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## **SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER IN MALAYSIA: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND FUTURE DIRECTION**

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### ABSTRACT

The emergence of the digital economy and a disease outbreak like the Pandemic Covid-19 have raised concerns about Social Media Influencers (SMI). SMI has been seen as important to complement the business and management. SMI acted as a marketing tool that utilised the social media platform. This paper aims to review past research in Malaysia related to SMI. Relevant articles were available on Google Scholar in the period between March 2020 to July 2022 and have been screened and analysed. Our review shows that research related to SMI varies in all aspects including awareness, perception, role, impact, causal analysis study and descriptive. The finding has also shown that SMI has been involved in consumer products, healthcare, automotive, advertising, fashion, tourism and hospitality and others. In conclusion, SMI is widely accepted as one of the marketing tools in various business sectors. Policymakers and businesses need to strengthen SMI in Malaysia. Legalise SMI is vital, especially in today's digital businesses. Future study is encouraged to examine the impact of SMI on business while suggesting a sustainable business model for SMI.

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## **1. Introduction**

The digital economy brings new trends in business and marketing including created jobs that use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. The digital economy in Malaysia contributed 22.6% to gross domestic product (GDP), increasing 10.4% to RM320 billion in 2020 compared to 2019 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). In line with Malaysia's aspirational National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 (NEP 2030) and Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 plan, Malaysia is committed to be the heart of the Digital ASEAN economy (Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives, 2019; MAMPU, 2019; MDEC, 2022). The usage of social media in business has also increased recently, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2020) indicates that the world's consumer trends are now shifting to more frequently rely on the internet for shopping, news, health-related information and digital entertainment during this pandemic. Furthermore, in 2021, more than 65% of consumers in Malaysia purchased the majority of items they needed via an online platform instead of going to a physical store (Google, Temasek & Bain and Company, 2021; Narula, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has persistently changed online shopping behaviours which eventually help to materialise the digital economy aims.

Recently, most digitally powered businesses integrated social media as the medium of business and marketing strategy as this platform is considered the most assessable and convenient. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest and Reddit are among the social media platform in Malaysia (StatCounter, 2022). Social Media Influencers (SMI) emerged from the increased use of the social media. SMI is known as an influencer, a person who uses and utilises social media to create their brand or influence their followers to buy products or services and support a brand and others' business agendas (National Geographic Society, 2021). SMI also refers to someone that has the power to affect or change people and their behaviour through social media. Most businesses use SMI in their business and marketing strategy and the trends consistently increasing (Google Trends, 2022). SMI uses its platform to promote products or services to its followers and potential consumers. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the research conducted in Malaysia specifically related to SMI to recommend areas for future research. To the best knowledge of the researcher, limited study has been offered about SMI, especially in Malaysia (Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2020; Charles, 2020; Pop, Săplăcan, Dabija, & Alt, 2021; Ahmad & Bruno, 2021; Kim & Kim, 2022;). The following section of this paper is a literature review, methodology, finding and conclusion.

## **2. Literature Review**

SMI is known as "digital influencers" since they use and rely on social media to influence people's behaviour, attracting consumers' attention to organisational products through their knowledge, skills and expertise of the products or services, attitudes, opinions and their reviews (Khalid, Jayasainan, & Hassim, 2018; Zak & Hasprova, 2020). SMI also influences and modifies consumer's behaviour as to persuade them to buy products or services, support a brand, or support business agendas (Jiménez-Castillo & Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; National Geographic Society, 2021). Khan and Phung (2021) mention that consumers rely on SMI before making any future purchases as they have a high level of trust on the SMI. SMI acts as new business and marketing tools, shifting from being traditional towards digitally based business.

SMI resulted in a brand reputation, positively boost sales and revenue, generate engagement, increase expected value and behavioural intention regarding the recommended products and build a network of fans and supporters (Jiménez-Castillo et al., 2019; Wei, Singh & Kularajasingam, 2021; Zak et al., 2020). SMI attracts consumers' attention to the organization brands, resulting in more effective brand communications (Jiménez-Castillo et al., 2019). SMI also helps the organisation in developing a network of fans and supporters, then they use this network to express themselves and influence potential customers, while fans and supporters can easily

communicate their opinions, ideas, and product experiences (Zak et al., 2020). With these advantages, it is not surprising that SMI is gaining popularity around the world, including in Malaysia.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent uncertain global economic events, there is now a critical need for entrepreneur' skills for the world of complexity, whereby advancement of digital technology concurrently take hold in the era of Industry Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0). As digital technologies become more prevalent, the digital economy has been identified as a key economic growth area (KEGA) in realising *Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama 2030* (WKB 2030) to make Malaysia a country that is developing sustainably with fair economic distribution as well as equitable and inclusive growth (Economic Planning Unit, 2021). In addition, the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint 2021 highlighted that the digital economy would become the foundation of the modern economy, therefore entrepreneurs need to be equipped with the know-how, knowledge and skills needed to stay relevant.

### 3. Methodology

This study intends to review research related to SMI conducted in Malaysia specifically during and after the post-COVID-19 pandemic available in an online database. In this study, the researcher begins searching for journal articles in online databases namely Google Scholar. The keywords or search strings by the name of "social media influencer", "social media influencers", "SMI", and "in Malaysia" were used in the searching process. From this search, several related journal articles have been reviewed and analysed to be included in the review of this paper. The review process is to sort the most relevant articles that can fit the research objectives to present the issues of SMI specifically in Malaysia. In total 17 articles were collected and reviewed in this study. The review has been examined based on objectives, methods, and findings accordingly to all collected empirical studies.

### 4. Results & Discussion

#### 4.1 Journal Articles Searching

Table 1 indicates the collected journal articles. In total 17 articles were reviewed based on key searching. Meanwhile, table 2 indicates the study of SMI in Malaysia. The theme of article is across various sectors including consumer products, automotive, fashion, healthcare, services and others. The reviews found that SMI roles exist in various sectors.

Table 1

Collected journal articles

Key searching	Number of articles(relevant)	Source
"Social media influencer" "social media influencers" "SMI" "in Malaysia"	17*	Google Scholar

\*Relevant to the scope of review

Table 2

Theme of articles

No	Theme of article	Title	Authors & year	Key finding
1.	Consumer product (Pet Product)	Impact of Social Media Influencers on Purchasing Intention towards Pet Products.	Wei, L. Y., Singh, J. S. K., & Kularajasingam, J. (2021)	The study found that source attractiveness and source similarity were significant predictors of females'

		A Quantitative Study Among Females in Malaysia		intention to purchase pet products.
2.	Consumer product (Restaurant)	Social Media Influencers and Electronic Word of Mouth: The Communication Impact on Restaurant Patronizing	Azim, R., & Nair, P. B. (2021)	Familiarity of source and convenience of information have a strong impact on the intention to purchase.
3.	Consumer product (Food)	Social media influencers - shaping consumption culture among Malaysian youth	Khalid, N. L., Jayasainan, S. Y., & Hassim, N. (2018)	Social media influencers are significant in sharing new knowledge through the display of food tasting experiences that is highly curated and often emphasize on aesthetics.
4.	Consumer product (brand products)	"I follow what you post!": The role of social media influencers' content characteristics in consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs)	M.L. Cheung et al. (2022)	The findings suggest that creativity and design quality are necessary conditions for, and significant predictors of, parasocial relationships and the consumers' desire as measurement consumers' psychological connections with endorsers.
5.	Consumer product (Halal food products)	The Effects of Social Media Influencer towards Factors of Muslim Millennial Generation's Attitude into Halal Food Product Purchase in Malaysia	Hainnuraqma Rahim, Mohamed Rasool, Nadiah Rus Liyana Rusli, Noorazlin Ani. (2022)	Trustworthiness and Social Media Influencer Expertise's can affect attitude of halal food products purchasing among Muslim Millennial in Malaysia who are deemed as an influential group of consumers.
6.	Consumer product (Food)	Impact of social media influencer on instagram user purchase intention: the food industry	R.Sorakhaibam, S.Loitongbam and S.S.Singh (2021)	The findings of the study indicated that social media influencers' trustworthiness, expertise and familiarity are positively significant with Instagram users to purchase intention.
7.	Automotive Industries	Hypothesising the Effect of Social Media Influencer Roles, Credibility and Advertising Values on Attitude and Brand Love	Nor Azri Sharizal Abu Bakar, Rosidah Musa (2020)	Advertising value for social media video would help the influencers to enhance their video content to attract more viewers hence, to influence them to buy the brand.

8.	Online Advertising Industries	Impact of Social Media in Online Advertisement Industry	Bernice Titilola Gbadeyan, Bamidele Samuel Arije (2021)	Influencers on social media do affect the consumer's behaviour towards a product or service, in relation to purchasing behaviour and reliability of the product or service. Advertising in general affects people's behaviour, to an extent is difficult to predict. The purchasing behaviour is affected, whether it is in relation to purchasing products that the consumer believes are necessary or unnecessary after seeing advertising on social media. The more influencers you follow the more likely you are to purchase a product or a service that is being advertised, whether it is a direct advertisement, sponsorship or co-operation with an organization.
9.	Fashion Industries	Factors of Virtual Influencer Marketing Influencing Generation Y Consumers' Purchase Intention in Malaysia	Yap Yoong Ruey Nurlida Binti Ismail (2021)	it is confirmed that the identified factors (Parasocial Interaction, Attractiveness and Trustworthiness) have highly significant effects in influencing Generation Y consumers' purchase intention in Malaysia. Attitude towards virtual influencer strongly mediates the relationship between Parasocial Interaction, Attractiveness and Trustworthiness and purchase intention.
10.	Fashion Industries	Conceptual Review of Social Influencer Marketing on Purchase Intention; Dynamics in Fashion Retail Industry	Thilina DK (2021)	Study's results showed that influencer credibility plays an important role as an informational source. If consumers tend to believe a fashion influencer is credible, trustworthy, has expertise about the field he/she associates herself/himself with, it is then considered to be appealing.

11.	Healthcare Industries	Social Media Influencers and The Dietary Choices Among University Students	Syahrudin Ahmad and Diandra Eleanor Bruno (2021)	Investigated the attitude and subjective norms of students on Social Media Influencers (SMIs) towards the behavioural intent on their dietary choices in accordance with the Theory of Reasoned Action. The finding shows that attitude of students towards the SMIs does not affect their daily dietary choices, however, the subjective norms in the students' life on the SMIs actually makes a difference in their eating habits. This indicates that the students live are impacted by them.
12.	Environmental	The effect of social media influencer attributes towards pro environmental intention	Yaacob, A., Gan, J. L., & Yusuf, S. (2021)	Source credibility, and the attractiveness of social media influencers has had a significant effect on attitudes and intentions in the advertising campaign. Attitude has a positive and significant effect on pro-environmental intention. Attitude to mediate between exogenous and endogenous.
13.	Tourism and hospitality	Impulse buying in hospitality: The role of content posted by social media influencers	Szymkowiak, A., Gaczek, P., & Padma, P. (2021)	Arousal in a SMI's presentation influenced purchase intention. Arousing content increased buying urge compared to non-stimulating content.
14.	Consumer behaviour	Social Media Influencers and its Impacts on Consumer Behavior: Malaysia	Frah Rukhsar Khan, Siew Poh Phung (2021)	Consumers see social media as an important tool in purchasing decisions, and social media influencers play an important role in that decision.
15.	General	Literature Review on the Factors Influencing the Usage of Social Media among Entrepreneurs in Malaysia	Bakar, N. and Zaini, A. (2022)	Based on the preliminary findings, it can be concluded that studying social media usage as a marketing tool can help entrepreneurs gain competitive edges, build relationship with customers and build business presence in the market. Future

16.	General	Fear of Missing Out and Consumer Happiness on Instagram: A Serial Mediation of Social Media Influencer-Related Activities	Jung Ah Lee, Laura F. Bright, and Matthew S. Eastin. (2021)	<p>research should include entrepreneurs' intention as mediating variable and gender, age and experience as moderating variable to enhance the findings on the factors that influence social media usage and to improve the possibility of generalization.</p> <p>SMI-related activities are positively associated with a consumer's happiness. Individuals higher in FoMO (fear of missing out) more frequently visited SMI's account profiles leading to more frequent purchasing of products recommended by SMIs, which in turn positively influenced happiness. To better elucidate why usage related to SMIs have such a contrasting effect, future research should compare how influencer-focused activities differ from general social media use.</p> <p>SMIs' trustworthiness and expertise are significant predictors of followers' purchase intention. The influence of attractiveness on purchase intention is greater when materialism is high.</p>
17.	General	Social media influencer marketing: the moderating role of materialism	Kian Yeik Koay, Man Lai Cheung, Patrick Chin-Hooi Soh, Chai Wen Teoh. (2021)	<p>SMIs' trustworthiness and expertise are significant predictors of followers' purchase intention. The influence of attractiveness on purchase intention is greater when materialism is high.</p>

Most of the articles reviewed in Table 2 utilised the quantitative approach of research methodology such as survey questionnaire. However, certain articles adopt the qualitative approach in the research like contents analysis. Wei et al. (2021) found that attractiveness is one of the important requirements for SMI to succeed other than trustworthiness on females' intention to purchase pet products. Moreover, Zak et al. (2020) discovered that SMI also works in the service industries. SMI's skills is crucial especially in dissemination of information to the public (Szymkowiak, Gaczek, and Padma, 2021). SMI such as food bloggers reviews on restaurant food can give impact on the intention on dining decision (Azim & Nair, 2021). In addition, the consumer's intention to purchase in a restaurant can be influenced by the familiarity of the source and the convenience of the information stated by SMI. Consumers increasingly rely on SMIs' content in their decision-making processes and 6.9 times more effective than traditional marketing activities in reaching consumers (Martínez-L'opez et al., 2020). Cheung et al. (2022) adopts a theory integration approach examines the impact of SMIs' content characteristics, as manifested by information, design, and technology quality, and creativity, on consumers' parasocial relationships and wishful

identification with SMIs. Thus, the study also investigates the subsequent effect on consumer engagement behaviour with the endorsed brand. The findings revealed that creativity and design quality are necessary conditions for, and significant predictors of, parasocial relationships and wishful identification. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of preparing creative content with good design layouts and technological features to drive consumers' psychological responses.

Additionally, Rahim et al. (2021) found that Trustworthiness and Social Media Influencer Expertise's can affect attitude of halal food products purchasing among Muslim Millennial in Malaysia. The result provides new perspectives where Halal logo itself may not be sufficient to convince Muslim consumers. Credibility, honesty, knowledge, and likeability are factors that may influence Millennial Muslim consumers' decisions to seek out and purchase halal food items and services. Furthermore, Koay et al. (2021) examines the impact of SMIs' credibility, as manifested by trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise, along with the moderating effects of materialism, on followers' purchase intention. Drawing samples from Instagram users, they show that followers are more likely to purchase endorsed products if they consider the information about the SMIs' endorsements is dependable, honest, genuine, sincere, and trustworthy.

Khan et al. (2021) grasps the idea whether social media influencers are playing a major role in purchasing decisions since social media become generic to the straightforwardness of Internet affiliation, especially around the urban areas in Malaysia. Using Social Learning Theory, they found that consumers now prefer to get their information from their friends, family, and like to see product reviews from actual consumers for purchasing decisions compared to get information from the company's website. Bakar and Musa (2020) construct a conceptual framework that examines the effect of social media influencers and advertising value on attitude and brand love, specifically in the context of Malaysia's national automobile. The framework generated by the study extends the study on marketing strategy, which concentrated on social media influencer either in the term of 'user specific effect' or 'content effect'. They found that advertising value for social media video would assist influencers in enhancing their video content in order to attract more viewers and persuade them to purchase the brand.

In essence, SMI has transformed the global business landscape from the traditional to the digital, and it is now a well-known marketing tool among Malaysian companies due to its benefits. Past studies show that all the SMI studied are leveraging social networking channels as the platform for creating value and engaging with their customers. However, technological elements that enable the survival of SMI in the digital economy continue to be contested. SMI characteristics on their ability to deliver information and recommendations capable of influencing user decisions. Also, the skill of creating trust in users is an important characteristic of social influencers. Therefore, organisations in the digital age of the economy view it as a critical important way to sustain the business for a long time.

## **4.2 Discussion**

All reviewed studies demonstrate the high impact of SMI on consumers' and followers' behaviour and decisions. From the reviews, the trends for businesses or brands to acquire SMI as representative of their brand is increasing. SMI is used in the business to enhance its marketing strategy. Marketing strategy within social media is an effective marketing channel to reach out to the target audience. However, from the review, no study liked between the SMI towards business perspective on strategy and performance is limited. It is suggested that future studies should develop a theoretical model that integrates SMI into any existing business model or other digital business models to understand how SMI works and complement the business. It is also acknowledged that SMI works differently, for instance, a company that sells sports products should choose a young influencer who is physically attractive. The business tends to select the most suitable influencer that will most effectively appeal to a particular target audience rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. Hence, distinguishing between the criteria, type and ability of SMI need to be considered in future studies.

The growth of the digital economy among SMI has become more and more intense. Researchers should actively integrate a more inclusive and sustainable business model for SMI, while championing the growth of the local digital economy, especially in this post-pandemic environment that primarily utilizes digital technologies. Researchers should not only consider factors related to the characteristics of SM influencers, but also external factors such as political-legal and economic factors need to be studied. Therefore, the future findings will provide guidelines to entrepreneurs who wish to venture into the digital economy in Malaysia.

## **5. Conclusion**

In the era of the digital economy, the trend of consumer behaviour and expectations has now changed especially in the usage of social media as a purchase platform. Nowadays, most people rely on their social media as a platform for making purchases. This research reviews the journal articles available in an online database specifically in Malaysia during the period of post Covid19 pandemic. The reviews indicate that the trends for businesses or brands to acquire SMI as representative of their brand are tremendously increasing. SMI has been used in many businesses including consumer products, fashion, healthcare, environmental and automotive. On top of that, academicians are also interested to research the fundamental aspect of SMI. From the trends, it can be said that the emergence and growth of SMI as one of the professions.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes to the significant literature on SMI. The finding also provides insight to the relevant government agency and regulators to have proper guidelines and policies to govern the SMI practices in Malaysia including the registry of SMI, code of conduct, specific regulation to the operation of SMI, income reporting and taxation and other aspects to avoid any wrongdoings and misconduct of SMI. Businesses also can start integrating SMI into their business model since the research found that SMI brings a positive impact to the business. All parties need to collaborate with SMI is needed to strengthen their role as well as support the national agenda to be a hub in the digital economy. However, future studies could consider comprehensively examining the impact of SMI on the business to suggest a suitable business model with the integration of SMI in today's business environment.

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## **Authors Contributions**

The corresponding author contributes to the contents as well as the publication process. Meanwhile, the other authors also provide the content required.

## **Conflict of Interest**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

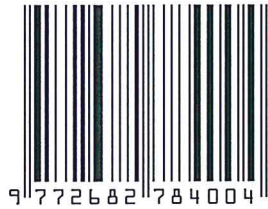
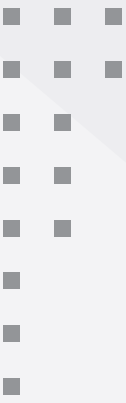
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