since this study focuses on the reactions of millennial consumers to online purchases when influenced by opinion leaders.

The number of expected respondents was 384 respondents from the selected sample size of approximately 8.9 million people in Klang Valley out of 32.7 million people of Malaysia's total population (Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 2022) with 95% confidence intervals and a 5% margin of error, following the guide from Krejcie and Morgan (1970). An invitation to participate was sent to 400 millennials (after adding 5% for incomplete or missing data as suggested by Kotrlík and Higgins, 2001) to answer the questionnaire disseminated through Google Forms, and the respondents were chosen from a potential social media account. Based on information obtained from the internet about some famous social media influencers, their followers are shortlisted according to every fifth number. In this study, the social media identified as stable in terms of



its existence and acceptance as well as having a large influence is Instagram. This social media also tends to be followed by many users from the millennial group and many advertisements are loaded with endorsements from influencers that provide a great possibility for purchase behavior to occur. All users (followers of these influencers) were contacted through their social media accounts to be given a Google form. Some were contacted via email (if obtained/shared by the user), based on their respective medium of choice. A simple sampling technique was applied to randomly pick from every 5th user to predetermine the qualifications of the respondent to answer the questionnaire. Then, the questionnaire was distributed for every interval of five users. If a respondent is unwilling to participate in the survey, the five intervals were still used for the next subsequent respondent. This sample selection process was repeated until the desired sample was obtained. In the process of sampling, the research performed on this sample should have high internal and external validity. The sample selected for this study was based on the following criteria: 1) the participant must be a millennial from Klang Valley, 2) the participant must be aged between 18 and 35 years old, and 3) the participant must have experience buying through social media. As a result, the study's response rate is satisfactory and extremely good for accomplishing the study's objectives.

3.2 Measurement Items

Most of the variables were assessed using scales that have previously been validated in other research, with minor changes to guarantee contextual consistency. In this research, the tools of data collection that have been used is a survey method that includes questionnaires. Since the survey method is used to define certain elements of a population statistically; in this category, participants were asked to identify opinion leaders using a brief questionnaire or to score themselves and their peers using pre-defined variables (Bamakan et al., 2019). There were five sections in the questionnaire in section one, the questions were asked regarding the participants' sociodemographic data and their frequencies of purchase through social media. The second section asked for information about respondents' online buying behavior. Next, the third and fifth sections included questions concerning respondents' perceptions about the encouraging influence factors (trust, credibility, and originality) associated with opinion leaders that influenced their purchasing



behavior. Hence, the questions consisted in the questionnaire managed to identify the interaction between how the characteristics of opinion leaders influence millennials in Klang Valley on consumer buying behavior. In addition, the questionnaire was constructed in English to ensure that responders clearly understood the questions and to urge responders to offer accurate, honest, and detailed data.

In this study, multiple-item measuring scales adapted from previous research support ensuring the measures' content validity. Section one contains demographic items and items about respondents' frequency of use of social media which depend on eight items that are newly developed by the researcher. Section two, consumer buying behavior is the construct and there were five items in scale adapted from Gañac (2018). Conceptually, consumer buying behavior refers to a consumer's entire attitude while purchasing a product or service based on individual preferences, beliefs, aims, and perceptions (Casas & Chinoperekweyi, 2019). Operationally, this construct refers to the purchase attitude of the ultimate consumer in selecting, purchasing, utilizing, and discarding things and services to fulfill their wants and desires. Section three, trust of opinion leaders contains eight items adapted from Osman et al. (2010), Santiago et al. (2020), and Mengo (2020). As a conceptual definition provided by Jain and Katarya (2018), trust in a social network may be characterized as a bidirectional bond between two users who communicate, share, and create friends with each other. In this study, trust was operationalized as a strong belief in someone or something's trustworthiness, truthfulness, or effectiveness. Section four, the credibility of opinion leaders was measured based on the definition guided by Mohamad, Abdullah, and Akanmu (2022) that referred to the amount of audience trust in the legitimacy and informational quality of an influencer's message is reflected in trustworthiness which was then being operationalized as referring to the quality of an individual that causes others to believe or trust them. This construct consists of nine items of which eight of them were adapted from Žák and Hasprová (2021) and Sokolova and Kefi (2020) and the remaining one item was newly developed. Finally, section five contains originality of opinion leaders with five items which comprised of four items adapted from Žák and Hasprová (2021) and one was newly developed. Conceptually, this construct refers to the degree to which these behaviors are seen as uncommon, creative, and knowledgeable is referred to as their originality (Casalo et al., 2020) and operationally, it is defined as a person's capacity to think and



express themselves independently and creatively. Table 1 shows the measurement items used in this study. A five-point Likert scale response format was used in which respondents rated from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”) on each item from section two until section five in the questionnaire.

Table 1 : Measurement Items Used in This Study

No.	Items	Sources
Consumer Buying Behavior		
1.	Before making a final purchasing selection, I normally check for several other brands and options.	Gañac (2018)
2.	When I have a clear understanding of the choices, I research and compare all options thoroughly.	Gañac (2018)
3.	I would rather make a fast selection than go through the detailed review process.	Gañac (2018)
4.	When I find a suitable brand or product, I stop exploring alternatives and make my selection.	Gañac (2018)
5.	I frequently purchase things that he/she (opinion leader) promotes on his/her social media networks.	Newly developed
Trust of Opinion Leaders		
1.	I would trust online opinion leaders enough to feel comfortable purchasing online.	Osman, Yin-Fah and Hooi-Choo (2010)
2.	I would trust an Internet opinion leader to convey personal information about online shopping.	Osman et al. (2010)
3.	I think that opinion leaders may be trusted.	Santiago, Magueta, and Dias (2020)
4.	I think that opinion leaders don't just care about their own.	Santiago et al. (2020)
5.	I think that opinion leaders deliver reliable/accurate information.	Mengo (2020)
6.	I would trust opinion leaders if they are popular.	Mengo (2020)
7.	I would trust opinion leaders if they are not biased.	Mengo (2020)
8.	I would trust opinion leaders if they were accessible.	Mengo (2020)
Credibility of Opinion Leaders		
1.	I believe that the advertisements posted by opinion leaders have an impact on me.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
2.	I think that advertising through opinion leaders is more credible than traditional types of advertising (TV, radio, print advertising)	Žák and Hasprová (2021)



No.	Items	Sources
3.	I believe that opinion leaders with a higher number of followers are more trustworthy.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
4.	In my opinion, an opinion leader's credibility is determined by his or her understanding of the field in which they work.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
5.	It distracts me when an opinion leader fails to use the right hashtag to identify paid promotion of a product or service, such as #cooperation.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
6.	I trust the review or suggestion of opinion leaders less when I realize it's a sponsored cooperation.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
7.	I consider the opinion leader to be an expert in his or her field.	Sokolova and Kefi (2020)
8.	I find the opinion leader is trustworthy.	Sokolova and Kefi (2020)
9.	I think his/her (opinion leader) content is constantly updated.	Sokolova and Kefi (2020)
Originality of Opinion Leaders		
1.	I think he/she (opinion leader) contributes newer material compared to others.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
2.	I admire some of his/her (opinion leader) own features (talent, physical condition, beauty) that are different from others.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
3.	I like the content and topic of the postings he/she (opinion leader) adds that are different from others.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
4.	I like he/she (opinion leader) adds beautiful photos or videos based on his/her (opinion leader) own creativity.	Žák and Hasprová (2021)
5.	I like the creativity of presenting his/her (opinion leader) content compared to others.	Newly developed

3.3 Data Analysis and Results

The data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0, which was responsible for descriptive data analysis, while Pearson correlation and multiple regression were used to test the three hypotheses and to examine the contribution of the main predictors' understudy, respectively. To test for construct validity, the results of exploratory factor analysis found that the data were appropriate to be examined indicated by the significant result of Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p=0.000$) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was above 0.5 (KMO = 0.956). In addition, the total variance explained (60.556) was considered high for all the constructs extracted, and the items were found to belong to their constructs by referring to



the rotated component matrix. Therefore, these measurements were judged to have good construct validity considering the exploratory nature of the study. For the reliability test, Cronbach's alpha value of trust of opinion leaders had the highest value of 0.950 among all the variables. The second highest Cronbach's alpha value of 0.905 is the originality of opinion leaders. These two variables have an excellent level of reliability and indicate that they were reliable. Further, the credibility of opinion leaders shows a level of good reliability, and consumer buying behavior has a moderate reliability level. Both variables stated Cronbach's alpha values of 0.891 and 0.578 respectively.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Descriptive analysis was performed to identify respondents' background while inferential analyses, i.e., Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple linear regression were conducted to determine the relationships between independent variables (opinion leaders' trust, credibility, and originality) and dependent variable (consumer buying behavior) among millennials in Klang Valley. When using multiple linear regression analysis, the most influential predictors among the three predictors, which are trust, credibility, and originality of opinion leaders can be determined.

4.1 The Respondents' Background

The sample structure shown in Table 2 is based on 398 respondent's useable questionnaire responses. The sample consisted of more women (59.3%) than men (40.7%), with the age range between 18 and 22 years old having the highest frequency which comprises 49.5% of respondents while the age group between 33 and 35 years old is the lowest frequency which only consisted of 20 or 5% of the millennials. On the other hand, about one-third (32.7%) of them indicated their age was between 23 and 27 years old and 12.8% of them expressed their age was between 28 and 32. Further, there were almost half (42.7%) of the millennials identified their ethnic status as Chinese, 36.4% acknowledged their ethnicity as Malay, 16.3% as Indian, and 4.5% of respondents from other ethnic involved in this research. In terms of occupation, more than half (61.6%) of the millennials in Klang Valley were full-time students and there was only 1% of the respondents was part-time employee. In addition, there were



23.6%, 9.5%, and 4.3% of the respondents were full-time workers, students with part-time jobs, and unemployed workers respectively. Since more than half of the respondents fell into full-time students, there were more than two-thirds (68.6%) of the respondents of their a monthly income below RM1000 and almost half (41%) of the respondents had a monthly income of more than RM4000 because they were employed with stable monthly income. Looking at the patterns of purchasing through social media, 61.3% of the respondents have experienced sometimes purchasing through social media and 6.8% of respondents revealed that they have daily experience in purchasing online. Based on the findings, many people have made purchases online, but they do not purchase online on social media very frequently.

Table 2 : Background of Respondents (N=398)

Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	162	40.7
Female	236	59.3
Age (years old)		
18 - 22	197	49.5
23 - 27	130	32.7
28 - 32	51	12.8
33 - 35	20	5.0
Ethnicity		
Malay	145	36.4
Chinese	170	42.7
Indian	65	16.3
Other	18	4.5
Occupation		
Employed with a full-time Job	94	23.6
Part-time Employee	4	1.0
A student with a part-time Job	38	9.5
Full-time Student	245	61.6
Unemployed	17	4.3
Monthly Income		
Below RM1000	273	68.6
RM1000 – RM1999	17	4.3
RM2000 – RM2999	34	8.5
RM3000 – RM3999	33	8.3



Variables	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
RM4000 above	41	10.3
How frequently do you purchase through social media?		
Daily	27	6.8
Weekly	31	7.8
Monthly	96	24.1
Sometimes	244	61.3

4.2 Relationship Between Consumer Buying Behavior and The Influence of Opinion Leaders Among Millennials in Klang Valley

In this study, the Pearson correlation test was utilized to examine the relationship between independent variables (trust, credibility, and originality) and consumer buying behavior as presented in Table 3.

Table 3 : Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis

Hypotheses	Result	Decision
H ₁ : Trust of opinion leaders has a positive impact on consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley	r=0.545 p=0.000	H ₁ is supported
H ₂ : Credibility of opinion leaders has a positive impact on consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley.	r=0.518 p=0.000	H ₂ is supported
H ₃ : The originality of opinion leaders has a positive impact on consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley.	r=0.398 p=0.000	H ₃ is supported

The study found that all the relationships were found to be significant with positive ($r = 0.545$, $p \leq 0.01$ for trust; $r = 0.518$, $p \leq 0.01$ for credibility, and $r = 0.343$, $p \leq 0.01$ for the originality of opinion leaders). However, the strength of the relationship involving the originality of opinion leaders was considered moderate since the r -value was between 0.3 to 0.5. The positive direction in all the relationships implied that the higher the level of trust, credibility, and originality of opinion leaders, the higher the consumer buying behavior.

The current finding regarding the significant correlation between trust and consumer buying behavior was consistent with previous research findings which indicated that people desire to learn from each other and share their expertise and knowledge in an online community where they have social trust (Liu et al., 2019). As for the significant



correlation involving opinion leader's credibility and originality, the current result was similar to past research in which Maldynova (2021) suggested that the more loyalty, the more probable it is that consumers will pick what the leader suggested to them to choose among numerous alternative products and services and strengthened the study of Balikcioglu (2018) indicates that fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership, as well as buying impulsiveness, have a direct impact on impulse shopping behavior, respectively.

4.3 The Most Influential Social Factors of Opinion Leaders Affecting Buying Behavior

Multiple linear regression analysis was then performed to examine the most influential social factors (trust, credibility, and originality) of opinion leaders on consumers in buying behavior. All items for each construct were computed as scores and included in the multiple regression analysis using the enter method and the output was illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4 : Summary of Multiple Linear Regression for the Influence of Social Factors of Opinion Leaders on the Consumer in Buying Behavior

Variables	Standardized Coefficient Beta (β)	Beta (t)	p-value
(Constant)		15.204	0.000
Trust of opinion leaders	0.368	4.985	0.000*
Credibility of opinion leaders	0.222	2.715	0.007*
Originality of opinion leaders	-0.009	-0.140	0.889

$F = 59.544$; $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.312$; $\Delta R^2 = 0.307$

* $p < 0.05$

All variables were included in the standard multiple regression analysis about the relationship between the social factors of opinion leaders and consumer buying behavior scores among millennials. The multiple regression model yielded an F-ratio of 59.54 ($p = 0.000$) that was statistically significant, and a correlation is significant below the 0.001 level. This indicated that a statistically significant linear relationship was found to exist between the influence of social factors (trust, credibility, and originality) and consumer buying behavior. In contrast, the entire model was scored favorably due to its significance and fitness. In addition, the finding also revealed that the proportional contribution of the independent variables (trust, credibility, and



originality) to the dependent variable (consumer buying behavior) was low (0.312). Meanwhile, the adjusted R-square (ΔR^2) value, which indicates how much of the total variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables, was 0.307. Therefore, 30.7 percent of the variation in consumer buying behavior can be explained as an influence by social factors of opinion leaders.

The (absolute) value of the Standardized Coefficients Beta (β), the greater the influence in a predictor model. Based on that, the trust of opinion leaders is the most significant predictor of consumer buying behavior. Only two variables which were the trust of opinion leaders ($\beta = 0.368$, $p = 0.000$) and the credibility of opinion leaders ($\beta = 0.222$, $p = 0.007$) influence consumer buying behavior. Furthermore, the highest regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.368$) was shown as the most dominant influencing factor which is the trust of opinion leaders has the greatest influence on millennials' buying behavior followed by the credibility of opinion leaders ($\beta = 0.222$). On the contrary, the originality of opinion leaders ($\beta = -0.009$, $p = 0.889$) illustrated that the originality of opinion leaders has very little effect on the millennials buying behavior in Klang Valley. When compared to the Pearson correlation results, trust in opinion leaders had the strongest relationship with consumer purchasing behavior among millennials in Klang Valley, accompanied by the credibility and originality of opinion leaders. In this case, it can be justified that the greater originality of opinion leaders will lead to a 0.009 decrease in the intention of the millennials' buying behavior. Thus, the originality of opinion leaders had no significant contribution to millennials' buying behavior. In addition, looking at the previous result from the Pearson correlation analysis, originality of opinion leaders had the lowest r-value ($r=0.398$) among all three factors. It means that the strong correlation between these two variables is not strong compared to the other two factors, so when it compares to the other two factors and the dependent variable (buying behavior) in multiple linear regression, it shows that the originality of opinion leaders does not effectively influence millennials to purchase the product.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

The data were analyzed, and all of the independent variables (trust, credibility, and originality) have positive and significant impacts on millennials' purchasing behavior. Taking this into account, the



current study has found that all hypotheses (H₁, H₂, and H₃) were supported and consistent with Liu et al. (2019), Maldynova (2021), and Balikcioglu (2018) which also found that social trust, loyalty on opinion leaders and innovativeness of opinion leaders can influence consumer buying behavior from previous research.

Additionally, multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the contribution of the predictors as well as to determine the most influential social media factors on consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley. Trust in opinion leaders was found to be the most dominant influencing factor on millennials' buying behavior followed by credibility. However, the originality of opinion leaders was found to have no significant contribution to millennials' buying behavior. Several previous studies suggested by Zhao et al. (2018) and Oueslati et al. (2020), discussed that the trust of opinion leaders is the most significant factor that directly influences consumer buying behavior.

5.2 Implications

The findings of this study have contributed to the understanding of the influence of opinion leaders on consumer buying behavior. As a contribution to the body of knowledge, this study provided an exploratory examination of the relationship between trust, credibility, and originality of opinion leaders and consumer buying behavior. It was revealed that there was a strong positive significant relationship between trust, credibility, and originality of opinion leaders and consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley. In addition, consumer buying behavior among millennials in Klang Valley was most reliant on the trust of opinion leaders compared to the other influencing factors. Thus, it is understandable that the trust, credibility, and originality of opinion leaders can influence the buying behavior of millennials. The most influencing social factor that strongly affects consumer buying behavior is the trust of opinion leaders. The fact that millennials may regard their opinions as more trustworthy than information obtained from traditional advertising. As a result, millennials are more likely to buy based on the recommendations of trusted opinion leaders. However, it was discovered that the originality of opinion leaders has a negative intention toward consumer purchasing behavior. Henceforth, opinion leaders' originality is one of the influencing factors, but it has no impact on millennial purchasing behavior.



The findings also concur with and provide managerial implications for all who are consumers and marketers. Marketers will have a better understanding of millennials' attitudes toward consumer purchasing behavior, as well as the factors influencing their purchasing behavior. Understanding buyers can help marketers connect with customers and influence their behavior to avoid wasted advertising expenses in today's competitive global market. Marketers must study various types of customer behavior such as complex buying behavior, dissonance-reducing buying behavior, habitual buying behavior, and variety-seeking buying behavior, as well as how consumers make purchasing decisions to increase their sales. From the result, it can be concluded that opinion leaders' trust, credibility, and originality have a significant impact on consumer purchasing behavior. Furthermore, the findings of this study show that trust in opinion leaders is the most influential social factor in consumer buying behavior. Taking this into account, marketers can gain consumer trust and understand the behavior of potential customers through a stronger engagement with influencers that will benefit them. Meanwhile, they can be aware that customers are more likely to base their buying decisions on the trust, credibility, and originality of an opinion leader. Hence, businesses can design a product that is customized to meet the specific requirements of their customers.

In the growth of the advancement of information and technology, opinion leaders have always influenced consumers' buying decisions, especially millennials. This is primarily because, despite the common use of such a communication strategy by companies in recent years to better influence target customers, opinion leaders become in high demand among brand managers and businesses. Influencer marketing is the appropriate method and tool for assisting the company in not only attracting new customers and increasing sales but also in building a good reputation for the company or brand (Žák & Hasprová, 2021).

From the consumer's perspective, the findings indicated that consumers should be aware that informative labeling and delivery by opinion leaders have become important trends in this modern information technology society. Further, consumers were able to place a greater emphasis on obtaining certifications for the quality of products produced (Pärson & Vancic, 2020). The study established that the most dominant characteristic of opinion leaders is trust which has an impact on millennials' buying behavior. This is supported by the research of Liu et al. (2019) and Zhao et al. (2018), which show that opinion



followers' trust in opinion leaders has an impact on their behavior. Consumers are more willing to pay for the product and service depending on word of mouth and product reviews from their trusted influencer marketing. Hereby, consumers can consider the products that are preferred by trusted opinion leaders.

The fact that millennials may regard their opinions as more trustworthy than information obtained from traditional advertising. As a result, millennials are more likely to buy based on the recommendations of trusted opinion leaders. However, it was discovered that the originality of opinion leaders has a negative intention toward consumer purchasing behavior. Henceforth, opinion leaders' originality is one of the influencing factors, but it has no impact on millennial buying behavior.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations, despite its strengths that should be highlighted. First, this study was only conducted in the Klang Valley areas of Malaysia. Different environments, specifically working environments, played an important role in influencing respondent behavior. If the research area could be conducted in various locations, it could come up with other results. When compared to this sample, working people may behave differently. Dörtyol et al. (2018); Eze and Bello (2016), as well as Premapriya et al. (2016), stated that cultural, social, psychological, and personal aspects such as age, quality, and income of consumer affect consumer buying behavior. This is because consumer preferences change at various stages of life. Another fact is that consumers make decisions based on their net income after taxes (Qazzafi, 2020). As a result, it could not represent people in cities or remote areas where the quality of life and approaches differ. Future researchers may extend the scope of the study to demonstrate it in different environments and geographical locations.

Secondly, this research has only examined three factors that influence online purchasing behavior. As the study could only explain a small portion of the changed buying behavior, more influencing variables other than those affiliated with opinion leaders (trust, credibility, and originality) would aid in explaining a larger portion of the changed buying behavior. The findings of this study illustrated that only 30.7% of the variation in consumer buying behavior can be explained as an influence by social factors of opinion leaders. Future researchers are suggested to determine other factors that influence consumer



purchasing behavior besides the trust of opinion leaders, the credibility of opinion leaders, and the originality of opinion leaders. For example, characteristics of opinion leaders such as interactivity, authority, and activity of opinion leaders are encouraged to have a further examination. Besides, Liu et al. (2019) suggested that changes in opinion leaders' individual-level explicit characteristics can be investigated further. Therefore, it can help them to understand other factors that may influence online purchase behavior.

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