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## ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH (eWOM): HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AFFECT CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION

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### Abstract:

With the growth of social media nowadays, a new type of celebrity known as social media influencers has arisen. Social media influencers are more prominent than typical celebrities in that they developed their online character and renown through the creation of content on social networking platforms. Through their credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, social media influencers could influence their audience to purchase products or services they recommended through eWOM virality. However, some social media influencers promote criminal scams among their followers, have fake followers/fake likes, low saturation rate, and non-disclosure of sponsorships which have caused the concerns. Therefore, this study intended to measure the effect of social media influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness) on consumers' purchase Intention with eWOM virality as moderator. The researcher developed an online questionnaire through Google Form to collect the data from 200 respondents of young adults between 18 to 30 years old with convenience sampling. By using SPSS, the researcher performed descriptive analysis, regression analysis (linear regression and multiple regression), and T-Test on the collected data. Consequently, the result findings demonstrate that all the variables were statistically significant towards this research objective, and hypothesis, and successfully answered this research question. These findings may be used as a reference for business and marketing specialists to properly manage and execute their communication strategy.

### Keywords:

Consumer, eWOM, Purchase Intention, Social Media Influencer

## Introduction

The emergence of the Internet these days has created new types of communication channels that allow people to produce and share user-generated content on a variety of social media platforms. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media platforms have grown in popularity as one of the most popular marketing channels in which advertisements on the internet are significantly more powerful than those on cable TV, and niche, since social media influencers may influence more product sales than celebrities (Monella, 2021). In line with Media Kix (2022), 80% of businesses find social media influencers as an effective marketing technique because they help businesses achieve their goals. According to a survey from Inmar Intelligence (2021) in **Table 1** below, there were about 84% of consumers have purchased on a recommendation of an influencer. The survey found that 61% of consumers believe in the product/category experience of influencers, 52% of consumers said social media influencers provide honest feedback even if they don't like the product, 47% of consumers said they can connect with social media influencers, and 41% of consumers said they trust social media influencers because they are genuine. Thus, approximately 49% of consumers have sought help from social media influencers before making a purchase decision, indicating that consumers are more likely to buy when they have received advice from individuals who they believe (Cloutrack, 2021).

**Table 1: Key Findings from Inmar Intelligence (2021)**

| No. | Key Findings  | Percentage |
|-----|---|------------|
| 1   | Consumers have purchased on a recommendation of an influencer                                       | 84%        |
| 2   | Consumers believe in the product/category experience of influencers                                 | 61%        |
| 3   | Consumers said social media influencers provide honest feedback even if they don't like the product | 52%        |
| 4   | Consumers said they can connect with social media influencers                                       | 47%        |
| 5   | Consumers said they trust social media influencers because they are genuine                         | 41%        |

With the growth of social media these days, a new form of celebrity has emerged known as social media influencers. As expressed by Weismueller et al. (2020), Social media influencers are more important than typical celebrities because they have developed their character and online fame by creating content on social media platforms. Moreover, social media influencers are different from traditional celebrities, who have established their fame through traditional methods and use social media sites as an additional way to communicate with their followers. Hence, social media influencers are the new growing trend in marketing to communicate with consumers on social media (Wielki, 2020). They have revolutionized the behaviour of the whole business and have become for many of them an essential element of success.

The term “electronic word-of-mouth” (eWOM) was popularised in the mid-1990s when the Internet began altering the way people connected (Chu, 2021). eWOM is commonly characterised as consumers sharing and exchanging information about a product or company through the Internet, social media, and mobile communication. Since it is effortless for consumers to start discussions online, eWOM has been shown to increase retransmission intentions that enable information to be sent widely and swiftly. As digital media and new technology advance each day, eWOM has emerged as a vital part of advertising, communication, and marketing research. Because eWOM spread by friends and family is seen

as more trustworthy and credible than marketing ads, establishing good eWOM communications has been identified as a significant promotional tactic. Consequently, social media adds a new aspect to eWOM by making the experience more convenient for users to share their ideas, whether it's positive or negative (Sharma et al., 2011). As stated by Bilal et al. (2021), consumers seem to easily read other users' opinions and feedback about their eWOM experience. These opinions influence the customer's purchasing decision. Consequently, it is very important to understand the key components that can significantly influence the relationship between eWOM and consumer purchasing intentions of social networking sites.

People almost probably had a predisposition in believing what other people said which is why the marketing techniques using social media influencers had become such a powerful and effective marketing approach (Thant, 2019). As outbound marketing became less popular and inbound marketing became more prevalent, it had become one of the most effective ways for obtaining consumers since the consumers nowadays are not the same as consumers in the past. They did not pay attention to anything they heard on the radio or television. They also did not pay attention to billboards and did not take most public information to the heart. Indeed, some of them did, however, take attention to what others had to say. Therefore, the research focuses on social media influencers who can be of great help for an inbound marketing effort that affects consumer purchase intent in this study. With eWOM virality that drives social media influencers in advertising products or services through their social media, it possibly affects the consumers' purchase intention either consciously or unconsciously.

### **Problem Statement**

Some social media influencers promote criminal scams among their followers. Based on an article from Okpattah (2021), he discovered how simple it was to strike deals with the influencers since they published a post on the social media platforms that enticed individuals to purchase some "fullz" which is a free sample of a method to stole information. Everyone can purchase "fullz", an opening the dark web to everyone, from a social media influencer and then use them to steal money from victims, deceive banks, sign up for internet subscriptions, and perform a variety of other frauds (Panda Security, 2021). This confidential information ends up in circulation in the first place because they are frequently obtained through phishing schemes. Tricking people into disclosing sensitive information by considering suspicious emails or SMS messages that appear to be genuine sources. Because technology is so easy to access and use, many people become involved in digital crime, harming individuals and organisations, and significantly increasing the risk of prosecution.

Influencer marketing has gained popularity over the years due to its ability to increase sales, create quality content, and inspire trust with third parties. However, as the market grew, several problems arose.

Tobin (2019) claimed that several concerns have surfaced as the market has evolved, and three of the biggest factors are fake followers/fake likes, saturation rate, and non-disclosure of sponsorships, which have been caused, at least to some extent according to how businesses do by dealing with influencers. Businesses discovered that when the number of real or fake followers increases, thus, engagement rates will be decreased. The authors also discussed saturation rate, which is defined as the percentage of total influencer content sponsored. People follow influencers for inspiration, discovery, and keeping up with the latest trends. He claimed

that influencer engagement levels decline faster than reach when other businesses pay for all content.

Besides, one of the most typical violations of marketing rules regarding social media influencers is a lack of complete disclosure based on research from Nawi and Faizol (2019). Indeed, the issue of lack of complete disclosure in influencer marketing activities has become one of the most widespread infractions of marketing rules that have received a lot of attention. Based on the article, the problems of social media influencers' credibility and lack of disclosure in their endorsement methods on their social media profiles are now rampant. In Malaysia, no rule mandates influencers to disclose their sponsored/material relationship with any business on social media. As there is no rule requiring full disclosure in influencer marketing in Malaysia, social media influencers are not necessarily bound by such an obligation. Moreover, Audrezet and Charry (2019) found that companies asked 28% of influencers not to disclose their associations with their brands. Because they fear that such disclosure will undermine the credibility of the content. What's interesting about this claim is that the same article points out that consumers are now equally likely to purchase, whether publicly available or not. Some statutory advertising notices indicate that the influencer they choose is trustworthy as they know enough about the business associated with their brand.

For eWOM virality, the internet has developed both obstacles and possibilities. Jalilvand et al. (2011) stated that eWOM enables customers to obtain information about products and services not only from a small number of people they know but also from widely geographically dispersed groups of individuals who have used similar products or services. A survey from Nielsen (2015) reported that the majority of consumers believe that their online search is as reliable as the company's official website. These studies show how powerful eWOM is in influencing customer decisions. eWOM provides consumers with an alternative source of information while limiting the ability of businesses to influence these consumers through traditional marketing and advertising methods.

### Research Question

Based on the previous discussion, this research is motivated to answer:

- 1) Does eWOM virality moderates the influencers' credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness toward consumers' purchase intention?

### Hypothesis Development

In an article on eWOM virality, Tong and Chang (2016) mentioned the product and temporal effects of eWOM in viral marketing. Their findings give the following insights to assist businesses to build communication efforts in the United States. Businesses should launch an eWOM campaign as soon as feasible to get an early mover advantage despite representing a small portion of the target consumer population, communicative, buzz-generating, and trustworthy opinion leaders promote sales through propagating eWOM. On the other hand, businesses should not organize for all opinion leaders to write reviews at the start of the product acceptance process. Instead, businesses should collect eWOM from opinion leaders over time and the eWOM intensity must be high.

Moreover, El-Baz et al. (2018) reported that consumers must accept the information provided by the source and that for a source to be considered a reliable signal of quality or product

location, a source can and will consistently deliver what it promises and will be willing to deliver. With such a powerful presence, eWOM has become a great force that can both positively and negatively affect the reliability of a source. According to the study, eWOM acts as an indicator of source reputation that provides information capable of affecting consumers' perceptions about a business. Therefore, the availability of more reliable sources of information such as eWOM can be problematic if it contradicts the information provided by the company itself. eWOM is a force that can harm or weaken a business, increase its reputation, or help.

As specified by López and Sicilia (2014), the study found that perceived source trustworthiness had a significant effect on the influence of eWOM on decision making. When consumers view a source as very trustworthy, eWOM has a greater impact on decision making than when consumers view it as less trustworthy. This report confirms previous research that trusted sources are more convincing than less trusted sources. It also emphasizes the importance of the perceived credibility of the source in the communication process when the communicators are mostly anonymous. The receiver of eWOM's opinion-seeking and opinion-giving activities help to increase the amount of trustworthiness assessed from the source.

Moreover, Lou and Yuan (2019) indicated that an influencer of social media physically appealing to attracting and directing adepts in terms of recognition and acknowledgment from the sponsored brand. Furthermore, the splendour of an influencer proven in snapshots on social media systems which include Instagram is pretty essential for humans while finding out whether or not to comply with new accounts. Consequently, a social media influencer's attractiveness has a useful impact on his or her power of influence (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) stated that the attractiveness of a social media influencer will increase persuasion, and so it is miles an extensive thing in endorsement effectiveness. Based on the above dialogue and arguments, this takes a look at evolving the subsequent hypothesis:

H1: eWOM virality will act as an interactive role with influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and consumers' purchase intention. Specifically, the higher (vs lower) eWOM virality, the stronger (vs lower) the social media influencers' effect on consumers' purchase intention.

## Literature Review

### *Consumers' Purchase Intention*

Keller (2001) suggests that a consumer preference to accumulate a product or service is referred to as purchase intention. In other words, purchase intention involves a consumer's decision to purchase a product or service after evaluating it. Many factors influence consumer intentions when buying a product, and the final choice depends on consumer intention combined with numerous internal or external influences. Dodds et al. (1991) explains that consumers' purchase intentions occur when they pretend to buy the product, or when they are likely to buy the product, or when they are willing to buy the product. Purchase intention can be studied in offline or online setting, such as retail shopping and ecommerce shopping. In this study, we measure consumers' purchase intention based on how social media influencers influence consumer purchase intention (Abdullah, 2019). An analysis of the impacts of social media micro-celebrities' advertising on consumers between the ages of 18 and 31 revealed that the influence of followers had a favourable impact on consumers' opinions of suggested products



and their intentions to acquire such items (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Masuda et al., 2022). Therefore, young consumers may be more influenced by social media influencers in terms of purchase intentions.

### ***Social Media Influencers***

Based on a study by Senft (2008) that focused on micro-influencers, the author noted that an influencer does not necessarily have to be a celebrity, journalist, or blogger. They might be an ordinary person who has the ideal connections and social pull, rather than a superstar, although these celebrities are the first to come to mind when it comes to social influence. She also claimed that ordinary people who interact with their friends or social circle can be called influencers, as well as journalists, professionals, and public figures with varying degrees of notoriety.

In line with Lim et al. (2017), social media influencers are, to begin with, studied within the subject of marketing and marketing to create publicity, especially in more youthful markets, and boom the social media attain of companies. The influences of supply credibility, supply attractiveness, product match-up, and which means transmission on consumers' attitude and buy goal had been investigated in this study. They observed that social media influencers have a fine effect on consumers' buy goals. That the respondents who have an amazing mindset towards social media influencers are much more likely to buy the influencers' promoted product.

In the report by Tamara et al. (2021), the attractiveness and trustworthiness of influencers were found to have a beneficial effect on purchase intention. They claimed that the higher the number of followers, the lower the relationship between attractiveness with purchase intention and trust. In addition, the results of this study showed that the number of followers has a direct effect on purchase intention. The number of subscribers is affected by certain information, allowing consumers to accept and identify available and reliable information. So, it starts with consumers who believe that buying a sellable product can lead to the realization that influencers are more attractive and trustworthy. Hence, in this study can be concluded that the influencer is measured in three dimensions which are credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the influencers.

### ***Social Media Influencers' Credibility and Consumers' Purchase Intention***

Baker and Churchill (1977) pointed out that the credibility of the influencers has a major impact on consumers' purchase intentions and has positive evaluations. An influencer's credibility may be more important to message acceptance if the influencer in advertising is a spokesperson for the product. The influencer in the advertisement in the study was merely a model with no "personal attachment" to the advertisement. In terms of perception, attribution, and reinforcement, a model should enhance the credibility of the message. However, if the model has a direct connection to the message, such as in an advertisement with a testimonial or personal endorsement, the effect may be enhanced. In this case, the message can be evaluated more directly in terms of influencer credibility.

On the other hand, Petty and Andrews (2008) reported that consumers consider influencers who receive cash payments to be less trustworthy than those who receive free samples or coupons as a reward. Brands that pay influencers a direct monetary reward for their referral

contribution are generally perceived as “buying” a product, and influencers are perceived as “selling” consumer trust in their company.

### ***Social Media Influencers’ Trustworthiness and Consumers’ Purchase Intention***

In the opinion of Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020), social media managers who want to undertake influencer marketing should focus first on the trustworthiness of the influencers. This research clarified brand managers to acquire a greater understanding of the precise consequences of the criteria. The greatest and most important influence on brand image, brand trust, and brand satisfaction is trustworthiness. Influencers should advocate a product because they are persuaded of its worth, not solely because they will be paid. As a result, transparency is another factor that influences trustworthiness in influencer marketing which is accomplished through providing complete product information, creating views, and forming relationships.

Zogaj et al. (2021) suggest that creating perceived trustworthiness with actual self-congruence could benefit from matching consumers’ personalities. Zogaj and colleagues (2021) work has notably contribute to the self-congruence literature by demonstrating how real and the ideal self-congruence impact perceived trustworthiness and perceived competence separately. As their first approach, they present a novel model that considers both the primary elements of credibility as well as both dimensions of self-congruence. This allows us to investigate the impact of real and ideal self-congruence on perceived trustworthiness and competence. Previous research, on the other hand, has only looked at the role of trustworthiness or competence, or equivalent characteristics like utilitarian value, functional value, and expertise, or it has viewed credibility as a one-dimensional construct. It can outline the reason underlying the impacts of actual and ideal self-congruence and show significant distinctions in genuine and aspirational marketing methods for establishing the sense of trustworthiness and competence through social media influencers.

### ***Social Media Influencers’ Attractiveness and Consumers’ Purchase Intention***

A study by Joseph (1982) reported that advertisers have conventionally chosen influencers based on their physical attractiveness to influence consumer attitudes. The analysis of seven experiments on opinion change and four experiments on advertising suggests that attractive influencers contribute in a limited but important way to increasing the effectiveness of communication. Specifically, this study has shown that people evaluate both the advertisement and the advertised product more positively when attractive influencers are used in advertising. This is because attractive influencers are consistently more popular, perceived more positively, and have a greater positive impact on related products than unattractive influencers. It turns out that attractive influencers tend to have more influence on consumers than less attractive ones.

Besides, Chaiken (1979) revealed that male and female influencers who were physically attractive or unattractive delivered a compelling message to consumers of each gender. According to the results, attractive influencers elicited much stronger persuasion compared to unattractive influencers on a verbal and behavioural measure of consumers agree. Data collected from the consumers in this study revealed that physically attractive and unattractive influencers differed in different communication skills and other attributes relevant to communicator persuasions, such as cumulative grade point average, school aptitude test results, and various self-assessment measures. These results imply that attractive influencers may be more persuasive than unattractive influencers since they possess characteristics or skills that make them particularly effective communicators to influence consumers.

### ***Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Virality***

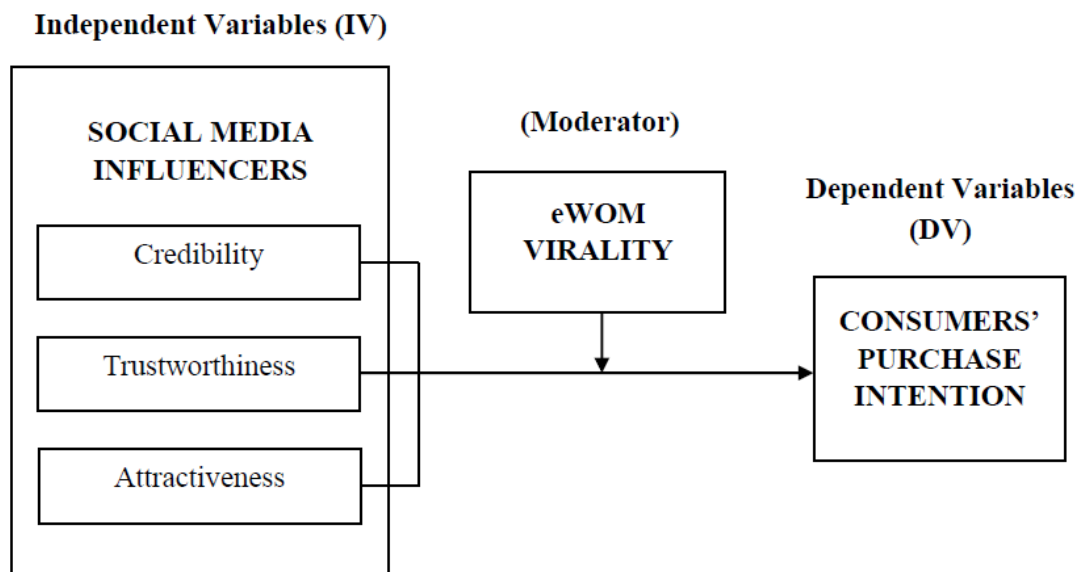
One of the earliest and prominent work is from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) who define eWOM communications as positive or negative statements about products or companies made by potential, current or former customers and made available via the Internet to various individuals and organisations. Using an online sample of around 2000 respondents, information on the structure and significance of consumers' online expressions is acquired. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) findings show that the most important factors influencing eWOM behavior are consumers' desire for social interaction, their desire for economic incentives, interest in other users, and their ability to increase self-esteem. eWOM providers can also be classified according to their motives for action. This means that companies may need to develop different methods to encourage eWOM behavior among different users. Additionally, consumers' reviews and social media influencers' recommendations are examples of eWOM since they represent consumers who share their product or service experiences and assessments with other potential customers (Tseng et al., 2020; Wasiat & Bertuah, 2022). Peer evaluations have been shown to assist potential consumers in making purchasing decisions (Zhang et al., 2019). The lower perceived risk while increasing trust in and attitude toward the items, the purchase intention would be higher (Qalati et al., 2021).

According to Buckley et al. (2012), the interest in word-of-mouth (WOM) and viral marketing have substantially multiplied with the appearance of social media. The studies of virality in this report employ a multi-method approach. Buckley and colleagues (2012) record the traits of viral content material even as highlighting what drives social transmission via way of means of combining a complete evaluation of virality in exercise with a sequence of managed laboratory experiments. Buckley et al. (2012) findings make numerous contributions to the prevailing literature addressing the continuing debate approximately whether individuals generally tend to proportion advantageous or poor beliefs. Additionally, Buckley and colleagues (2012) propose that advantageous information spreads extra even as the famous assumption is that poor information is much more likely to be shared than advantageous information. They locate that advantageous content material is much more likely to be shared, even if they bear in mind the frequency of its occurrence. Therefore, it's miles apparent that purchasers often proportion online content material, and that social transmission impacts product adoption and sales.

As Alghizzawi (2019) confirmed, viral marketing and eWOM through social media platforms influence consumer behavior and choices. The findings of this study and prior research in this field underscore the importance of policymakers, marketers, and organisations paying special attention to social communication platforms and opinions shared by consumers to recognize all opinions. It also highlights the effectiveness of marketing through social media platforms, especially with regard to consumer information or advertising. He reported that modern technology has created new channels for communication between customers and marketers with the emergence of social media platforms. Businesses should always have a way to connect with consumers through the world's first social communication platform in terms of dissemination and communication of information. Therefore, the importance of social communication platforms has increased due to the impact on customers through eWOM and viral marketing.



## Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study**

## Methodology

In this research, quantitative research will be performed to answer the research objectives of the study. This is a type of educational research in which the researcher decides what to study, collects measurable data from participants through thorough and narrow questions, then statistically evaluates these numbers and conducts the research fairly and objectively. Therefore, quantitative research is suitable to utilise in this study since the insight derived from concrete numerical data and analysis that designated to make judgments directly tied to the study objectives.

This research applied convenience sampling as the research sampling method. As specified by Lavrakas (2008), convenience sampling is a subset of non-probability sampling from which people are chosen because they provide researchers with a convenient source of accessibility data. Respondents were chosen because they were most readily available for study, and the researchers did not consider selecting people typical of the general population. It would be ideal in all methods of study to examine the whole population since the population is just too enormous to include every individual in most circumstances. For an online survey, 200 respondents per country is enough for the statistical analysis for a study (Akter et al., 2021; Kasuma et al., 2020; Seninde, & Chambers, 2020). Therefore, a sample of 200 social media users of young adults from 18 to 30 years old in Malaysia is targeted and provide sufficient data of convenience sampling in this study. A link to the online questionnaire developed in Google Form was sent to the targeted respondents via group WhatsApp or via direct message on social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. The respondents are a group of readily available respondents or self-selection of those wanting to participate and volunteers in this study. Since this is a convenience sampling, the results of the study could not be generalised to the social media user's population in Malaysia.

### **Research Instruments and Questionnaire Development**

Four items were adapted for the study for Section 1, which is the consumers' purchase intention. Furthermore, Section 2 contains a total of 9 items. This section was divided into three parts in social media influencers: Section 2(a): Social media influencers credibility, Section 2(b): Social media influencers trustworthiness, and Section 2(c): Social media influencers attractiveness. The questionnaire has three items in each of the divided parts. Besides, in Section 3, there are five items applied for moderator, which is eWOM virality. Furthermore, Section 4 will include nine question items on the respondent's basic information, such as demographic profile.

Thus, the Likert scale would be a suitable outline in devising Section 1, Section 2, and Section 3 of this questionnaire. Based on Joshi et al. (2015), the Likert scale is designed to quantify "relationships" in a scientifically accepted and tested way. The questionnaire will be developed to create the level of the consent of respondents to the choice of statements on five scales: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neutral; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree.

The questionnaire is developed based past research. Particularly, section 1 measures Consumers' purchase intention (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .716$ ) (i. *Social media influencers help me make decisions better before purchasing products or services*, ii. *Social media influencers increase my interest in purchasing products or services*, iii. *If I find out that the utility of a product or service is larger than personal devotions in terms of money, time, and energy. I will consider buying this product and service*, iv. *I am very likely to buy products or services recommended by the influencers on social media platforms*) (Abdullah, 2019).

Section 2 measures social media influencers (a) credibility (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .808$ ) (i. *I think the social media influencers' characteristic is relevant for me to purchase their product or service recommendation*, ii. *I think the social media influencers' characteristic is valuable for me to purchase their product or service recommendation*, iii. *I think the social media influencers' characteristic is mean a lot for me to purchase their product or service recommendation*) (b) trustworthiness (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .768$ ) (i. *I think the social media influencers are reliable that interest me to purchase their product or service recommendation*, ii. *I think the social media influencers are ethical that encourage me to purchase their product or service recommendation*, iii. *I think the social media influencers are knowledgeable about the products/services they endorse*) and (c) attractiveness (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .801$ ) (i. *I think the handsome/beautiful social media influencers attract me to purchase their product or service recommendation*, ii. *I think the physically attractive social media influencers captivate me to purchase their product or service recommendation*, iii. *I think the glamorous social media influencers appeal to me to purchase their product or service recommendation*) (Gadalla, 2019).

Section 3 concluded the hypotheses of this study that proposed eWOM virality is the moderator that impacted the relationship between independent variable towards dependent variable, which is (H4) eWOM virality will act as an interactive role with influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and consumers' purchase intention. Specifically, the higher (vs lower) eWOM virality, the stronger (vs lower) the influencers' effect on consumers' purchase intention. The questions taken from past studies by Abdullah (2019) focused on how the eWOM impacted the social media influencers which may affect the consumers' decision-making to purchase the products or services. Section 3 measures eWOM virality (Cronbach's

$\alpha = .852$ ) (i. When I buy products or services, I generally purchase those that I think others will approve of, ii. I like to know what products or services make good impressions on others, iii. If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same products or services that they buy, iv. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products or services that social media influencers have purchased, v. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products or services that social media influencers have purchased) (Abdullah, 2019).

The last section, which is Section 4, will focus on the respondent's basic information such as demographic data. As stated by Salkind (2010), demographic information provides information about study participants and is necessary to determine whether an individual in each study is a representative sample of the target population for generalization purposes. It applies to socioeconomic information that reflects different geographic locations, such as population, race, income, education, and employment, and is often time limited. There are nine questions for this section, such as gender, age, race, marital status, employment status, social media usage (yes/no), social media that often use by respondents, asked respondents whether they follow any influencers on social media and have they ever bought product/service that is recommended by the social media influencers.

### Data Collection

A Google form-based online questionnaire was created for the study's data collection. By using convenience sampling method, a link to the online questionnaire was posted to the researchers' WhatsApp group and through direct messaging on social media sites such as Instagram and Twitter, which often feature social media influencers. 200 individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 who use social media participated in this survey. The same questions were asked to all respondents in the same sequence since the questions were standardised. This implies that a questionnaire may be simply reproduced to test its reliability. The validity of each item is determined by the topic's relevancy in the context of the respondents' comprehension and is appraised in the questionnaire. If the questions are relevant to the respondents' perspective and situation, then the addition of more options may improve the scale's content and construct validity. Providing alternatives that are closer to the respondent's initial point of view reduces the pressure of ambiguity in the replies.

### Data Analysis and Results

#### Data

There were 64 (32%) male and 136 (68%) female respondents that were from the youth group aged from 18 to 30 years old. The data were collected from 181 (90.5%) Malay, 8 (4%) Indian, 7 (3.5%) Chinese, and 4 (2%) Others race respondents. Regarding the marital status of the respondents indicates that 177 (88.5%) were single, 10 (5%) had engaged, and 13 (6.5%) had married. The employment status of the respondents shows that 37 (18.5%) are employed, 7 (3.5%) are unemployed, 1 (0.5%) are self-employed, and 155 (77.5%) are students.

All respondents reported to utilized social media which lead to TikTok as the most often used social media app that chosen by 147 respondents (73.5%), followed by Instagram with 73 respondents (73%), Facebook with 115 respondents (59.5%), Twitter with 69 respondents (34.5%), WeChat with 2 respondents (1%), WhatsApp with 2 respondents (1%), and Telegram with 1 respondent (0.5%). There were 195 respondents (97.5%) did follow any influencer, celebrity, or any other popular accounts on social media, meanwhile, there were 5 respondents

(2.5%) who claimed that they do not follow any influencer, celebrity, or any other popular accounts on their social media. Majority of the respondents which was 174 respondents or 84% bought product or service that are recommended by the influencer in social media, while the 44 remaining which was 26 respondents (13%) did not ever buy a product or service that are recommended by the influencer in social media beforehand.

### ***Multiple Regression with Dummy Variable Analysis***

Reid and Allum (2019) reported that multiple regression can describe a dependent variable as a linear function of two or more independent variables. In line with Rosenthal (2017), multiple regression models and controls for the impact of additional independent variables can involve interaction effects. Thus, multiple regressions were conducted to clarify the research question “does eWOM virality moderates the influencers’ credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness toward consumers’ purchase intention?” and answer hypothesis “eWOM virality will act as an interactive role with influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and consumers’ purchase intention. Specifically, the higher (vs lower) eWOM virality, the stronger (vs lower) the social media influencers’ effect on consumers’ purchase intention”.

Therefore, the researcher applied dummy variable of eWOM virality into this multiple regression using SPSS. This is because the dummy variable of eWOM virality is used to predict the social media influencers affect on consumers’ purchase intention based on two levels of eWOM virality which are low eWOM virality and high eWOM virality.

### ***Dummy Variable Coding***

As stated by Garavaglia et al. (1998), dummy variables are variables that can only have a value of 0 or 1. A dummy variable is a numerical representation of a qualitative fact or logical assertion. Thus, a dummy variable with a value of 0 in a regression model causes its coefficient to disappear from the equation. Because of the identical feature of multiplication by 1, a value of 1 leads the coefficient to operate as a supplemental intercept. In a linear regression model, this form of specification helps define subgroups of observations with various intercepts and/or slopes without creating separate models. Encoding all the independent factors and moderators as dummy variables in logistic regression models enables for easier interpretation and computation of odds ratios and increases.

Therefore, the researcher recoded all independent variables which are social media influencers’ credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, as well as the moderator which is eWOM virality into different variables using SPSS. Dummy variables coding was performed to categorize or group of independent variables and a moderator which represent the variables into a higher level of measurement that focuses on the low and high to meet the research hypothesis. Through this, the independent variables and moderator can reassign the values of existing variables into new values such as 0 and 1 for a new variable. Hence, the researcher will place a value of 0 as low to a value that is less than the median value, as well as a value of 1 as high to a value that is more than the median value. Once dummy variables have been recoded, the researcher will be used dummy variables to carry out regression analysis in this study to answer research question.

## **Results**

As presented in **Table 2**, the model summary has four predictors which is a moderator: eWOM virality, and three independent variables: (i) social media influencers’ credibility, (ii) social

media influencers' trustworthiness, and (iii) social media influencers' attractiveness. The value of ( $R = .789$ ) in this table indicates a good level of prediction. Thus, the value of  $R$  square of ( $R^2 = .622$ ) could be interpreted that 62.2% of the variability variance of dependent variables which is consumers' purchase intention is explained by the independent variables and moderator. It also demonstrates that the value of the adjusted  $R$  square is ( $=.614$ ), implying that 61.4% of the variation in the outcome variable is explained by the predictors retained in the model.

**Table 2: Model Summary Results**

| Model<br>R | R<br>Square | Adjusted<br>R<br>Square | F<br>change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F<br>Change |
|------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-----|-----|------------------|
| .789       | .622        | .614                    | 80.245      | 4   | 195 | .000             |

According to **Table 3**, the  $F$  value in the ANOVA tests whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data. The table shows that the independent variables and moderator statistically significantly predict the dependent variable, ( $F = 80.245$ ;  $p = .00$ ). As a result, the regression model provides a strong influence on consumers' purchase intention.

**Table 3: ANOVA**

| Model |            | Sum of<br>Squares | df  | Mean Square | F      | Sig.              |
|-------|------------|-------------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1     | Regression | 43.378            | 4   | 10.844      | 80.245 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
|       | Residual   | 26.352            | 195 | .135        |        |                   |
|       | Total      | 69.730            | 199 |             |        |                   |

a. Dependent Variable: Consumers' Purchase Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), eWOM Virality (Dummy), Social Media Influencers' Trustworthiness, Social Media Influencers' Attractiveness, Social Media Influencers' Credibility

As indicated in **Table 4**, all the variables are presented have less value than ( $p < .05$ ) which means they are statistically significant to the prediction. Both social media influencers' attractiveness and social media influencers' trustworthiness have the same significant value with ( $p = .00$ ), meanwhile social media influencers' credibility with ( $p = .020$ ), and eWOM virality with ( $p = .011$ ). Hence, the highest contributing predictor in coefficient  $\beta$  is social media influencers' attractiveness with ( $\beta = .263$ ), followed by social media influencers' trustworthiness with ( $\beta = .232$ ), and social media influencers' credibility with ( $\beta = .120$ ). This demonstrates the moderator, eWOM virality, has remarkably interacted with the dependent variable, which is consumers' purchase intention, as well as its independent variables, which are social media influencers' credibility, social media influencers' trustworthiness, and social media influencers' attractiveness.

Consequently, the coefficient  $\beta$  value of eWOM virality shows that it is positive with ( $\beta = .159$ ). Therefore, the researcher has interpreted the effects of eWOM virality in the findings as a positive effect on independent variables toward dependent variable. Multiple regression was also run to predict the consumers' purchase intention from social media influencers' credibility, social media influencers' trustworthiness, and social media influencers' attractiveness which eWOM virality (dummy variable) act as an interactive role. Consequently, the model



statistically significantly has justified the hypothesis of this research which is eWOM virality will act as an interactive role with influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and consumers' purchase intention. Specifically, the higher (vs lower) eWOM virality, the stronger (vs lower) the social media influencers' effect on consumers' purchase intention.

**Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Result**

| Model   | Unstandardise<br>d Coefficients | Standardised<br>Coefficients |      |       |      | Correlations           |         |      | Collinearity<br>Statistics |       |
|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|------|-------|------|------------------------|---------|------|----------------------------|-------|
|   | B                               | Std.<br>Error                | Beta | t     | Sig. | Zero<br>-<br>orde<br>r | Partial | Part | Tolerance                  | VIF   |
| 1 (Constant)                                    | 1.507                           | .174                         |      | 8.652 | .000 |                        |         |      |                            |       |
| Social Media<br>Influencers'<br>Credibility     | .120                            | .051                         | .147 | 2.340 | .020 | .597                   | .165    | .103 | .494                       | 2.024 |
| Social Media<br>Influencers'<br>Trustworthiness | .232                            | .053                         | .277 | 4.409 | .000 | .659                   | .301    | .194 | .489                       | 2.044 |
| Social Media<br>Influencers'<br>Attractiveness  | .263                            | .035                         | .411 | 7.459 | .000 | .694                   | .471    | .328 | .637                       | 1.569 |
| eWOMVirality<br>(Dummy)                         | .159                            | .062                         | .134 | 2.556 | .011 | .496                   | .180    | .113 | .706                       | 1.416 |

a. Dependent Variable: PurchaseIntention

## Conclusion, Research Limitations and Further Suggestions

### Conclusion

eWOM virality is a moderator that is embodied as crucial part which could impact the social media influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) on consumers' purchase intention in this study. This is because eWOM virality will influence the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. This study demonstrated that there are statistically significant in eWOM virality acting as a moderator between social media influencers' (credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) on consumers' purchase intention. It has been clearly demonstrated that the fourth hypothesis, (H4) eWOM virality will act as an interactive role with influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness) and consumers' purchase intention. Specifically, the higher (vs lower) eWOM virality, the stronger (vs lower) the social media influencers' effect on consumers' purchase intention.

eWOM virality is seen to influence the social media influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) toward consumers' purchase intention among the social media users of young adults between 18 to 30 years old in Malaysia since the T-Test and multiple regression analysis revealed that the moderator has positively influenced the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable which is significant. The positive relationship demonstrated that the eWOM virality is responding the social media influencers (credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) toward consumers' purchase intention among social media users of young adults in Malaysia.

This result has brought a new finding that shows the importance of eWOM virality influencing social media influencers toward consumers' purchase intention since there were limited data

of eWOM virality as a moderator. However, the researcher can relate this result with previous studies from Zhou et al. (2021) have discovered social media influencers is a key stakeholder who is increasingly working with businesses to improve the marketing initiatives of eWOM communications. This shows that social media influencers are creating eWOMs to offer and promote their products and services to consumers. In line with, eWOM communication using social networks is immensely effective at influencing product or service purchases. When a consumer is pleased with a purchase, they might influence others in their social circle to buy from the same brand. When they were dissatisfied, they would discourage their social circle from purchasing a thing that did not fulfil their wants and expectations. Therefore, based on the result findings, the researcher concluded that the higher eWOM virality, the stronger the social media influencers' (credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) effect on consumers' purchase intention.

### ***Research Limitations***

This study produced a substantial amount of updated data that has benefited both theoretically and practically with the consumers' purchase intention, social media influencer (credibility, trustworthiness, and attractiveness), and eWOM virality topics. Although this research has certain limitations, several issues are addressed here for prospective future research on the topic.

First and foremost, this study applied the convenience sampling method to speed up the data collection process and be cost-effective. Convenience sampling is a subset of non-probability sampling that makes non-random selections based on convenience sampling or other considerations, allowing data to be retrieved more efficiently (McCombes, 2019). Hence, the questionnaire was circulated to instantly available respondents from the researchers' personal networks via messaging applications and social media accounts. Since the researchers used non-probability to collect the sample of the data, it should be noted that the acquired data is skewed to some extent and may not fully represent the total research population even though statistical generalizations about the whole research population were drawn from a sample of 200 respondents online. The results of this study are almost certainly influenced by certain characteristics of certain social groups and may not apply to all young people in Malaysia. Therefore, researchers have no way of determining how close the sample values are to the values of the population, which increases the risk of bias.

Besides, another limitation concern was the lack of previous research that constitutes eWOM virality as a moderator to social media influencers on consumers' purchase intention. The researchers have encountered difficulties referencing needed information in this study since there was inadequate data towards eWOM virality. Nevertheless, the researchers have explored, examined, and studied similar research under the eWOM communications topic to undergo this study.

### ***Further Suggestions***

Researchers would like to emphasise various points of view to enhance improvement in future studies. To begin with, the researcher suggests conducting the same sort of study using probability sampling rather than non-probability sampling since it was a limitation for this study. According to Laerd Dissertations (2012), probability sampling refers to a set of sampling strategies that enable researchers to choose units at random from a population to investigate using probabilistic approaches. It may be fair for further studies to use probability sampling to

generalize the results. This helps to avoid potential sampling bias, which would limit the capacity of future studies to generalize from the sample to the population. To reduce sampling bias, probabilistic approaches are utilised, in which units from the population are chosen at random, to give each unit an equal chance of being chosen. To accomplish this, a population list must be obtained, and the sample frame must be the same as or similar to the population being investigated. Unbiased random selection of respondents is important for accurately representing the entire population and has the virtue of becoming convenient to employ.

Additionally, it would be noteworthy if future studies were to incorporate a broader range of consumers, as well as perhaps other generation groups especially older generations to provide a more reliable set of findings. It would be a fantastic opportunity since younger and older adults may have different perspectives at any given time. Generational groups make it possible for further studies to determine how today's older generations felt about a particular subject when they were younger, as well as define how the trajectory of views may differ across generations. Welchlin (2022) stated that each generation experienced significant occurrences throughout their initial years. These occurrences and trends have influenced how each generation perceives the world. Therefore, the older generation has had first-hand experience with being change agents and thinks that individuals can make a difference. Hence, with older generations as a new sample and population in further studies, it may bring new insightful findings in consumers' purchase intention, social media influencer, and eWOM virality.

Moreover, further studies may carry out a replication of this study in qualitative research to see if the outcomes are the same with this study. Qualitative research is intended to interpret all the videos by quantifying and analysing variables to get results. According to Palmer and Bolderston (2006), qualitative research is an interpretive approach that seeks to gain insight into specific meanings and behaviours experienced in specific social phenomena through the subjective experiences of participants. Qualitative research is usually used to explore new phenomena and capture thoughts, feelings, or interpretations of people's meanings and processes. Qualitative studies, therefore, allow eWOM to act as a mediator in the collection of qualitative data, making further studies of the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchasing intentions much more exploratory. It enables data collection to be triggered by further studies' intuition on where valuable information might be discovered more in-depth.

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