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## From Posts to Purchases: Insights into the Influence of Social Media's Influencers on Retail Consumers' Purchase Intention

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### Abstract

*This study aims to investigate how customer purchase intentions among Malaysian internet shoppers are influenced by social media influencers, where attributes of influencers were investigated. Previous studies on social media marketing, influencer attributes, and consumer behaviour served as the foundation for the conceptual model. Likeability, trustworthiness of the influencer, attractiveness, and influencer expertise are the key variables. This study utilized the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Source Credibility Theory as the underlying theories. Following a thorough analysis of relevant research, a structured questionnaire was created, and 142 respondents' responses were gathered using purposive sampling. To determine whether the suggested research model was significant, multiple regression analysis was used. The results show that the influencer's expertise had a significant impact on consumers' intention to make purchases. However, influencer's trustworthiness, likeability, and attractiveness were non-significant factors. By concentrating on these important elements, marketers and businesses can improve their social media strategy by applying the implications of this study. This study's primary contribution was towards understanding the impact of social media influencers on purchase intentions in the pharmaceutical industry within the Malaysian context.*

**Keywords:** Social Media influencers, Purchase Intention, Influencer Attributes, Sustainable Growth, Economic Growth.

### Introduction

Social media marketing, a key component of digital marketing, has seen exponential growth in the last few years. Social media sites including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook have taken centre stage as key marketing channels. Based on data from Statista (2023), Figure 1 illustrates the steady rise in global expenditure on social media advertising, which is expected to reach \$255.8 billion by 2028 from \$51.3 billion in 2017. This indicates the increasing significance of social media platforms as a medium for marketing. This increasing trend is a reflection of how companies are depending more and more on social media influencers to sway consumers' purchase intentions by taking advantage of these platforms' effective reach and growing digital audience. Dwivedi et al. (2021) state that social media, mobile apps, the internet, and other digital communications technologies are becoming a common place for billions of people worldwide and are predicted to continue growing at an even faster rate due to the spread of digital platforms and shifting consumer behaviour.

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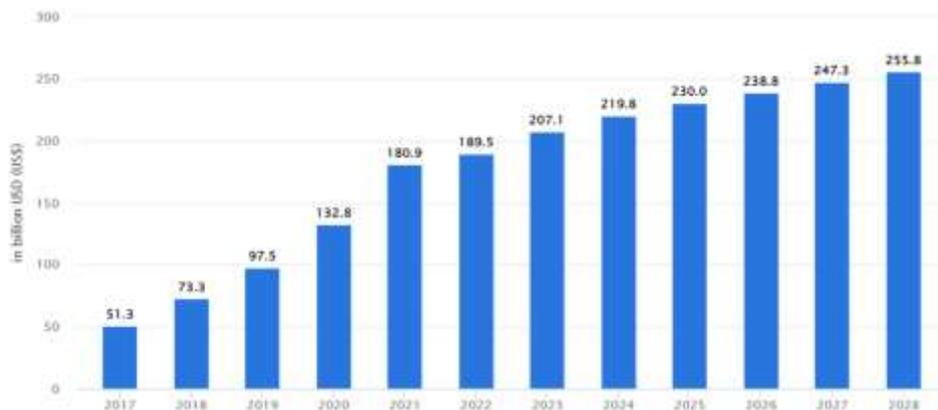
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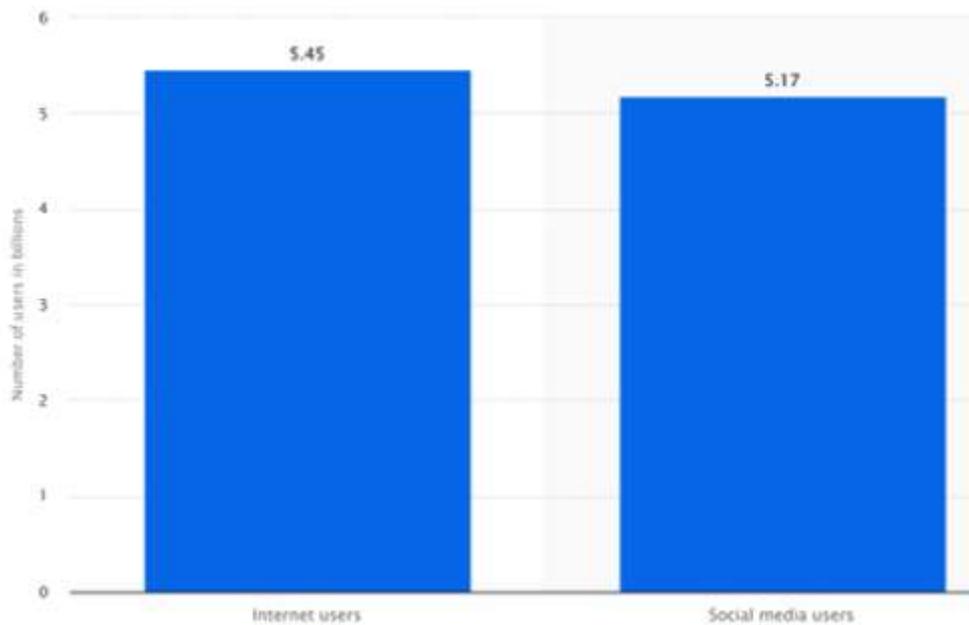


In a Dencheva (2024) global survey of PR agencies, marketing agencies, brands, and other relevant professionals, 37.6% of participants stated that their companies collaborated with up to ten influencers, while 14.7% said they worked with more than a thousand. Brands in a variety of sectors, including technology, automotive, fashion, and beauty, are spending a larger portion of their marketing funds on social media influencers because of how well they work to target consumers and to increase purchase intention. In 2020, the global Instagram influencer market size topped two billion dollars for the first time, according to a recent poll, and Instagram continues to be the most widely used medium for influencer marketing globally (Dencheva, 2024). Khanom (2023) mentioned that the current marketplace is growing increasingly digital every day and marketing sector is following in tandem.

Technology advancements and the widespread use of handheld devices have drastically altered consumer behaviour, which has an immediate impact on communication and use of social commerce to make decisions and conduct online shopping (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In addition to changing consumer behaviour, this pervasive digital presence has also changed how marketers plan and carry out their campaigns (Haudi, 2024). As a result, Appel et al. (2020) noted that social media in the future is probably going to appear considerably more visually enhanced. Referring to Figure 2, 5.45 billion people used the internet globally as of July 2024, making up 67.1% of the world's population. 5.17 billion people, or 63.7 per cent of the global population, use social media out of this total (Petrosyan, 2024). E-commerce, according to Rachmad (2022), is an internet channel that consumers can access through a computer. The business society use it to run their operations, and consumers use it to gather information before making decisions. From traditional brick-and-mortar stores to e-commerce integration like shoppable posts, direct purchases, and in-app checkout, the shopping landscape has changed dramatically (Wang et al., 2024). This has streamlined the consumer journey from discovery to purchase and increased the potency of social media influencers (Robson, 2024). Santosh (2024) claims that by utilizing the large, active user bases of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest, this online retail channel turns looking through photos into a more engaging purchasing experience. For instance, Facebook's Marketplace has developed into a strong platform that connects companies and customers, opening up the potential for both domestic and international trade.



**Figure 1** Global Social Media Ad Spending (in billion USD) from 2017 to 2028.



**Figure 2** *Number (in Billions) of Internet and Social Media Users Worldwide as of July 2024.*

Source: Petrosyan, 2024.

Liu and Zheng (2024) assert that rather than by engaging well-known celebrities for influencers, corporations work with these well known influencers to market their goods or services through social media channels. This is done by depending on the influencers' trusted standing and loyal followers. According to De Veirman et al. (2017), there are four types of influencers based on follower count: Nano-Influencers, who have 1,000–10,000 followers; Micro-Influencers, who have 10,000–100,000 followers; Mid-tier or Macro-Influencers, who have 100,000–1,000,000 followers; and Mega-Influencers, who have more than 1 million followers. The majority of brands have long collaborated with macro-influencers, and their approach has been to select the influencers who have a larger following (Lourenço & Pedro, 2023). But as of late, marketers are shifting their focus from Mega-Influencers to Micro-Influencers because the latter have more specialized audiences that value their ideas more, which boosts engagement rates (Lourenço & Pedro, 2023).

According to Shutsko (2020), because of its wide audience and engaging quality, video content—especially in short-form formats like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts—are quickly taking the lead as the most popular medium for social media influencers. Compared to text or still photos, video content can draw viewers in fast and more dynamically communicate a certain narrative, emotions, and product benefits (Dodds, 2024). Specifically designed for quick viewing and easier viral distribution, short-form videos have a larger audience (Babu et al., 2024). The way this format combines lighthearted content with subtly promoted products which reduces ad fatigue and increases viewer engagement, both of which have a positive impact

on purchase intentions. As of right now, content marketing is clearly regarded as a major yet balanced investment, with organizations allocating 10% to 29% of their budget (Haan, 2024). This tendency is especially noticeable in fast-growing industries where marketers are investing extensively to take advantage of influencers' credibility and reach, such as electronics, fitness, fashion, and cosmetics (Ao et al., 2023). Brush (2024) states that performance-based cost models like cost-per-acquisition (CPA) or revenue-sharing agreements are either replacing or supplementing older cost models like cost-per-engagement (CPE) and cost-per-click (CPC). A wide range of stakeholders, such as significant social media platforms, influencer marketing companies, content producers, and analytics organizations are defining the competitive landscape of digital marketing (Aruna et al., 2024). Market leaders include Meta Platforms (which includes Facebook and Instagram), TikTok, and Google (via YouTube), offer broad audience reach and advanced advertising capabilities (André & Martins, 2022). These fresh, specialized platforms can up-end have established the market dynamics and present opportunities for focused interaction (Mariani & Nambisan, 2021). Therefore, in order to maximize their social media strategies and maintain their competitiveness, companies and marketers need to traverse a challenging and quickly evolving environment. With a combined monthly active user base of over one billion, Meta Platforms controls four of the largest social media networks: Facebook (main platform), Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Facebook (Dixon, 2024).

Despite the growth of social media, customers are growing numb to commercial messages as influencers and brands oversaturate social media with influencers and ads (Watkins, 2020). When content appears unduly commercial or repeated, viewers may become bored toward it or even experience ad fatigue. According to Nicola (2022), consumers feel powerless and the only option to defend themselves is to intentionally ignore advertisements by doing things like turning away, muting the display, scrolling more quickly, or even stopping use altogether. Because of this, even carefully constructed influencers could find it difficult to draw in viewers and have a meaningful impact on purchasing decisions. If consumers believe that the influencers they see are related to their own needs, interests, or preferences, they are more likely to follow through on their buy intentions (Herrando et al., 2022).

Companies frequently use deceptive (misleading) advertising messages to reach gullible consumers since they are aware of the conformist inclinations of many people (Baltezarevic, 2023). Brüns and Meibner (2023) contend that these kinds of actions undermine the fundamental trust that serves as the basis for successful influencer marketing and degrades the quality of influencers. The effectiveness of influencer marketing techniques is at risk due to this growing scepticism, which also raises urgent concerns about the long-term viability of this marketing paradigm (Cheah et al., 2024). Social media endorsement visibility can be greatly impacted by algorithms on sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok that prioritize content according to user interaction and preferences (Adisa, 2023). An endorsement may not effectively reach its intended audience if it does not receive enough engagement or if it does not match algorithmic preferences. According to Mayar and Ramsey (2011), this computational algorithm means that, if influencers are not well-taught on this algorithm study, it will be hard even for well-executed videos or posts.

This research aims to examine the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions in Malaysia. The research objectives are as follows:

- RO1:** To examine the impact of influencer's expertise on purchase intention.
- RO2:** To examine the impact of influencer's trustworthiness on purchase intention.
- RO3:** To examine the impact of influencer's likeability on purchase intention.
- RO4:** To examine the impact of influencer's attractiveness on purchase intention.

## **Literature Review**

### **Global Perspective of Social Media**

From a global perspective, social media is incredibly powerful because it can be used to promote products that are significant to different individuals as well as to communicate new inventions (Poturak & Softic, 2019). Since every culture has a unique history, there are cultural distinctions that lead to variations in clothing styles worldwide and social media plays a role as a mediator (Shi, 2023). According to Khan (2023), the rise of social media as a subset of digital marketing has transformed how companies and their target audiences communicate, giving influencers and global brands the ability to affect consumers' buy intentions across national boundaries. Therefore understanding these key factors are important for companies seeking to efficiently customize their marketing tactics.

### **Relationship Amongst Key Variables**

To accurately evaluate the impact of SMM on consumer purchase behaviour in Malaysia, these hypotheses would need to be empirically tested using the appropriate research methods and data analysis techniques. Consumer purchase behaviour will be classified as the dependent variable in this conceptual framework. It is hypothesized that the independent factors, namely influencer's expertise, trustworthiness, likeability and attractiveness have a significant influence on this variable.

### **Influencer's Expertise has a Positive and Significant Influence on Consumer Purchase Behaviour**

According to Chekima et al. (2020), credibility is the degree to which the influencer is regarded by the recipients as having the required knowledge, reliability, and insight to present their viewpoints. First, it is important to know whether an influencer is expected to have a certain degree of product experience or general competence; second, it is important to know whether an influencer could be a helpful source of information when deciding what to buy (Coutinho et al., 2023). Usually, the assessment of knowledge considers the background in the sector, credentials, and experience of the influencer. For example, a culture of digital beauty gurus has emerged and replaced all sorts of conventional advertising, thus people work with cosmetics companies and utilise their knowledge of makeup to generate money while raising customer knowledge of their products (Hassan et al., 2021). An influencer is different from a celebrity in that the former is easier to reach and more relatable, as expertise has a greater impact in niche markets where specific knowledge is necessary to make well-informed decisions about purchases (Linnéa et al., 2018). As a result, influencers with a track record of success can shape customer behavior by offering insightful commentary and support with their established authenticity. Particularly in the beauty, technology, and lifestyle areas, unique expertise and experience-based influencers are increasingly influencing Malaysian consumers (Abdul Hamid et al., 2022). Halal cosmetics are attracting more consumers, for example, those who search for goods supporting their

religious views and values as well as those who see halal as a symbol of quality and safety (Hamid et al., 2024).

Therefore, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H1: Influencer's expertise has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.*

### **Influencer's Trustworthiness have a Positive and Significant Influence on Consumer Purchase Behaviour**

The degree to which an influencer's audience regards them as trustworthy, dependable, and moral is known as source trustworthiness (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Because it influences how believable and convincing the influencer's suggestions are, trustworthiness plays a critical role in the success of social media influencers (Jin et al., 2019). According to Kwiatak et al. (2021), consumers will not believe the information in content if they do not develop trust with influencers. A history of delivering accurate, trustworthy information and regular, transparent communication are two ways to establish credibility (Lange, 2023). To an extent Lisichkova and Othman's (2017) findings indicate that when respondents feel suggestions are provided sincerely rather than only for their own benefit, they are more likely to follow through on purchases. According to Andonopoulos et al. (2023), images uploaded on online landing pages reveal the private lives and identities of SMIs, while highlighted remarks and captions on their profile page can indicate genuineness to their followers. As a result, it is critical that brands choose a dependable influencer who can provide high-calibre content (Saima & Khan, 2020). In Malaysia, the market is broad and culturally complex, hence influencer credibility becomes even more crucial in determining buying intentions. Recognising their cultural significance, SMIs in Malaysia have actively supported halal gastronomic events, therefore augmenting the cultural dialogue and influencing consumer behaviour in this specific sector (Abu et al., 2023). Being trustworthy in Malaysia, a multiethnic and multireligious nation, calls not just honesty but also respect of cultural and religious distinctions (Bernama News, 2024).

Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H2: Influencer's trustworthiness has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.*

### **Influencer's Likeability has a Positive and Significant Influence on Consumer Purchase Behaviour**

A major factor in the success of social media influencers is their likeability, which is usually evaluated by their audience and how likeable, intriguing, and relevant an influencer is regarded to be (Ki et al., 2020). Likeability encompasses traits including warmth and appeal as well as the size, engagement rate, and degree of influence of an influencer (Aytuna, 2019). Developing their own brand identities around qualities that matter to consumers helps influencers establish this emotional connection (Frankenberger, 2023). Martensen et al. (2018) claim that businesses may exploit influencers' extraordinary ability to show great degrees of likeability, and resemblance while keeping the same degree of reach and impact as celebrities. Lai and Liu's (2020) study indicates that the likeability of the content influences consumer behaviour towards product information broadcast on social media. Research by Jin et al. (2019) shows that consumers who view brand posts from Instagram influencers experience a closer connection with the influencer than they do of conventional celebrities. Followers are more likely, for example, to connect to an influencer who presents personal stories and projects an approachable

1720 *From Posts to Purchases: Insights into the Influence of Social Media's Influencers* and real image of herself (Gelati & Verplancke, 2022). Surveys taken among Malaysian university students by Vien et al. (2017) indicate that marketers should choose endorsers seen as more appealing and charming. By sharing their personal stories, showcasing delicious halal recipes, or participating in challenges and events centred on halal food, influencers can help to raise the attractiveness of halal food in a variety of ways (Rahim et al., 2024.). In Malaysia, an influencer's likeability is also determined by how well they can connect with their audience's goals and common experiences. Malaysian influencers like Ebit Lew, a Muslim preacher, who regularly participate in local community activities and exhibit sincerity is more likely to be seen as a positive influencer (Hassandarvish, 2020).

Therefore, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3: Influencer's likeability has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.*

### **Influencer's Attractiveness has a Positive and Significant Influence on Consumer Purchase Behaviour**

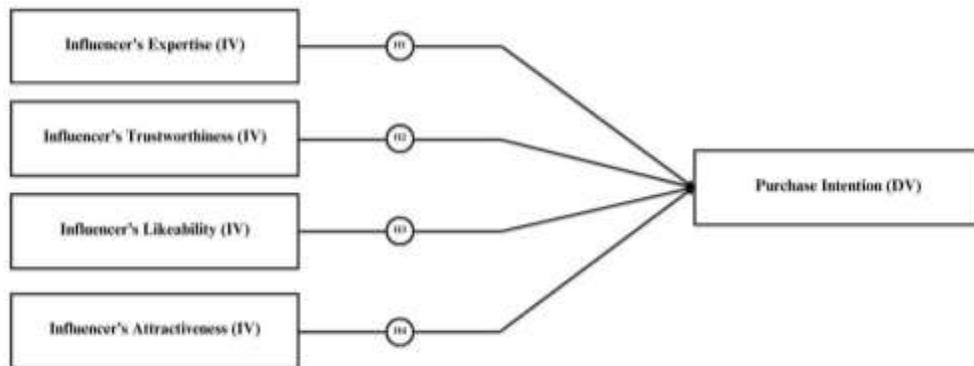
The word "attractiveness" is usually the physical attractiveness and general visual presentation of the influencer; this is a vital component in the effectiveness of social media influencers (Zhou et al., 2020). Kotler and Keller (2016) define physical aesthetics as assured when a post makes good use of colour (and music), typefaces and font sizes are readable, and individual pages are clean and devoid of clutter). Studies in marketing psychology indicate that visual attractiveness can enhance memory recall and emotional reaction to advertising messages, therefore supporting the influence of attractiveness on consumer behaviour (Otamendi & Martín, 2020). Masuda et al. (2020) study found a high positive association between purchase intentions and beauty. Drawing in clients, building friendly relationships, and catching their attention all depend on attractiveness. Kim's (2022) research indicates that clever image and fashionable look made social media influencers attractive on the outside. Social media content is often utilised to underline this appeal as the main route of contact between the influencer and their audience (Gurung et al., 2023). Furthermore, Weismueller et al. (2020) claim that customers may read a declaration of a collaboration with the brand favorably, increasing the influencer's desirability. An influencer who, for example, consistently posts well-curated, eye-catching photographs on Instagram with a consistent aesthetic is probably going to get more attention and engagement.

Therefore, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

*H4: Influencer's attractiveness has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

With reference to the literature review, the framework in Figure 3 below depicts the independent variables dimension comprising the likeability, attractiveness, knowledge of the influencer, and the reliability of the source. The consumer's intention to make a purchase, however, is the dependent variable.



**Figure 3** Proposed Conceptual Framework for this Study

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

In order to quantify data and to generalize conclusions this study adopted a quantitative research entailing quantifying items and asking questions like "how long," "how many," and "the degree to which" (Ghanad, 2023). This methodology will be applied in this investigation since it facilitates the analysis of the correlations between the independent and dependent variables. Descriptive research, an analytical technique that characterizes the relationships and connections that each variable has as well as particular characteristics or phenomena that occur in the respective markets, was used in this marketing research (Angelina & Tjokrosaputro, 2024). This study adopted good methodological practices from previous studies (Almonawer et al., 2023; Annathurai et al., 2023; Khalil et al., 2022; Gazi et al., 2024; Liew et al., 2024).

### Target Population and Location

The set of people from the target population that can be chosen using a study's selection procedure is known as the sample frame (Mesa, 2016). This study's target market consists of online shoppers who use social media sites to complete transactions. A thorough examination of all the variables defining the target population's limits is necessary (Hossan et al., 2023), in order to better model purchase behaviour in social media usage and online buying behaviors throughout Malaysia. In order to create a successful sample design, marketers need mix geographical targeting and behavioral targeting, according to Bernritter et al. (2021). This study investigated the impact of social media influencers on purchase intentions at varying stages of market maturity and digital adoption by focusing on all states in Malaysia. Furthermore, researchers can be assured of the generalizability of the findings the more representative the sample is (Indrayadi & Helty, 2021).

### Sampling Size

As per Kang's (2021) findings, the G\*Power software can be utilized to calculate the suitable sample size. This software takes into account three crucial criteria, namely the alpha ( $\alpha$ ) level, power ( $1-\beta$ ), and effect size ( $f^2$ ). With a significance level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05, there is a 5% chance that

the null hypothesis may be mistakenly rejected when it is true (Serdar et al., 2021). According to Aberson (2015), the power ( $1-\beta$ ) is set at 0.80 (80%), which is a well recognized benchmark in the social sciences and indicates an 80% chance of correctly rejecting the null hypothesis in the event that it is wrong. According to Cohen's norms, the effect size ( $f^2$ ) is fixed at 0.15, which denotes a small effect size (Elsayir, 2015). When precise prior knowledge regarding the projected effect size is unavailable, this is an acceptable option. With these parameters and four predictors (the beauty, likeability, expertise, and trustworthiness of the influencer), the minimal sample size determined by G\*Power for the research is 85 responses. However, the sample size was increased to improve the validity and reliability of the study in order to account for potential data inefficiencies, such as incomplete responses, non-responses, or errors (Munyaradzi, 2018). To make sure that enough useful data is gathered, the sample size is adjusted in light of a data inefficiency rate of 20–40%. The sample size should be by about 25% to account for a 20% inefficiency rate. This will result in 107 respondents overall ( $85 \times 1.25 = 106.25$ , rounded to 107). Based on 40% inefficiency rate, the sample size needs to be increased by around 67%, which means that 142 respondents should be the final size of the study ( $85 \times 1.67 = 141.95$ , rounded to 142). To consider possible inefficiencies and guarantee suitable quality of data, the study sample size targeted between 107 and 142 respondents.

### Sampling Technique

Campbell et al. (2020) mentioned that the purposive sample approach, a non-probability sampling technique is done to specifically select participants, depending on specific characteristics that line up with the study objectives: This approach calls for especially choosing respondents who live in Malaysia, active social media users between the ages of 20 and 60, and have intentions to purchase influencer's suggestions. This entailed deliberating choosing of a participant depending on the characteristics of the participants (Etikan et al., 2016). By concentrating on particular demographic groups, this approach ensures that the sample reflects individuals most relevant to the study.

## Results and Findings

### Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 tabulates the profile of the respondents in this study.

**Table 1** Respondents demographic profile

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	43	30.3
Female	99	69.7
<b>Age Group</b>		
20 - 29 years	98	69.0
30 - 39 years	29	20.4
40 - 49 years	10	7.0
50 - 59 years	5	3.5
<b>Education Level</b>		
High School	18	12.7
Diploma / Certificate	31	21.8
Bachelor's Degree	72	50.7

<b>Master's Degree</b>	18	12.7
<b>PhD</b>	2	1.4
<b>Others</b>	1	0.7
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
<b>&lt; RM 3000</b>	40	28.2
<b>RM 3001 - RM 5000</b>	25	17.6
<b>RM 5001 - RM 7000</b>	15	10.6
<b>RM7001 - RM10000</b>	18	12.7
<b>&gt; RM 10000</b>	11	7.7
<b>Unemployed</b>	33	23.2

### Pilot Test Results

The study obtained a Cronbach's Alpha value of more than 0.6 for each variable (refer to Table 2), therefore demonstrating suitable internal consistency and dependability of the survey items. This implies that the questionnaire captures constructions like influencer credibility, attractiveness, and the consequent purchase intentions rather successfully. The reliability of the study is strengthened when a Cronbach's Alpha over 0.6 shows that respondents' responses are consistent across related items inside each construct. This dependability measure guarantees that the survey instrument is appropriate for large-scale data collecting, so facilitating strong research of how influencer characteristics in social media settings influence buying behaviour of Malaysian consumers.

**Table 2** Pilot Test Results

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
<b>Purchase Intention (DV)</b>	0.894
<b>Influencer's Expertise (IV1)</b>	0.877
<b>Influencer's Trustworthiness (IV2)</b>	0.897
<b>Influencer's Likeability (IV3)</b>	0.881
<b>Influencer's Attractiveness (IV4)</b>	0.856

### Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of every construct. Purchase Intention had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.915 shows a strong degree of internal consistency for this sample. This suggests that the items meant to gauge purchase intention are precisely measuring the construct. For the independent variables, influencer trustworthiness (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.874), attractiveness (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.824), likeability (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.876) and expertise (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.901) showed similar dependability. Table 3 tabulates the results of the findings.

**Table 3** Reliability Analysis Result

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
<b>Purchase Intention (DV)</b>	0.915
<b>Influencer's Expertise (IV1)</b>	0.901
<b>Influencer's Trustworthiness (IV2)</b>	0.874

<b>Influencer's Likeability (IV3)</b>	0.876
<b>Influencer's Attractiveness (IV4)</b>	0.824

### Multiple Regression Analysis

The regression model (refer to Table 4 & 5) shows a R Square value of 0.549, which is the combined influence of these four predictor to explain about 54.9% of the variance in purchase intention. This is a noteworthy percentage suggesting that consumer purchase intentions are shaped in part by influencer qualities including knowledge, credibility, likeability, and attractiveness. With an F-statistic of 41.707 and a p-value less than 0.001, the ANOVA table confirms the relevance of this model. The F value and at a significance level suggest that the regression model is statistically significant. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.924 indicates little autocorrelation in the residuals, therefore supporting the validity of the model. These values taken together suggest a substantial model of influencer traits on customer purchase intentions.

**Table 4** Model Summary of Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.741 <sup>a</sup>	0.549	0.536	0.667

a: Predictors: (Constant), Social Interaction, Attitude, Subjective norms, Perceived Behavioural Control

**Table 5** Coefficients of Multiple Regression

Model	Unstandardized B	Coefficient Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig. (p value)
(Constant)	0.178	0.362		0.491	0.624
<b>Influencer's Expertise</b>	0.646	0.112	0.582	5.782	<0.001
<b>Influencer's Trustworthiness</b>	0.180	0.120	0.147	1.502	0.136
<b>Influencer's Likeability</b>	0.012	0.128	0.009	0.095	0.924
<b>Influencer's Attractiveness</b>	0.072	0.120	0.049	0.599	0.550

a: Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

With a significant p-value (<0.001), the multiple regression analysis's coefficients reveal that Influencer Expertise (IE) has the greatest standardised coefficient (beta = 0.582), thereby showing it is the strongest and only predictor of purchase intention. The values of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) fall within reasonable bounds (below 5), therefore suggesting that multicollinearity is not a main concern.

## Hypothesis Testing

Table 6 tabulates the summary of hypothesis findings.

**Table 6** Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Std Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Decision	R-square	VIF
<b>Hypothesis 1 (H1): Influencer's expertise has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.</b>	0.582	5.782	<0.05	Supported	0.549	3.077
<b>Hypothesis 2 (H2): Influencer's trustworthiness has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.</b>	0.147	1.502	>0.05	Not Supported		2.920
<b>Hypothesis 3 (H3): Influencer's likeability has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.</b>	0.009	0.095	>0.05	Not Supported		2.705
<b>Hypothesis 4 (H4): Influencer's attractiveness has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.</b>	0.049	0.599	>0.05	Not Supported		2.040

## Conclusion and Recommendation

### Research Question 1

What is the impact of an influencer's expertise on purchase intention?

#### (a) Influencer's Expertise on Consumer Purchase Intention

H1: Influencer's expertise has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.

Shamim and Islam's (2022) study shows that expertise knowledge in influencer content is crucial in providing confidence to consumers via social media to raise their buy inclination. The results of this study suggest that hypothesis 1 was the sole acceptable hypothesis, thus influencer

knowledge is quite important in determining consumers' buy intentions, particularly in the digital market of today where credibility and trust are fundamental. Previous studies have looked at a number of influencer attributes, including how they define authenticity (Balaban & Szambolics, 2022). Authenticity in this formulation is a public "face" or personality that social media influencers (Ebben & Bull, 2023) typically present in digital interactions—that which is socially created. Based on the influencer's comments and behavior as well as the limited amount of contact that can be created via the several platforms, Singer et al. (2023) advises the audience to decide whether that content producer is being honest and reliable. The influencer's niche could also be considered as expertise recommending the best product or service (Cornwell & Katz, 2021). This quality fosters confidence among possible consumers since the influencer is someone who knows the product and can provide accurate recommendations (Chisala et al., 2018). Influencers can build audience trust by proving their knowledge in their field, so raising the possibility of customers purchasing purchases depending on their recommendations (Al-Mu'ani et al., 2023).

Customers often feel that social media influencers are legitimate sources of information (Ezenwafor et al., 2021). Knowledgeable influencers are more likely to be seen as an authoritative source of information by consumers, who also view their endorsements as objective since it helps to lower the perceived risk connected with the purchase. Thus, it is argued that the perceived credibility of an influencer is absolutely essential for influencer persuasiveness, which can be quantified in several ways including the influencer's success in motivating purchase intention or influencees' transfer of loyalty to the businesses promoted by them (Miya, 2021). Consumers find the endorsement less beneficial, nevertheless, when an influencer just lists his/her credentials without offering proof of first-hand experience (Weathers et al., 2015). Therefore, this study suggest that influencer's expertise increases apparent legitimacy, lowers the purchase's perceived risk, and helps consumers develop confidence and trust.

## **Research Question 2**

What is the impact of an influencer's trustworthiness on purchase intention?

### **(a) Influencer's Trustworthiness on Consumer Purchase Intention**

H2: Influencer's trustworthiness has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.

Studies have shown that reliable information from credible sources increases consumers' purchase intention (Al Mamun et al., 2023), so experience is quite significant in this process as it directly influences how credible and reliable an influencer seems to their audience. Trustworthiness, according to Balaban et al. (2021), is honesty, transparency, and authenticity. When their followers believe their endorsements to be honest, influencers are more likely to evaluate and use the products or services they promote. Trustworthiness becomes more important in an environment when consumers are increasingly aware of sponsored material and compensated suggestions (Balaban & Mustățea, 2019). Gerlich (2023) says that people are generally unsure about whether influencers truly value and use the products they promote or if they are merely profit from them. This transparency allows followers to believe that the influencer is providing actual advice rather than merely marketing advice. Studies by Liu and Zheng (2024) reveal that when followers see an influencer as trustworthy, their opinions of the suggested product enhance, thereby enhancing buy intention. Trustworthy influencers act as a link between brands and consumers since the influencer's apparent credibility is believed to

affect behaviour (Iqbal et al., 2023).

According to the results of this study, despite past studies indicating a correlation between influencer credibility and purchase intention, in the marketing industry this may not be as clear-cut. The variations between the two results emphasize the need of more study to fully grasp the complex connection between purchase intention in various business cultures and influencer credibility. Though the analysis of the Pearson association indicates that influencer expertise and trustworthiness usually go hand-in-hand, more study is required to validate a more robust correlation between purchase intentions. Notwithstanding the differences in the results of this study and the corpus of the present literature, the relevance of influencer trustworthiness in purchase intention is still a main issue of research (Aziz et al., 2022). The results of this study suggest that further research is required to fully grasp this complex link and suggest that the link between influencer traits and buy intention could be more subdued. Since the hypothesis of Research Question 2 is not significant, the study formulated the following theory: influencer's trustworthiness has no positive and significant influence on purchase intention. The second research question aimed to explore the influence of subjective norms on consumer purchase behaviour within the Malaysian retail pharmaceutical industry, specifically focusing on purchases made through social media platforms.

### **Research Question 3**

What is the impact of an influencer's likeability on purchase intention?

#### **(a) Influencer's Likeability on Consumer Purchase Intention**

H3: Influencer's likeability has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.

The third study focuses on how the purchase intention of Malaysian social media users in Malaysia is impacted by the likeability of the influencer. As influencer likeability promotes a personal connection and relatability between the influencer and their audience, Borgel et al. (2024) claim that it greatly affects customers' buy intentions. This entails the acceptance and appreciation of influencers' alleged likeability, relatability, and charm, which so enthralls their followers (Ahmed et al., 2024). Followers then create a para-social relationship—that is, a closeness with the influencers. They view the influencers as reliable, credible, and generally beautiful (Gelati & Verplancke, 2022), since they relate to them. Influencers use the likability factor to connect with consumers and establish a good relationship with the brand; thus, one of the main reasons why likeability influences purchase intention is that consumers are more likely to trust and replicate persons they like or admire. A likeable influencer seems relevant by stimulating emotions of urgency, attractiveness, and even the fear of missing out (FOMO), according to Gerrath and Usrey (2020), which helps to lower psychological barriers and increase consumer susceptibility to product recommendations. This interaction strengthens the relationship between the influencer and their fans, therefore improving the supposed authenticity of their endorsements.

According to the results of this study, whilst past studies have shown a positive correlation between influencer likeability and customer buy intention, this link might not be as definite in all situations. For example, whilst some studies show that a likeable influencer can greatly affect purchase decisions by building trust and relatability with their audience, the impact of likeability may be less obvious when consumers assign attributes like experience or credibility top importance (Khalil & Haque, 2022). These results ultimately suggest the need for a greater study

to investigate the intricacies of how influencer likeability influences purchase intentions (Siang et al., 2018). Likeability's impact on decision-making could be more layered, implying that the context, audience, and product type would affect the link between an influencer's personality qualities and consumer behaviour (Hailong et al., 2022). Since the hypothesis of Research Question 3 is not supported, the study formulated the following theory: influencer's likeability has no positive and significant influence on purchase intention.

#### **Research Question 4**

What is the impact of an influencer's attractiveness on purchase intention?

##### **(a) Influencer's Attractiveness on Consumer Purchase Intention**

H4: Influencer's attractiveness has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention.

Three personal traits—attitude homophily, physical attractiveness, and social attractiveness—as antecedents of purchase intention—were examined Masuda et al. (2022). The audience of the influencer-centered community is the fan of the internet influencers; so, the attractiveness of the internet influencers can improve consumers' favourable attitudes (Zhao et al., 2024). By use of appealing visual displays, such material can persuade customers to act, either in terms of product or service purchase from Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) (Sunarso & Mustafa, 2023). According to Palmer and Peterson's (2015) studies, attractive influencers usually gain from a "halo effect," whereby viewers may instinctively link good qualities with them even beyond their physical appearance. This relationship can help customers develop an aspirational connection with the influencer's product recommendations, therefore increasing their likelihood of interaction and trust of them. Still, the influence of attractiveness on purchase intention is not exactly clear-cut. Regarding beauty items, Zhang et al. (2020) said that physically appealing endorsers could be beneficial; but, they could not be good endorsers for knowledge-driven, technological products or health-related ones. Individuals drawn to goods or individuals with aesthetically pleasing looks and attributes are usually drawn to. The results of this study, however, highlight the need of more investigation on the complexity of how attractiveness influences purchase intention among several customer segments (Haque et al., 2024). Although appearance is important, it is probably only one element buyers take into account among several. Product kind, audience traits, and context could all somewhat offset the degree of this influence. The results imply that although the attractiveness of a virtual influencer has a favourable impact through mimetic desire and brand connection, it does not directly affect purchase intention (Ling et al., 2023). The results of this study show that whereas earlier studies have generally shown a favourable link between an influencer's attractiveness and customer purchase intention, this link may not be simple in all circumstances (Bin et al., 2022). In essence, the hypothesis of Research Question 4 is not supported; the study developed the following argument: purchase intention is not favourably and significantly influenced by the attractiveness of influencers.

#### **Implications of the Study**

##### **Managerial Implications**

This study provides valuable insights for marketers and managers seeking to leverage influencer marketing to enhance consumer purchase intentions, especially in the context of the Malaysian market. First of all, the results emphasize the need of choosing influencers depending on characteristics appealing to target markets. More especially, the experience and credibility of an

influencer became clear as important elements, implying that companies should give influencers with shown competence or power in their field top priority (Fei et al., 2024). When advertising specialised or technical products, for example, marketers should work with credible influencers who can clearly communicate product benefits since customers are more inclined to follow their advice (Leong et al., 2024). Furthermore, even if purchase intentions are positively connected with attractiveness and likeability, this study implies that these features by themselves could not always influence customer decisions. These elements should be seen by managers as additional rather than main criteria for choosing influencers (Narayanan et al., 2024). Choosing a really pleasant and handsome influencer could improve appeal for lifestyle, beauty, or fashion products where appearance and personality are mostly important. On items that demand more user engagement or knowledge, however, it could be more advantageous to concentrate on influencers with experience since they are more likely to inspire belief in the worth of the product (Josephine et al., 2018).

These results also impact content strategy. Managers should inspire influencers to produce materials highlighting their own appeal as well as their product understanding. This mix will enable the influencer to be relevant and create their credibility at the same time, thereby balancing everything. Content showing an influencer's personal experience or in-depth knowledge of the product could appeal to buyers seeking authenticity and confidence, therefore enhancing their purchase intentions (Chowdhury et al., 2023). At last, this research emphasizes the requirement of managers analyzing the tastes and expectations of their target audience in a sophisticated manner (Malnaad et al., 2022). Influencer marketing tactics can be maximized by matching influencer traits with audience tastes and product type. For instance, knowing the cultural elements influencing consumer preferences—as in the Malaysian market—allows a more customised strategy. All things considered, the insights of the study help managers to choose influencers and create content with more knowledge, therefore improving the efficiency of influencer marketing campaigns in influencing customer buy intentions.

### **Limitations of the study**

This paper aimed to address and underline elements of influencers influencing buying intentions in Malaysia. There are several constraints since the used literature review was not a systematic one. First of all, we understand that this is not a complete picture of the qualities of influencers; so, some things could be absent from this research. For instance, the language limits could have affected the results; studies conducted in other languages could have added fresh material to our account. More research is required to methodically assess the content analysis reporting in scientific publications, that is, to investigate what researchers have underlined regarding the trustworthiness of their qualitative content analysis study, and how those studies have interpreted the criteria of these influencer attributes (Soon et al., 2025). This might enable qualitative content analysis to provide a more comprehensive picture of influencer qualities. Still, several of the present methodological authors have a lot of experience applying the content analysis approach. Furthermore supporting our argument are the writers' backgrounds as supervisors of master's and doctorate students, professors, and researchers.

The findings of this study may be specific to Malaysia's unique digital landscape and cultural context, particularly in terms of how consumers perceive influencers, which may not fully generalize to other regions. For example, Malaysian customers could react to some influencer traits differently than those in Western markets. High respect for social harmony and traditional

values as well as other cultural elements could shape how likeability, trustworthiness, and experience affect purchasing intentions. These results should thus be taken carefully in various cultural settings.

Furthermore, depending just on quantitative data could not be able to adequately represent the complex ways in which influencer traits influence consumer behaviour. While qualitative data could expose contextual elements, such personal experiences with influencers or subdued emotional reactions to endorsements, quantitative approaches can ignore them. Combining quantitative polls with qualitative interviews in a mixed-methods approach will improve the depth of the research and enable a more complete knowledge of how influencers influence purchase intentions in the Malaysian market.

Thirdly, respondents could have answered what they felt were expected of them, therefore biasing the results. To fit expected social conventions or desired qualities in Malaysia, participants may exaggerate their inclination for the likeability or expertise of influencers. Such prejudices can affect results, which emphasises the need of making sure respondents are honest by means of anonymous and unbiased survey forms so enhancing the data dependability.

Lastly, time and financial constraints could have affected the scope and sample size of the research, therefore restricting the representativeness of the data. Having a three-month data collecting span, the study might have only caught a moment of consumer opinion. More varied representation from a longer timeline and larger sample would have improved the validity of the results. These constraints point future research directions including investigating cross-cultural comparisons, combining qualitative approaches, and expanding the scope and depth of data collecting to better grasp how influencer marketing influences consumer purchase intentions across many sectors and audiences.

### **Recommendation for Future Study**

Considering the limitations of this study, some suggestions are made for next studies on the effect of influencers on customer purchase intentions in the digital scene of Malaysia. These suggestions can help to overcome constraints in the present research and highlight influencer-consumer dynamics in this special cultural setting (Ifedi et al., 2024). The first advice is to do longitudinal research tracking how purchase intention changes with respect to influencer qualities such likeability, trustworthiness, and expertise. Particularly in a fast changing digital context, looking at patterns across several months or even years could help one understand the sustainability of influencers' effects on customer behaviour. This method would expose if some influencer traits are always appealing or whether their impact varies depending on industry trends or societal changes (Khalil et al., 2022). Second, a mixed-methods strategy combining qualitative insights from in-depth interviews or focus groups with quantitative data would offer a more complete knowledge. Future studies might look at the contextual elements—such as social conventions, cultural expectations, and the relevance of product types—that mould how Malaysian consumers react to influencers (Ying et al., 2023). such qualitative viewpoints would help one better grasp the causes of quantitative trends, such why in some buying situations trustworthiness may be prioritised over likeability.

### **Conclusion**

All things considered, the results of this study show that among the influencer characteristics thought to affect customer purchase intentions—expertise have the only predictive influence.

This study emphasises the need of influencers' perceived knowledge and credibility in properly engaging consumers, especially when advertising products needing great consumer confidence, including health and wellness or financial products (Almuhatresh et al., 2022). The results imply that companies trying to improve buy intentions should give influencers who show professionalism and real connection with their audience top priority, in line with the larger values of Malaysian consumers who want dependability in their digital contacts (Hakimi et al., 2024). Practically speaking, this study offers Malaysian firms and marketer's direction on influencer choosing techniques, so guiding their activities (Chinn et al., 2025). To build great customer confidence, companies are recommended to choose influencers with industry-relevant knowledge who show openness. These observations imply that influencer marketing should deliberately stress influencers' professional backgrounds or personal experiences with the product in order to increase credibility for consumer involvement initiatives. Notwithstanding its benefits, this study has many shortcomings including possible biases in self-reported data and a concentration on Malaysian consumers, which would restrict generalisability to other settings (Sivagurunathan et al., 2024). Future studies should take into account these constraints and investigate cross-cultural analogies to grasp how influencer characteristics affect purchase intentions among several customer groups. Further subtleties in influencer-consumer dynamics could also be revealed by investigating the relationships of influencer traits with product type. This study provides a road map for more efficient customer involvement in the digital world and sets the groundwork for deeper inquiry of influencer marketing techniques.

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