

## SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' ATTRIBUTES ON FOLLOWERS' PURCHASE INTENTION IN MALAYSIA

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**Abstract.** 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 diverse industries. This study aims to investigate the influence of brand awareness on purchase intention through the mediating role of influencers' attributes (credibility and endorsement) among consumers in Selangor, Malaysia. This study was hinged on the Source Credibility Theory. Using a survey research method, a structured questionnaire was administered among 389 social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok) followers in Selangor with experience in purchasing products/services after watching or browsing social medias endorsed by an influencer. The findings revealed that majority of consumers' purchase intention are moderately affected by the social media influencers. Further, the results show that brand awareness, influencers' credibility, and influencers' endorsement have a stronger influence on purchase intention. Besides, both influencers' credibility and influencers' endorsement have a mediation role on the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention. This result indicates that a "credible" social media influencer that endorsed the specific product/service with social media post stated an '#sponsored' '#ad' have a positive effect towards the brand and purchase intention. It was recommended that companies should ascertain the credibility of social media influencers whose services would be employed in order to enhance positive perception about product promotion among the consumers.

**Keywords:** *brand awareness, influencer credibility, influencer endorsement, purchase intention*

### Introduction

Social media platforms present not only collaborative environments that concentrate on the exchange of contents but also lay stress on the active engagement of the consumers in the creation of all published contents (Alalwan, 2018). Therefore, social media platforms could create value for the businesses, as they help firms to reach out to customers globally for the purpose of forming and sustaining the premium brand (Singh and Cullinane, 2010). According to a recent report published by Oberlo Official Portal (2020), 73 percent of marketers have thought that social media platforms could effectively help in conducting their marketing campaign. This could be attributed to the increasing number of people who join such platforms over the recent years. Influencers are those who due to their knowledge, skills, and character-but not position-can make an impact on attitudes of a certain group (Balaban and Mustăţea, 2019). This means that companies use influencers as a way of increasing consciousness and perception of their brand. Consumers that gather and collect information are more likely to be influenced when the information is believable. In other words, the information needs to be credible in order to get sustenance from the consumers. The credibility of the company will influence the attitude of the consumer (Hoyer et al., 2013). Yet, social media influencers have a more complex situation as they have to accomplish their own recognition by being authentic on social media (Jiang, 2018). Therefore, for influencers to be perceived

as credible, they have to work hard to be able to convince the followers that the product/service recommended was in fact made to improve the influencer's public image, communicate their genuine interest in the product/service, or convey their intention to help others (Jiang, 2018).

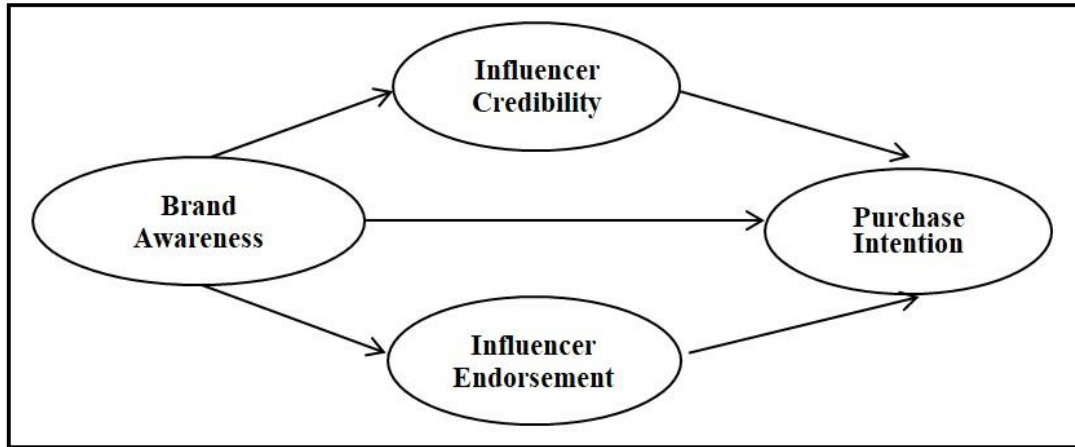
There are many studies conducted on how influencers persuade their followers and the different ways they approach their followers (Ki and Kim, 2019; Martensen et al., 2018). For instance, Dreifaldt and Drennan (2019) investigated consumers' perception of similarity, familiarity, and credibility in how brand image could influence consumers' purchase intention. However, Dreifaldt and Drennan (2019) study found that there is a gap in how credibility of influencers plays a role in the purchasing intention of their followers. Besides, as most of the brands in the industry nowadays are connecting with the influencer in part of their marketing strategy as ambassador, there are number of issues concerning public's eye from engaging with such brands through influencers in the social media platforms. According to Prema (2020), the role of influencers in digital marketing communication is widespread, but they are not backed by empirical evidence. Therefore, this study mainly aims to investigate whether social media influencers' attributes (credibility and endorsement) can mediate the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention among consumers in Selangor, Malaysia.

### ***Literature review***

Purchase intention refers to a motive to buy certain products or services in the future (Nursyirwan and Ardaninggar, 2020). Purchase intention can also be referred to willingness to purchase a specific brand as cognitive behavior (Doan, 2020). Previous studies recommended that purchase intention is frequently linked to perceptions of influencers and influencer marketing as a whole (Abraham et al., 2022; Lee and Lee, 2022; Masuda et al., 2022). Weismueller et al. (2020) argued that the perceived trustworthiness of the influencer increased the rate of the purchase intention towards brands among customers. According to Le et al. (2021), the influence of social media influencers on the intention to purchase cosmetic products among consumers in Vietnam can be linked to the perception of the credibility of the information disseminated by the influencers. Masuda et al. (2022) pointed to perception of influencers' attitude, physical attractiveness, and parasocial relationship as factors that heighten the purchase intention for brands among the audience.

To understand more about how cognitive behavior affect purchase intention among consumers, this study focuses on the mediating influence of social media influencers' attributes on the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention. *Figure 1* shows the research framework for this study. This study is anchored on the Source Credibility Theory. Hovland and Weiss (1951) proposed the Source Credibility Theory in 1951 to explain that a communicator's message is convincing to the degree to which receivers consider the source to possess some credibility traits such as expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness (Le et al., 2021). The theory proposes that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. The perceived credibility of the source's endorsement determines how the audience will react to the message. The view of the audience of a medium and how they receive the message of that medium to a large extent is dependent on how they see the source (Balaban and Mustățea, 2019). It can be considered that the more a social influencer has embodied the characteristics of source credibility, the more customers would accept the promotional

messages from such influencer. In regards to social media influencer marketing of products, *Figure 1* shows that this study assumes the effectiveness of the brand awareness is reliant on the positive perception of the audience towards influencers' credibility and influencers' endorsement for their purchase intention.



*Figure 1. Conceptual framework.*

### ***Brand awareness***

Brand denotes a combination of identification and differentiation in which it draws great attention to the product/service. Hermanda et al. (2019) defined brand awareness as the probability that consumers are familiar about the availability and accessibility of a company's product/service. Brand could bring value to consumers and companies whereby consumers perceived that companies would make their attempt to satisfy their consumers by providing consumers' desire list of values, where value means benefit (Khan, 2020). When consumers are satisfied with the value they receive from brands, they may provide value to companies and demonstrate brand loyalty. According to Mudassar et al. (2013), the awareness of the brand plays a substantial role while purchasing a product/service and may have control on perceived risk evaluation of consumers and their level of assurance about the buying decision due to awareness with the brand and its uniqueness. In fact, social media is crucial as brand awareness basically build in there for the engagement of social media influencers with their followers. These influencers may use their platform, particularly the online profile to connect with other social media users and to raise awareness about the brands' products (Adreani et al., 2021). Whenever a customer is willing to buy a product/service, the first brand name that clicks in his mind reveals that this product has higher brand awareness (Jaitly and Gautam, 2021). Nurhandayani et al. (2019) also indicated that it seems that influencers have a massive reach, and they have the ability to increase brand exposure and boost brand awareness. As conclusion, countless businesses are partnering with respected digital influencers, including celebrities and/or influencers to raise awareness about their products/services, and increase their sales (Hsu et al., 2013).

### ***Influencer credibility***

Influencer credibility is defined as the degree to which consumers believe that an influencer is professional and attractive in a specific field and regard the information provided for the product/service (Deng et al., 2020). Influencer's credibility has gained

their public recognition through their talents which has made them popular among marketers in promoting the brands of products/services (Khamis et al., 2017). In other words, social media influencers accomplish their own recognition by being authentic and in branding themselves as experts on social media platform (Jiang, 2018). Influencers also are found to be credible and influential due to their lifestyle of vlogging and exposing their daily activities to their followers (Chakraborty and Bhat, 2018). By doing so, it creates a connection, appreciation, and a special relationship to the followers (Khamis et al., 2017). Previous study such as Chakraborty and Bhat (2018) argued that purchase intention and brand attitude of consumers have been found to be dependent on the credibility of influencers. Plus, influencers' credibility has also been found to play a mediating role between the purchase of intentions of consumers (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2017). Weismueller et al. (2020) revealed that influencers' credibility can affect the consumer purchase intention and reach huge advertising disclosures due to their high number of followers. Similarly, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) suggested that influencers are perceived as more credible and relatable than traditional celebrities, therefore they seen to have a significant impact on their followers' purchasing intention. This indicates that influencers' credibility could be considered as highly credible communicators which are more persuasive than those who are considered of low credibility (Muda and Hamzah, 2021). Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) further added that credible influencer has a positive effect on advertising effectiveness such as increasing consumers attitudes towards the ad, towards the brand, and purchase intention.

### ***Influencer endorsement***

Influencer endorser is defined as any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer product/service by appearing with it in an advertisement (Seno and Lukas, 2007). The goal of influencers' endorsement is to encourage positive attitudes and create favourable behavioural responses towards the endorsed brand as a result, just like human influencers (Torres et al., 2019). The phenomenon of using social media influencers for endorsement purposes is currently on the rise since the influencers exert a huge influence on their followers and can affect their buying decisions. Some of the companies even promote their social media platform for customer relationship management (CRM) in an influencer-brand setting and claim this is the root of the superior results (Venciute et al., 2023). On top of that, there are plenty of studies showed that customer purchasing intention is initiated when the influencer's endorsement conditions were satisfied (Venciute et al., 2023; Kurdi et al., 2022). These conditions which mentioned by Müller et al. (2018) entailed that customer must perceive the product as useful, the influencer as credible, must have a positive attitude towards the ad, must perceive the persuasion attempt of the ad, and assess the ad rationally or emotionally. This indicates that customer reviews on influencer endorsements before making purchase as they are considered trusted and credible sources of information. Besides, it is highly significant that influencers are endorsing the products professional as it affects the buying decision.

### **Materials and Methods**

Quantitative analysis with cross-sectional design was employed in this study. The population of this study represented all social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok) followers in Selangor with experience in purchasing

products/services after watching or browsing social media endorsed by an influencer. A web-based survey was designed and administered in collecting the data. Screening questions were placed at the beginning of the survey to check whether the respondents regularly used social media as an influencer channel, had experience in purchasing products/services after watching their social media. Participants who answered “yes” to all of these screening questions were asked to fill in the remainder of the survey. Unqualified participants denied further access. The final sample size was 389.

**Measurement of the constructs**

The measures employed in the study along with their sources are listed in *Table 1*. The measures were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire measures.

Constructs	Items	Source(s)
Purchase intention	10	Nagori (2020)
Brand awareness	6	Hermanda et al. (2019)
Influencers' credibility	8	Saima and Khan (2020)
Influencers' endorsement	7	Dwidienawati et al. (2020)

Table 1

**Data analysis method: PLS-SEM**

The study’s data analysis used the partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique, which is a multivariate statistical technique that integrates empirical data and the underlying model to assess the direct and indirect relationships between constructs. PLS-SEM analysis is more adaptable for a smaller sample size than covariance-based SEM (Hair et al., 2019). SmartPLS 4 is used as software to perform two-stage data analysis models based on PLS-SEM (i.e., the measurement model and structural model).

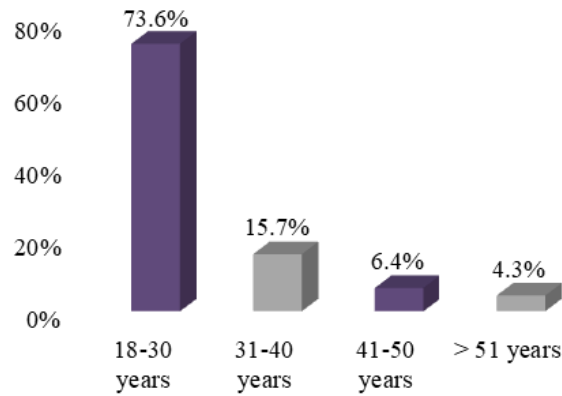
**Results and Discussion**

*Figure 2(a)* depicts unsurprisingly that female respondents are more than the male as 66.4% of the study’s participants were female as compared to 33.6% males. Further, *Figure 2(b)* shows that majority of the respondents are between 18 and 30 years old. They make up more than half (73.6%) of the total responses to the survey given. The race status of the respondents as depicted in *Figure 2(c)* shows that 85.7% of respondents are Malay, while Indian make up the second largest respondents in this study with 9.3% of participation. Chinese respondents are the least participate in this study (5.0%). In terms of occupation (*Figure 2(d)*), majority of the respondents (35.7%) currently worked in private sector, followed by students (29.3%). Finally, the rest of the respondents are worked as government servant (24.3%) and doing business (10.7%). *Figure 2(e)* reveals that majority of the respondents mostly preferred Instagram as their social media site as compared to other social media types. They counted more than half (57.1%) of the overall participants in this study. Facebook is the second preferable social media chosen by the respondents (22.9%). Contrary, the least preferred social

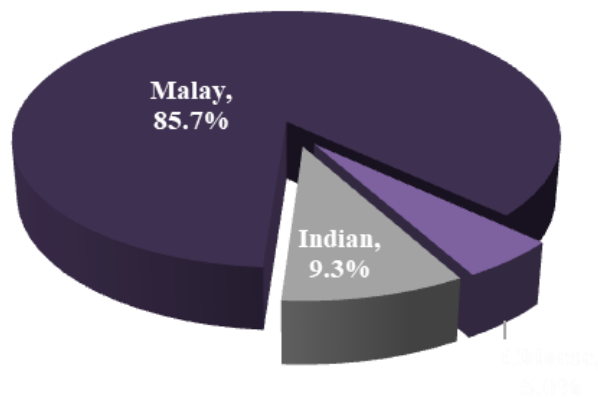
network site when deciding for purchasing products/services by respondents is TikTok with only 5%. Respondents also are required to indicate how do social media influencers affect their purchase intention. *Figure 2(f)* illustrates that majority of the respondents indicate that their purchase intention was moderately affected by the social media influencers (55.7%). There are 12.9% of respondents stated that they are highly depends on social media influencers when thinking of making purchase, while 10.7% of respondents revealed that they are not affected by the social media influencers.



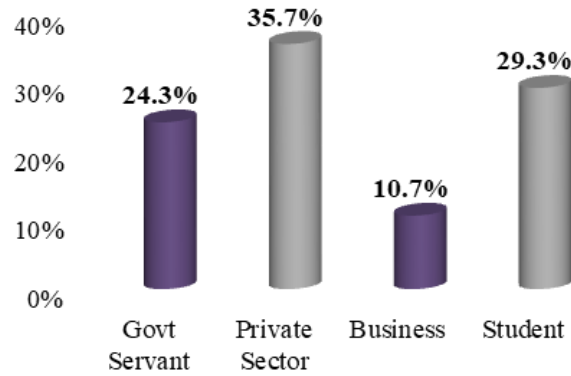
*Figure 2(a). Gender of respondents.*



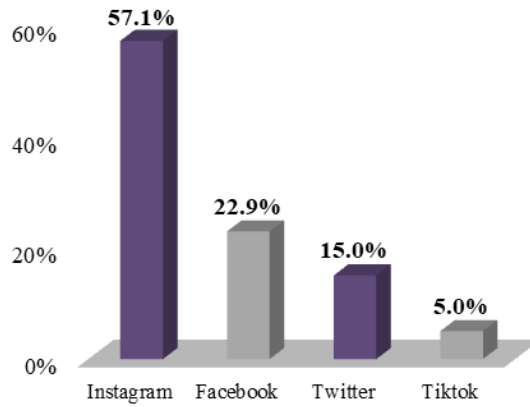
*Figure 2(b). Age group of respondents.*



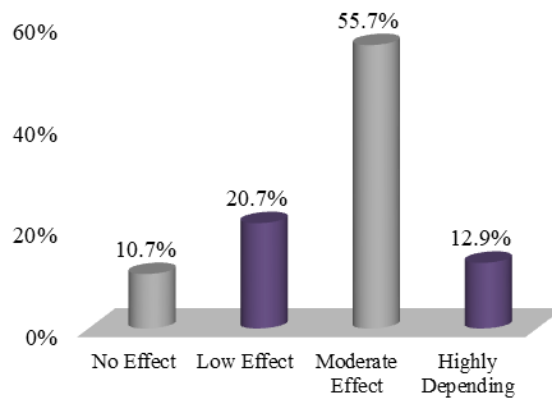
**Figure 2(c).** Race of respondents.



**Figure 2(d).** Respondents' occupation.



**Figure 2(e).** Social media preferences.



**Figure 2(f).** Social media effects on respondents.

### **PLS-SEM analysis results**

PLS-SEM consists of two-step process as suggested by Henseler et al. (2016), which involved the calculation of the parameters of the PLS model separately by solving the measurement model and then calculating the path coefficients of the structural model.

**Measurement model assessment**

To validate the measurement model, the item loadings on relevant constructs are evaluated to assess indicator reliability. Next, the internal consistency of each construct using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha are assessed. Further, the convergent validity using the average variance extracted (AVE) values are examined for all the indicators of each construct. As shown in *Table 2*, all item loadings were above the threshold of 0.7. Cronbach's alpha for each construct ranged from 0.7911 to 0.8976. On the other hand, the smallest composite reliability was 0.8172, which is much greater than the recommended threshold of 0.7. These assessments confirmed the internal consistency of the measures for each construct. In addition, all the AVE values were well above the required minimum level of 0.50, implying high levels of convergent validity for all constructs. Finally, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) criterion was used to assess discriminant validity. Ramayah et al. (2018) recommended a 0.90 threshold value, which indicates that if the HTMT value is less than 0.90, then the discriminant validity between two constructs have been established. *Table 3* presents the results of the discriminant validity analysis using the HTMT criterion. All values were below 0.90. Therefore, discriminant validity was verified.

**Table 2. Results of measurement model analysis.**

Constructs and items	CA	CR	AVE	OL	VIF
<b>Purchase intention</b>					
I would prefer online shopping than walk-in to store.	0.7911	0.8172	0.5486	0.702	1.673
I have spent my money for online shopping more than I probably should.				0.799	1.786
I often go through social network sites to do online shopping.				0.739	1.886
I always do my own research about the product before buying it online				0.855	1.530
I usually read customer reviews before I decide to buy the product.				0.748	1.634
I followed influencers account on social media to gain information of the product.				0.711	2.127
I have followed recommendations from influencers to purchase products.				0.811	2.126
I am more likely to try a new brand if influencers recommend the products.				0.813	2.585
I could afford to buy any products through online shopping.				0.714	1.659
I had never encountered any problems yet to make online purchase.				0.786	1.854
<b>Brand awareness</b>					
I assume brand awareness of products could be easily raised by influencers.	0.8144	0.8588	0.5277	0.765	1.945
Sometimes I notice some important messages from product reviews and advertisement on social media.				0.780	1.425
I often read customer review to know product impression by others before purchase product.				0.764	1.568
I believe influencers could attract more consumers when they expose their lifestyle on social media.				0.816	2.382
Information and reviews from influencers have high impact of brand awareness.				0.899	2.651
The influencers succeed to help the consumers recognised the product only by its name.				0.829	2.161
<b>Influencers' credibility</b>					
The experience of an influencer is true indication of his/her credibility.	0.8976	0.9180	0.5855	0.770	1.599
The number of followers is an important factor for assessing credibility of influencers.				0.799	2.128
Influencers are considered as one of reliable sources for product knowledge.				0.829	2.868
Influencers' reviews reflect their work credibility.				0.711	2.222
<b>Constructs and items</b>					
I put my trust on influencer's recommendation about products.				0.863	2.292
I relied on influencers review to make sure I buy the right products.				0.811	2.530
I believe the review from the influencers have integrity, trustworthy, and reliable.				0.829	2.921
I think the influencers who engaged with their followers are more				0.876	1.921



trustworthy.

Influencers' endorsement					
I bought online merchandise because the influencers endorsed the product.	0.8463	0.8839	0.5247	0.7437	2.217
The personality of the influencers endorsed affects my purchase intention.				0.8104	2.419
I think influencers' endorsement could attract more consumers of the product.				0.7705	1.907
I assume that influencers will not purposely endorse a brand that will harm their followers.				0.7320	1.453
Influencers help me to buy product when they used visual ads and image to make promotion look more interesting.				0.7483	1.758
The popularity of the influencers has significant impact towards society through their endorsement.				0.7550	1.575
My favorite influencers could activate the interest of buying the newly endorsed products.				0.7729	2.229

Note: CA=Cronbach's Alpha; CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted; OL=Outer Loading; VIF=Variance Inflation Factor.

Table 3. Assessment of discriminant validity using HTMT.

Constructs	Brand awareness	Influencers' credibility	Influencers' endorsement	Purchase intention
Brand awareness				
Influencers' credibility	0.7487			
Influencers' endorsement	0.7658	0.8174		
Purchase intention	0.6665	0.7276	0.7502	

### Structural model assessment

The first step of the structural model assessment is to ensure that no significant levels of collinearity exist among the predictor constructs, which can create problems of redundancy in the analysis. This can be assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF). All VIF values among the predictor constructs based on the research model (as depicted in Table 2) were below the threshold value of five, demonstrating no critical multicollinearity issues. The significance of the hypothesized relationship between constructs was tested using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 4 with 5,000 subsamples. Figure 3 reveals the schematic diagram for the path coefficient ( $\beta$ ) and its significance value for the structural model.

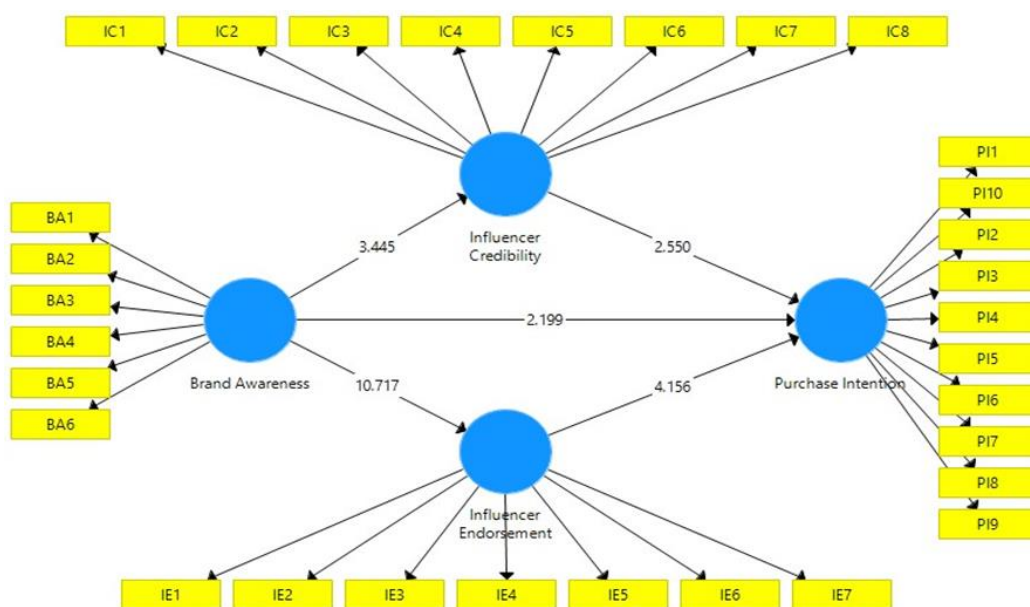


Figure 3. Path coefficients of the structural model.

Regarding explanatory power and predictive relevance, the squared multiple correlation (R<sup>2</sup>) and Stone-Geisser's Q<sup>2</sup> value (Geisser, 1975; Stone, 1974) were tested using the bootstrapping and blindfolding procedure in SmartPLS 4. Table 4 presents the R<sup>2</sup>, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, and Q<sup>2</sup> values for the endogenous constructs. R<sup>2</sup> measures the percentage of variance explained by the independent constructs in the model. Characterizations consisting of brand awareness, influencers' credibility, and influencers' endorsement seem to explain approximately 38.33% of the variance in purchase intentions. Moreover, brand awareness explains about 41.94% of the variances in influencers' endorsement, while the same construct explains only 16.03% of the variance in influencers' credibility. The Q<sup>2</sup> value is used to interpret the model's predictive relevance with regard to each endogenous construct (Hair et al., 2019). The Q<sup>2</sup> values of all endogenous constructs are considerably higher than zero. Therefore, this study's research model demonstrates moderate explanatory power and predictive relevance for endogenous constructs.

**Table 4.** Results of R<sup>2</sup>, adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, and Q<sup>2</sup>.

Constructs	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
Purchase intention	0.3833	0.3640	0.2879
Influencers' credibility	0.1603	0.1518	0.1249
Influencers' endorsement	0.4193	0.4234	0.5162

For the path coefficients, the results are presented in Table 5. The proposed research model was largely supported. Among the three constructs influencing purchase intentions, influencers' endorsement stands out strongly and significantly influence purchase intention ( $\beta=0.5344$ ,  $p<.05^{***}$ ), followed by brand awareness ( $\beta=0.3658$ ,  $p<.05^{**}$ ). In addition, brand awareness maintained a significant with strong association with influencers' credibility ( $\beta=0.4004$ ,  $p<.05^{***}$ ) as well as influencers' endorsement ( $\beta=0.6476$ ,  $p<.05^{***}$ ). Finally, the result indicates that there is a mediation role of influencers' credibility ( $\beta=0.3460$ ,  $p<.05^{***}$ ) and influencers' endorsement ( $\beta=0.2147$ ,  $p<.05^{**}$ ) on the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention of consumers. This result indicates that a "credible" social media influencer that endorsed the specific product/service with social media post stated an '#sponsored' '#ad' have a positive effect towards the brand and purchase intention.

**Table 5.** Results of structural model assessment.

Structural path	$\beta$	T statistic	Results
H <sub>1</sub> : Brand awareness → Influencers' credibility	0.4004	3.4451***	Accepted
H <sub>2</sub> : Brand awareness → Influencers' endorsement	0.475	10.717***	Accepted
H <sub>3</sub> : Brand awareness → Purchase intention	0.3658	2.1989**	Accepted
H <sub>4</sub> : Influencers' credibility → Purchase intention	0.2866	2.5498**	Accepted
H <sub>5</sub> : Influencers' endorsement → Purchase intention	0.5344	4.1561***	Accepted
H <sub>6</sub> : Brand awareness → Influencers' credibility → Purchase intention	0.3460	3.6818***	Accepted
H <sub>7</sub> : Brand awareness → Influencers' endorsement → Purchase intention	0.2147	2.8867**	Accepted

Note: \*\*\* denotes significance at .001 level; \*\* denotes significance at .05 level; NS denotes not significant.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this study investigates the influence of brand awareness on purchase intention through the mediating role of influencers' attributes (i.e. credibility and endorsement) among the consumers in Selangor, Malaysia (N=389). The structural model achieved an excellent fit and predictive power, as about 0.1603, 0.4193, and 0.3833 of variance was accounted for in influencers' credibility, influencers' endorsement, and purchase intention, respectively. The results also supported the effecting role of all constructs on the purchase intention. Additionally, a mediating role was also found for influencers' credibility and influencers' endorsement on the path between brand awareness with purchase intention.

One of the significant deliverables of this study is to discuss the relationship between brand awareness and the increase in the engagement of the followers with social media influencers, which in turn, leads to having a higher purchase intention. This means that as long as customers see that social media influencers are attractive and have expertise, they will be more motivated to engage with what has been posted by those influencers, and accordingly, will have a positive intention to purchase the products/services recommended by those credible influencers. To put it differently, customers in Selangor are more likely to consider influencers with the attitude, physical attractiveness, and experience of enjoyment of the products/services as a credible source of information once they are in the process of formulating their decision to buy such products/services (Wang and Scheinbaum, 2017). The findings support the conclusions of the previous studies on this impact. For example, the study of Hughes et al. (2019) investigated the same topic of the purchase intention and the influencers' credibility in the UK context, and their results argued that for any sponsored post posted on the blog, the blogger with better expertise would be the more effective one to raise the awareness versus others, and this is demonstrated in the increase in purchasing rates.

In spite of the large volume of research that dealt with topics related to influencers' credibility, influencers' endorsement, and brand awareness, the relationship between influencers' influencers' endorsement, brand awareness, and purchase intention still calls for more analyses and exploration. This is especially in the light of the fact that the impact of these influencers' attributes on the purchase intention is not well covered and needs further evidence. Therefore, the current study was able to add a value to the current understanding of the main antecedents of purchase intention by looking at these dimensions of perceived influencers' attributes. Another contribution was captured in the current study by successfully validating the mediating impact of influencers' credibility and influencers' endorsement between brand awareness and purchase intention, especially in the absence of the studies that have addressed such relationship. Therefore, there is a need to have an in-depth understanding regarding the main factors that could positively or negatively shape the customer perception and behaviour. The current study results have contributed to the theoretical understanding but also provide practitioners with rich clues as to how they can conduct their social media marketing campaign in a way that will enhance both customers' perceived credibility and engagement and accordingly, their purchase intention.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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