

# Impact of Social Media Influencer on Instagram User Purchase Intention towards the Fashion Products: The Perspectives of UMK Pengkalan Chepa Campus Students

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**Abstract** – *Social media has completely revamped the way people communicate, interact and engage with each other. The most important is this platform plays a main role in facilitating greater influence. This study seeks to identify the features of social media influencers that contribute to purchase intention in the fashion industry. It adopts the Ohanian model of sources of credibility as to examine the association between trustworthiness, expertise, likability, similarity and familiarity towards Instagram users' purchase intention of fashion products. A total of 148 sample students of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan are responding to the questionnaire. Findings indicate that likability, trustworthiness and familiarity are key factors that influence Instagram users purchase intention towards fashion products. The study has implications for marketing strategy as social media influencer like Instagram has a powerful impact on effective marketing strategies.*

**Keywords:** Influencer, Instagram, Social media, Purchase intention, Fashion

## 1. Introduction

Social media is a platform that connects people especially between the business organisation and customer. It became a marketing strategy to manage market shrinkage in the fashion industry. In particular, during the pandemic, all institutions regardless of profit making or non-profit making entities being affected by Covid-19 virus. This has opened an opportunity to the fashion industry to focus on social media as a marketing platform. Social media influencer (SMI) is also known as a new type of subscriber compared to celebrity endorser who configures consumer's perspective in social media platforms (Freberg et al., 2010). One of the benefits of having social media influencers as a platform in marketing is that the business organisation can directly interact with

their potential customers and existing customers and at the same time collect their feedback on the particular products (Kolarova, 2018). Social media advertising not only persuaded consumers towards purchasing

The fashion industry is a multibillion international organization that is involved in the business of producing, manufacturing, and selling fashion products to the customers. In this modern era, the fashion industry is playing an important role in the community (Major & Steele, 2018). Nowadays, fashion has become their identity to express themselves to the community. The consumers are influenced by their favourite inspired by social media influencer or their own friends which they could keep updated and discuss about the latest trend of fashion in the community especially for young consumers. According to Mangold & Faulds (2009), the effectiveness tool to reach maximum consumers and increase profitability of companies which is to provide the details and information about the products and services is a social media platform such as Instagram and Facebook.

Traditionally, Instagram is mainly used for posting interesting pictures and captions (Chua & Chang, 2016; Lee et. al, 2015). However, social media such as Instagram has transformed into a platform whereby the business organisation uses it as a place to promote and market their products. This is because photos offer more attractive content than word content to catch the attention of the viewers (Hanson, 2018). The followers will follow them based on the useful and creative content posted in social media platforms and thus, have attracted the consumers' attention to follow their lifestyle, attitude and personal traits shown in influencers' profile such as blogs, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (Forbes, 2016).

Recently, many business owners make a collaboration with the social media influencers that have more than 100 million followers (Hanson, 2018). This is because consumers may be influenced by public or other Instagram users to follow SMI who has the large number of followers in social media platforms (Jade, 2017). The effectiveness of social media influencers strongly attracts the Instagram users to follow them by launching the "power middle influences" to the community with the number around 100 thousand to 200 thousand followers in Instagram (Chen, 2016). The popularity of the social media influencer is measured by an increase in the number of followers. All this information is well studied by previous researchers. However, the area that is still unknown is what makes the Instagram users be influenced by the social media influencers which impacts the purchasing intention of fashion products. Thus, this study aims to provide more insights and knowledge to the existing research works in this area.

## **2. Literature Reviews**

### **2.1 Social Media Influencers**

Social media influencers (SMIs) can be defined as third party endorsers who can shape attitudes and help in business marketing (Freberg et al., 2011). SMIs also can be identified as micro-celebrities (Khamis et al., 2016). According to Jin & Phua, 2014; Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014, they are also seen as modern-day opinion leaders. Wong (2014) stated that SMIs are individuals who manage a large number of followers. Based on

Sharma & Ranga, 2014; Freberg et al., 2011), social media influencers will promote the products by writing the attractive information to attract customers through the social media platforms. Liu et al. (2012) proved that SMIs as third party's opinions have power to influence the audiences towards the brand promoted. Previous study shows that SMIs are seen to be more believable compared to the paid advertisements (Abidin, 2016).

Furthermore, the customers will have more favorable attitudes and intentions towards the products when expert SMIs endorse the product rather than non-expert SMIs (Bhutada & Rollins, 2015). Based on Hsu et al. (2013), the consumers will believe their social media influencers and allow them to influence them if the influencers' opinion and ideas are relevant within the subject. Moreover, Sudha and Sheena (2017) stated that the use of influencer marketing contributes to the brand building process as the SMIs are always regarded as role models and give influences to the audiences.

## **2.2 The Application of Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness Models**

Source credibility model and the source attractiveness model are related to a social media influencer to identify an influencer's persuasiveness in social media platform (Weismueller et al., 2020). This study explained how both models bring an influencer as a successful key on online communication platform. The message delivered by an endorser will bring positive effect to receivers more effective than the advertising created by companies. Pornpitakpan (2004) proved the effect trustworthiness and attractiveness of an endorser applied on three dimensions positively relate to purchase intention.

The Ohanian Model of source credibility was developed by Ohanian (1991). This model played an important role to convey the persuasiveness of a message in the process of communication with target segment which depends on characteristics of the source (Corina, 2006). Credibility is measured in three dimension which is combination of social media influencer expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness especially in advertising process (Sertoglu et al., 2014). Present study adopts and adapt both models as to measure the perception towards the purchase intention whereby the social media influencer was acting as a platform for the marketer to market their products especially in the fashion industry. Figure 1 demonstrates the research framework for this study.

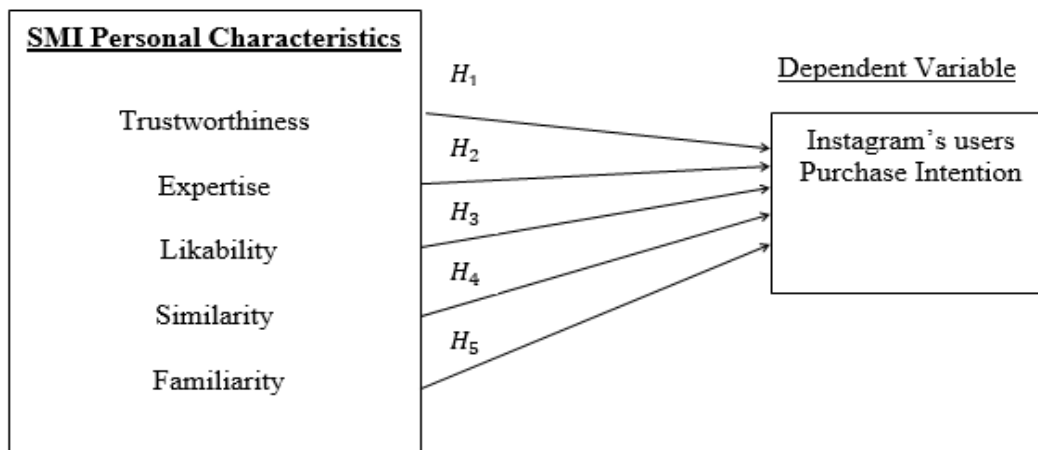


Figure 1: Research framework (Source: Ohanian, 1991; McGuire, 1985)

## 2.3 Factors influencing Instagram users' purchase intention

### 2.3.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the believability, honesty and integrity possessed by the endorser. Furthermore, trustworthiness is how unbiased the receivers perceive the source. (Van der Waldt et al., 2009: 104). Moreover, Erdogan (1999, p. 298) stated that trustworthiness can be translated into believability, honesty, integrity and expertise and indicates the knowledge, experience or skills possessed by an endorser. Trustworthiness is one of the dimensions of source credibility and influencers must be trustworthy to give influence to their followers (Kim et al. 2018).

Brown and Hayes (2008) claimed that 54% of the consumer would recommend the products purchased to the others if the company earned a consumer's trust. Customers are more likely to accept the products recommended by SMI they feel reliable (Liu et al., 2015). According to Rebelo (2017), the trustworthy influencer was more persuasive. Trustworthiness of an influencer is considered when Instagram users perceive them as dependable, honest, reliable, sincere and trustworthy. Based on Chao et al. (2005), most of the literature executed supports the positive impact of trustworthiness on effectiveness.

### 2.3.2 Expertise

Expertise is defined as a high level of knowledge or skill. This variable also can be defined as the degree to which the endorser is perceived to have the adequate knowledge, experience or skills to promote the products. Influencer might have more expertise compared to created spokespersons (Van der Waldt et al., 2009). The social media influencers used the term of expertise to perform product-related tasks successfully (Alba & Hutchinson. 2007). SMI has the ability to create a trustworthy and creative message for a brand or products to attract the consumers' attention. Silvera and Austad (2004) emphasizes that the purchase intention of target groups is higher when the influencers are more credible as he/she has higher expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Influencers use their expertise to post about the brands and products in social media that are usually seen by their followers, the message of the brands and

products are seen as more credible and trustworthy than paid sponsorship ads (Kassoway, 2015). Kassoway (2015) defined influence is a long-term proposition between social media influencers and consumers as the successful key in the market in this technology era. SMI is able to improve bond relationships with consumers by posting believable information on social media platforms and interacting with them referred to as expertise (Chun et al., 2018).

### 2.3.3 Likability

Likability can be defined as the information receiver's fondness towards the information source's physical looks and personal characteristics (McGuire, 1985; Kiecker & Cowles 2001; Teng et al., 2014). A consumer's perceptions towards a SMI can be said as one of the strongest factors in affecting the consumer's attitude towards an SMI (Li et al., 2014). Moreover, based on Brickman et al. (1975), the longer the time of people under exposed to a person's ideas, the more they will like the person.

According to Cheung et al. (2014), when consumers feel that they share similar personalities with SMIs, it will motivate them in purchasing the same products that SMIs use in their daily life that they have uploaded on the SMIs social media. Therefore, a famous SMI is seen as a more likable person which will bring greater influence on product choices towards consumers (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014; Abidin, 2016; Forbes, 2016). This is because consumers often regard SMIs as role models (Forbes, 2016).

### 2.3.4 Similarity

Similarity defines the same level of individual having alike principles such as demographics, background, interests, attitudes, social status and lifestyles that can be noticed by social media users (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska, 2016). Differences between generations have been found that change in society and social influences as well as similarities within each generation (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003). In this era, social influencers such as journalists, celebrities, bloggers, magazines and brand advocates are able to make a lot of money by doing brand endorsements, also as "the most powerful force in the fashion marketplace" (Wiedman et al, 2012). They can influence their followers by convincing purchasing decision to purchase the brand or products based on their personal opinion, ability and position which considered experts themselves same with their followers. Social media influencers have power of influence to make something become a trend and as "must have" fashion to lead the consumers to copy their style and believe that they expected they will own the same lifestyles as social media influencers if they used the same product as the social media influencers.

### 2.3.5 Familiarity

Familiarity is related to experiences of the product or brands that have been collected by consumers through direct and indirect experiences such as word of mouth and advertising exposures (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). In addition, familiarity can also be known as the comfort level between the information source and also the recipient (Kiecker & Cowles, 2001). This is because familiarity will bring important effects towards brand choice which will lead in stimuli consumer purchase intention (Hutchinson et al., 1986). According to Brockner & Swap (1976), the more frequent a person has been seen will lead to more people rating that person positively and therefore

they want to interact with the person. Moreover, when people are more familiar with a celebrity name or images, the more likable they will feel on that celebrity (Harrison, 1969). According to Bornstein (1989), adults prefer familiar when compared to unknown since unknown will involve more risk. The smaller the perceived risk gained, the higher the purchase intention.

## **2.4 Instagram users' purchase intention**

Purchase intention is defined as the conscious decision of someone to buy a particular brand (Spears & Singh, 2004) and a plan to purchase particular products or services (Goyal, 2014). The effect of advertising features presented by markets will affect a person to make purchasing decisions (Hausman & Siekpe, 2009). Consumers will go through the information by collecting their previous practice, preference and suggestions from others. After that, they will go through the alternatives evaluation process and lastly make the purchase intentions (Chi et al., 2011). Previous studies show that there is a positive relationship between social media influencers and the purchase intention (McCormick, 2016; Lisichkova & Othman, 2017). However, Johansen & Guldvik (2017) failed to establish a positive effect of influencer marketing towards purchase intention when tested on blog content.

Furthermore, purchase intention is an indicator of actual purchase and it is used to measure consumers' actions (Kim et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2015; Pavlou, 2003). Lisichkova & Othman (2017) mentioned that consumer's intention to purchase has a considerable effect on their actual purchase intention. Companies have realized the importance of purchasing intention as it will help to increase the sales of products and services to maximize profits (Hosein, 2012). According to Rebelo (2017), when the advertisers' main purpose is getting customers to form purchase intentions to buy the products that are advertised by marketing influencers, it is important to study the perception of trustworthiness of SMI when SMI trustworthiness will influence consumers' purchase intentions.

## **3. Research Design and Methodology**

Present study employs quantitative approach in acquiring the perception of the factors of SMIs that influence purchase intention of Instagram users towards fashion products. In doing so, this study uses questionnaires to collect perception towards the factors. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents which are UMK Pengkalan Chepa students. Using convenience sampling techniques, students who are convenient and available were selected to participate in this study. The respondents were given the link of google form where they can answer the questionnaire at anytime and anywhere.

The questionnaire was divided into seven sections. In section one, the respondents need to fill in the demographic information such as age, gender and ethnicity. Meanwhile, in section two until section seven, questions relating to the independent variables and dependent variable were asked. Each item used a 5 point Likert scale and all of the measured items passed the value of Cronbach Alpha Coefficient larger than 0.70. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used to investigate the strength of the association between independent and dependent variables.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Reliability analysis

The independent and dependent variables were measured by Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the reliability of test items. Reliability test is used to identify the degree of consistency and stability of the data collected. The coefficient alpha will represent Cronbach's alpha that will be used to quantify reliability. Referring to Hair et al. (2003), the Cronbach's alpha that is higher than 0.7 will be considered as good and acceptable. Meanwhile, the result of a reliability test that is less than 0.6 will be considered as poor.

Based on Table 4.1, the number of reliability tests for each independent variable are more than 0.7. This shows that all the variables that influence the purchase intention of Instagrams' users in the fashion industry are consistent. In other words, trustworthiness, expertise, likability, similarity and familiarity showed an acceptable reliability as the  $\alpha$  were more than 0.8. The measure for dependent variable that is purchase intention was found to be very reliable too (5 items;  $\alpha = 0.851$ ).

Table 4.1: Results of reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha (page 53)

Variables	Respondents	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Trustworthiness	148	5	0.863
Expertise	148	5	0.834
Likability	148	5	0.863
Similarity	148	5	0.854
Familiarity	148	5	0.864
Purchase Intention	148	5	0.851

### 4.2 Hypothesis Testing and Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficient analysis has been used to investigate the relationship between dependent variable and independent variables. Table 4.2 summarises the result of correlation analysis. First, there is a moderate association between social media influencer's trustworthiness and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products. This has offered a meaning that, for hypothesis 1, almost 70 per cent of Instagram users were influenced by trustworthiness in social media platforms as to make purchase decisions in fashion products. Second, for hypothesis 2, it was founded  $r$  is equal to 0.627 which indicates a moderate association between expertise and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products. It shows that 60 percent of purchase intention towards the fashion industry was explained by the factor of expertise. Third, there is moderate association between social media influencer's likability and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products. This has explained that, for hypothesis 3, 70 percent of Instagram users' purchase intention

towards the fashion industry was explained by features of social media influencer's likability. For hypothesis 4, the result shows that there is moderate association between social media influencer's similarity and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion apparels in the fashion industry. In other words, 60 percent of Instagram users' purchase intention towards the fashion industry is explained by the features of similarity. Finally, for hypothesis 5, there is moderate association between social media influencer's familiarity and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products. This means more than 60 percent of Instagram users' purchase intention towards the fashion industry is explained by the features of social media influencer's familiarity.

Table 4.2: Summary of hypotheses

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Finding</b>
RQ1: Does SMI's trustworthiness is associated with Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products?	There is moderate association between SMI's trustworthiness and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.	r= 0.675 (p<0.01) There is an association between SMI's trustworthiness and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.
RQ2: Does SMI's expertise is associated with Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products?	There is moderate association between SMI's expertise and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.	r= 0.627 (p<0.01) There is an association between SMI's expertise and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.
RQ3: Does SMI's likability is associated with Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products?	There is moderate association between SMI's likability and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.	r= 0.692 (p<0.01) There is an association between SMI's likability and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.
RQ4: Does SMI's similarity is associated with Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products?	There is moderate association between SMI's similarity and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.	r= 0.627 (p<0.01) There is an association between SMI's similarity and Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.
RQ5: Does SMI's familiarity is associated with Instagram users' purchase intention towards	There is moderate association between SMI's familiarity and Instagram users'	r= 0.663 (p<0.01) There is an association between SMI's familiarity and



fashion products?	purchase intention towards fashion products.	Instagram users' purchase intention towards fashion products.
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## 5. Conclusion

This study has achieved its objective to investigate the features of social media influencers that contribute in influencing Instagram users' purchase intention towards the fashion industry. Five features of social media influencers were tested and found that each of the items has positive associations with Instagram users' purchase intention towards the fashion industry. The main findings of this study is likability, trustworthiness and familiarity has greater influence in purchase intention towards fashion products. The likability was found to have a higher correlation result among other independent variables. This has explained that the greater the affection to deliver the message and information for Instagram users, the more effective to persuade the purchase intention among the Instagram users. Meanwhile, the messages and marketing information posted on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook by social media influencers are more credible and trustworthy than sponsorship paid advertising. Most consumers will have the intention to purchase the product recommended by their favourite social media influencer on Instagram. As for the familiarity, consumers intend to purchase on the product which they are familiar with their favourite and popular social media influencer on Instagram.

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