From Influencers to Followers: Unpacking Credibility Dimensions on Food Sharing Intentions Among Malaysian Youth

MUHAMAD SHUKUR SUHAIMI
SITI NOR AMALINA AHMAD TAJUDDIN*
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris

ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has blossomed into an increasingly prevalent method for products and brands to engage with followers, prompting interest in digital marketing and social media studies. However, due to a lack of source credibility, many social media influencers are experiencing a decline in content sharing from their followers despite investing time and money in developing engaging content. Yet, relatively little is known about influencers' credibility in relation to food-sharing intentions among Malaysian youth. The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between social media influencers' credibility and followers' sharing intention on food content. By adopting a quantitative approach with a correlational design, this study aimed to discover the relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness with followers' sharing intention towards the food content among Malaysian youths. The researcher employed a probability sampling technique using a random selection of respondents for the sampling. The findings showed that the level of perceived source credibility dimensions and followers' sharing intention towards the food content among Malaysian youths was mostly moderate. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between social media influencers' source credibility dimensions and followers' sharing intention towards the food content among Malaysian youths. The study leverages a deeper understanding of social media influencers through the dimension of credibility and food-sharing intention and thus contributes to developing a more successful social media strategy to engage with netizens.

Keywords: *Digital marketing, food-related content, sharing intention, social media influencers, source credibility.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital world, social media plays a pivotal role in shaping people's routines and lifestyles. They also serve as a gateway to a vast number of services, thus transforming how individuals access and interact with information. The evolution of digital transformation has created a complex ecosystem within social media, seamlessly integrating various functions. This interconnected network not only showcases technological development but also highlights how social media deeply influences people's daily lives. This digital transformation enables users, including social media influencers, to access information, make connections, and exchange ideas beyond geographical boundaries, both in real-time and asynchronously, barring any authoritarian or technical limitations (Lüders et al., 2022).

In this context, the role of social media influencers is particularly significant. They utilize these interconnected platforms to engage with followers, shape opinions, and contribute to direct interactions between followers and sponsored content (Wies et al., 2023). These direct interactions as part of engagement include the number of followers engaged in their posts such as likes, comments, shares, reposts or clicks on any provided links

in the posts (Gross & von Wangenheim, 2022; Kasmani et al., 2022; Monacho & Slamet, 2023). Based on the findings from Sokolova and Kefi (2020), the relationship between influencers and their audience on social media is not unidirectional which means the connection is not one-sided. For instance, followers or social media users actively contribute by commenting and participating in discussions about the content, while content owners in return, respond to comments or direct messages related to their content. Establishing a relatable connection is crucial for users to actively engage with digital content, driven by the diverse interests of social media users when seeking digital content.

According to the Digital Marketing Institute (2024), "4 out of 10 Millennials subscribers say their favorite social media influencer understands them better than their friends, and 70% of teens trust social media influencers more than traditional celebrities." Therefore, this phenomenon should be considered in the context of this study. With the evolution of social media, individuals now have the opportunity to create content that resonates with other users on these platforms. Leveraging social media as a tool for influence, many users strategically position themselves as "social media influencers". These individuals, known for their adeptness at capturing attention and fostering positive influence among their audience, play a pivotal role in shaping online interactions. The influential capacity of social media influencers extends to shaping the behavior of their audience in response to the content they share. As highlighted by Kurdi et al. (2022), influencers significantly influence the actions of their followers, extending to their purchasing intentions. Consequently, this research aims to test the relationship between the credibility of social media influencers and their followers' inclination to share the influencer's content across social media platforms.

Social media users, driven by their day-to-day experiences and individual preferences, exhibit a strong inclination toward content that resonates with their lives. Chae's (2018) research elucidates this tendency, emphasizing the active engagement of participants with five distinct categories of informative posts—food, fashion, travel, cosmetics, and interior design. When users discover content that captivates them, they often share their excitement, fueling the widespread dissemination of videos and bolstering the influence of social media influencers. Additionally, a noteworthy trend in social media usage is the substantial interest expressed by a significant number of users in food-related content. This trend is exemplified by the notable surge in sales reported by Gohain (2021). The heightened engagement with food-related content underscores its relevance and popularity among social media users, further emphasizing its potential as a valuable focal point for content creators and marketers.

To further illustrate this trend, the success story of social media influencer Khairul Aming is noteworthy. His achievement of surpassing RM 1 million in sales in less than 4 minutes through the digital marketing of "sambal," a spicy Malaysian paste, underscores the tangible impact of food-related content. Khairul Aming attributes his success to followers actively sharing his content across various social media platforms. This success is further solidified by his recognition as one of Malaysia's top social media influencers on Instagram, acknowledged for both the quality of his content and the engagement of his followers (HypeAuditor, 2021). Supporting this overarching trend, Statista (2022) provides additional validation by revealing that Malaysian users, among others, follow at least one social media influencer, underscoring the enduring influence of such individuals in shaping digital interactions. This collective evidence emphasizes the need for content creators and marketers to strategically align with the prevalent interests and engagement patterns identified within the dynamic landscape of social media.

Posts centered around food have a universal appeal, evidenced by a survey conducted by Nedjar-Guerre et al. (2023) revealing that correlations were found between screen time and consumption of unhealthy food and drinks among adolescents. While some studies suggest a potential link between social media use and increased consumption of unhealthy foods and Body Mass Index (BMI), others posit social media as a valuable tool for raising awareness of obesity and fostering a healthy lifestyle and food culture (García-León & Teichert, 2023). This ongoing study diverges from examining mere healthy and unhealthy food consumption via social media, focusing instead on the credibility of social media influencers and their followers' sharing intentions related to food content.

However, despite investing time and resources in creating engaging content, many social media influencers experience a decline in content sharing from their followers due to a perceived lack of source credibility. This decline is notable on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, which, according to Cucu (2023), experienced a significant drop in engagement between 2021 and 2022, with the average reach rate decreasing by 29% on Instagram and 9% on Facebook. This declining trend supports the notion that a social media influencer must possess specific qualities to be considered credible, including expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness.

It is crucial to acknowledge that building source credibility requires considerable effort. Trust is earned over time, attractiveness often demands financial investment, and expertise necessitates certification. Brooks et al. (2021) emphasized that social media influencers work hard to gain followers, create specialized content, and share it across various social media platforms. Despite influencers' efforts to produce high-quality content, gaining support from other social media users to share their posts remains challenging. Cirisano (2021) noted that creating content demands a substantial investment of time and energy, evident in TikTok's emphasis on 'consistency' as a crucial practice. Effective sharing of content is not effortless; it necessitates a credibility factor to be regarded seriously by social media users.

Considering these challenges, this study aims to explore the relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness with followers' sharing intentions regarding food content among Malaysian youth. Previous studies consistently highlight the role of credibility in influencing sharing intentions, as demonstrated by the studies of several scholars (i.e. Balaban et al., 2022; Kalam et al., 2024). Despite this understanding, there is a lack of robust research on the declining trend of sharing food-related content among followers, and this paper seeks to address this research gap. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to achieve the following objectives:

1) Identify the level of social media influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness towards the food content among Malaysian youth;
2) Determine the level of followers' sharing intention towards the food content among Malaysian youth.
3) Measure the relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness with followers' sharing intention towards the food content among Malaysian youth.

To investigate the relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness with followers' sharing intention towards food content among Malaysian youth, we hypothesized that these factors have a significant relationship with followers' sharing intention towards food content as follows:

H1: There is a positive relationship between social media influencers' perceived attractiveness and followers' sharing intention towards food content among Malaysian youth.

H2: There is a positive relationship between social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness and followers' sharing intention towards food content among Malaysian youth.

H3: There is a positive relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise and followers' sharing intention towards food content among Malaysian youth.

Building upon these hypotheses, the next section of the literature review will delve into existing studies and the theoretical framework of source credible theory that explores the nuanced aspects of perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness in the context of social media influencers. Reviewing the existing body of knowledge will illuminate the intricate connections between digital marketing, social media influencers' qualities and the intentional behaviors of their followers, providing a nuanced perspective on the dynamics at play in the digital landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the increased exposure and frequent interaction with digital materials, digital marketing thus has significant impacts on targeted markets, and can influence large audiences. As such, social media marketing has emerged as a highly favored and popular form of digital marketing in recent years not only for people to join social communities but also contributing to the content (Tuten, 2023). As witnessed by most of us, prominent platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube have revolutionized the method of disseminating news (Ahmad Tajuddin, 2024) as well as doing business, including marketing, promotion, and advertising, significantly influencing the behavior and lifestyle of internet users (Arfan et al., 2023; García-Morales et al., 2022). Among other benefits of using social media platforms for businesses, digital marketing has therefore led to higher exposure for goods and services, improved brand visibility, and amplified traffic to commercial websites (Dencheva, 2023). By strategically utilizing social media platforms for marketing, promotion, and advertising purposes, businesses can effectively reach and engage with their target audiences, drive traffic to their websites, and ultimately enhance their overall brand visibility and profitability in the digital marketplace Castillo-Abdul et al. (2022). Therefore, the evolution of social media platforms has become an integral component of the broader digital business landscape. This evolution not only facilitates companies' ability but also enables social media influencers to adapt and thrive in an increasingly digital-centric world, as further explained in the following sections.

Social Media Platform

The landscape of communication has undergone a significant transformation with the advent of social media, reshaping social relations in the virtual sphere as highlighted by Carneiro and Costa (2022) within the context of Web 2.0, which functions as a platform for networked two-way communication. Various studies, including Castillo-Abdul et al. (2022), have underscored

social media as an exceptionally effective platform for brands and companies. This perspective emphasizes how social media offers a unique avenue for brands to engage with their customers, providing an optimal space for the creation of user-generated content.

Building upon these technological advancements, as noted by Hayes (2022), social media has enabled interactive engagement between individuals and businesses through the sharing of user-generated content. Notably, previous research has not extensively explored the dynamics of two-way communication between social media users and the content of influencers. This study aims to address this gap by focusing on the sharing intentions and behavior of followers on social media.

Social Media Follower
Users of social media have the freedom to follow any content that suits their tastes and desires. Additionally, the appeal of content is heightened when shared interests align with those of friends. As emphasized by Harun et al. (2023), social media serves as a platform to keep viewers aware of a brand and increase how often consumers see and engage with their content. Influencers with more followers, known as macro-influencers, and those with fewer followers, known as micro-influencers (Gross & von Wangenheim, 2022), each play distinct roles in this dynamic. Consequently, social media influencers face the challenge of creating compelling content to captivate and maintain their followers' interest.

In the rapidly growing world of influencers, one of the main criteria advertisers use to screen influencers is their follower count, also known as indegree. Indegree measures the size of the audience an influencer can directly reach with their content, and since it's publicly visible on the platform, it has become a key factor in the influencer and retail industry (Wies et al., 2023). They further highlighted that a higher follower count means an influencer can reach a larger audience, but it often signals a weaker connection with their followers, leading to lower engagement (Wies et al., 2023). In other words, engagement tends to increase at first with more followers, but then it starts to drop as the follower count continues to rise.

On social media platforms, an influencer's follower count reflects their level of public exposure and reach. Unlike macro-influencers, micro-influencers are seen as more relatable and trustworthy because they have fewer followers (Gross & von Wangenheim, 2022). Despite these challenges, social media users are likely to continue following their favorite influencers, providing support through likes, comments, and shares. This dynamic is further discussed in the following sub-section.

Social Media Influencer
In the dynamic landscape of social media, the role of social media influencers has gained increasing prominence. Various scholars have explored and defined this phenomenon. Garg and Bakshi (2024) identify social media influencers as individuals with a substantial following and social networks, recognized as trusted tastemakers in specific niches who always share information about their personal experiences, tips and views through various platforms. Monacho and Slamet (2023) characterize them as individuals who, through brand recognition, establish and nurture relationships with their social media followers, having the capacity to inform, entertain, and mold the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of their audience. Furthermore, Kalam et al. (2024) describe social media influencers as individuals who attract sizable audiences, build fan bases, and earn the trust of their followers. These emerging celebrities wield significant influence on social media, surpassing the impact of traditional

celebrities. More recently, Añaña and Barbosa (2023) suggest that influencers serve as the primary figures in influencer digital marketing, acting as intermediaries connecting brands and consumers. These individuals are characterized as having built credibility with substantial social media audiences due to their expertise and knowledge on specific subjects, thereby wielding considerable influence over the decisions of their followers and peer consumers.

In exploring the allure of social media influencer careers, the resonance of pursuing one's passion is evident. Fetter et al. (2023) highlight that these careers possess particular appeal, especially among younger generations aspiring to join the ranks of social media influencers. This phenomenon is exemplified by Charli Grace D'Amelio, an American social media personality, dancer, and prominent TikTok influencer (George, 2020), who holds the distinction of being the first TikTok user to amass 100 million followers. Additionally, Huda Kattan, affectionately known as 'Your Big Beauty Sister' on Instagram, transcends conventional roles as a makeup artist and blogger, amassing a substantial following of 50.7 million. In the year 2024, armed with an estimated fortune of $550 million, she emerged as a true entrepreneur and a dominant force in the beauty industry (Istituto Marangoni, 2024). Thus, social media influencers have become one of the most widespread and trendiest communication strategies used by companies. As a result, many marketing experts consider influencers to be opinion leaders due to their significant role in persuading and influencing their followers (Lajnef, 2023).

The landscape of food influencers includes notable figures such as British chef Jamie Oliver, recognized for his restaurants, TV shows, cookbooks, and appetizing food imagery on Instagram, where he boasts 9.5 million followers. Another case in point is Che Nom, a Malaysian social media influencer who transitioned from engineering to specializing in cooking content, amassing 2 million followers on YouTube. Therefore, for social media influencers to maintain their influence, they need followers to share their content for continuous engagement. This dynamic is crucial for comprehending the evolving nature of social media influencer careers and their impact on aspiring individuals, aligning with the concepts explored in Fetter et al.'s (2023) research. The next section further discussed the Source Credible Theory.

Source Credible Theory
According to the inventor of the Source Credibility theory, individuals are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Thus, the aim of this study is to discover the dimension that social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness has on followers' actions, such as their intention to share their content. Social media influencers are often studied in-depth to obtain a thorough understanding of these theories. For instance, Balaban et al. (2022) found that from the perspective of social media influencers, expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness and similarities are crucial components of source credibility.

This theory provides insight to what extent that the perceived credibility dimensions of social media influencers positively influence followers' intention to share the content. Kalam et al. (2024) revealed that the influencer's credibility characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness) could positively and significantly affect the consumer attitude. An illustrative example is the study conducted by Garg and Bakshi (2024) on social media users, revealing a positive correlation between the credibility dimensions (expertise source, trustworthiness source, attractive source) of celebrity endorsers and

consumer intention to purchase. Furthermore, a separate study delved into the moderating impact of celebrity endorsers' perceived religiosity on the relationship between dimensions in the Source Credibility Theory and consumers' purchase intention in Jakarta, Indonesia (Silalahi et al., 2021). While previous studies have extensively examined the three key elements of source credibility dimensions, their investigation primarily centered on celebrity endorsers in digital marketing for endorsed products or services. In contrast, the present study extends beyond celebrity endorsement, concentrating on social media influencers and their source credibility dimensions concerning food content among Malaysian youth.

Social Media Influencer Credibility Dimension
Social media users measure social media influencer's content credibility (expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness) to be influenced and willing to share their content Hence, the Source Credibility Theory was utilized as a guide in this research. Thus far, previous studies from Balaban et al. (2022) have reported that when it comes to source credibility dimensions, parasocial relations had a positive significant impact on the SMI's credibility. Thus, the concern of social media influencers about how to increase engagement can be resolved depending on how their followers perceive their credibility. Credibility denotes the perceived ability of a source to deliver accurate and truthful information (Mir & Salo, 2024). As AlFarraj et al. (2021) suggest, the content of social media influencers becomes more captivating when their followers perceive them as experts and attractive. This, in turn, influences a large number of followers, who assert that influencers on social media garnered a following by showcasing their lifestyle and passion, thereby enhancing engagement. Nonetheless, aspects and characteristics related to influencers' credibility dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness) have not been fully explored, and further research is needed. Therefore, this study attempts to explore and empirically evaluate the impact of social media influencers' perceived credibility dimensions on the followers' sharing intention towards the food content among Malaysian youth.

a)   Attractiveness
Visually appealing things naturally arouse the attention of humans. The attractiveness of social media influencers can thus attract the attention of their followers. Previous studies predominantly defined attractiveness as the quality associated with a person, encompassing elements such as physical appearance, personality, and athletic abilities (Erdogan, 1999). Another recent study suggests that attractiveness could be referred to the degree to which a social media influencer (SMI) draws followers using visually appealing content and aesthetically pleasing posts (Wang & Weng, 2024). Consequently, determining attractiveness is subjective, rooted in the pleasure experienced when observing or listening to something.

Social media influencers may be appealing to some individuals while not resonating with others. For instance, recent cases reported by AlFarraj et al. (2021) indicate that, when deciding to purchase dermatology products, users tend to perceive social media influencers with both experience and physical attractiveness as credible information sources. Therefore, attractive influencers on social media have the potential to inspire followers and enhance engagement.

Additionally, influencers are often perceived by followers as appealing, authentic, and relatable (Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020). However, regarding attractiveness, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) argued that while parasocial interaction and influencer follower homophily

are positively linked, physical attractiveness does not play a significant role. Hence, this study aims to address the gaps in previous research, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

b)   Trustworthiness

Building and maintaining trust among social media users is an ongoing and challenging endeavor. Contemporary social media users exhibit a heightened discernment between right and wrong. Ohanian (1990) defined trustworthiness in the context of social media influencers as the degree to which consumers trust them to disseminate information deemed reliable. However, not all social media users readily place trust in information provided by influencers, exhibiting caution and selectivity. AlFarraj et al. (2021) highlight that credibility is rooted in perceptions of trustworthiness and authenticity.

An intriguing insight from Garg and Bakshi (2024) suggests that likability, trustworthiness, and familiarity significantly impact the influence on purchase intention, particularly in the realm of fashion products. Therefore, the high trustworthiness of social media influencers enhances the likelihood of followers sharing their content, driven by the trust vested in their posts. This aligns with the perspective presented by Harun et al. (2023), emphasizing that well-aligned content from influencers captivates followers. When combined with effective visual communication design, this approach builds trust, belief, and a positive image, boosting confidence and enhancing the credibility of both the influencer and their posts (Harun et al., 2023).

c)   Expertise

Each of us has specific areas of expertise, and when we have knowledge and experience in those areas, we can be recognized as experts in those areas. This gives someone the confidence in their knowledge to boldly state a fact on social media. The word experts, which are regarded as reliable sources of genuine information, has long been defined by Ohanian (1990). As a result, an expert is less likely to face rejection from others due to their persuasiveness. Kalam et al. (2024) argued that when social media influencers are perceived as knowledgeable and trustworthy, customers are more inclined to alter their purchasing decisions in alignment with the influencers. This underscores the influencers' ability to influence behavioral changes, such as intentions to share content, through their expertise.

There is also consistency in the findings from Monacho and Slamet (2023) stated that people's perceptions of brands, influencers' preferences and viewpoints, and blog content, generally are influenced by expertise and attractiveness. To fill the gap from previous studies, this current study investigates the dimension of source credibility and followers' intentions to share.

Sharing Intention

A social media platform is indeed a two-way communication platform in which users can respond to content created by other social media influencers. Influencer engagement behaviour is defined as followers' interaction with influencer content on social media, such as liking, sharing, and commenting (Monacho & Slamet, 2023). However, previous literature neglects to consider sharing intentions, although sharing intention is the most important determinant of a video's success and becomes viral. For example, Jang et al. (2021) did not consider sharing intentions as a significant indicator, focusing instead on purchase intentions.

Referring to a study by Lim et al. (2023), the participation of influencers or internet celebrities in creating videos or postings significantly enhances credibility and fosters greater customer engagement. This increased engagement encourages participant interactions, thereby creating opportunities for future commercial activities. Social media influencers must recognize the factors that drive their followers to share the content they post. Additionally, just as job experience and common sense are valued in graduates (Ahmad Tajuddin et al., 2022), influencers must showcase their real-world experience and demonstrate a sound understanding of their field to foster trust and credibility among their audience. Therefore, aligning with the expectations placed on graduates, influencers too must continually demonstrate these key qualities to maintain their credibility and effectively influence their audience.

Food-Related Social Media Content
Social media influencers hover in a particular field, such as fashion, cosmetics, interior design, food, and travel, and they share information on these subjects on their social media. They enjoy greater public recognition compared to experts in those fields. For instance, as highlighted by Monacho and Slamet (2023), influencer marketing on social media has a big impact on how people choose what to buy. This shift in lifestyle significantly boosts the consumption of products promoted by these influencers, playing a crucial role in the growth of the digital economy (Monacho & Slamet, 2023). Consequently, social media influencers meticulously monitor engagement when sharing content related to food.

This is in line with the findings stated by Monacho and Slamet (2023) that interesting content with good hashtags and captions on social media is more likely to receive likes, shares, and comments. Therefore, tailoring food content to suit the audience's preferences enhances the likelihood of followers sharing the content. Additionally, Añaña and Barbosa (2023) also affirmed that source credibility is a key focus in influencer marketing research, and many studies have shown that it significantly boosts the purchase intentions of digital influencers' followers (Shah et al., 2023), as well as for food products. The next section further discusses the methodology that has been adopted in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study employs a quantitative method approach to answer all the research questions. Descriptive studies will be utilized to address the first two research questions: (1) identifying the level of perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of social media influencers concerning food content among Malaysian youth, and (2) determining the level of followers' sharing intention towards food content among Malaysian youth. Subsequently, the obtained data will be analyzed using the descriptive analysis method.

Following that, a quantitative approach was employed to address the third research question. An inferential analysis was also carried out to measure the relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness with followers' sharing intention on food content among Malaysian youth. By analyzing a sample of data using inferential techniques through correlation analysis, the researchers can infer whether there is a statistically significant relationship between these variables in the population of interest (Malaysian youth). The target population for addressing the research questions encompasses all youth, amounting to 8,852,300 individuals (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2022). This population comprises individuals aged 20 to 30 years old, aligning with the

new youth age limit policy, which defines youth as those aged 15 to 30 years old (Bernama, 2023).

A sample of 400 participants was chosen using probability sampling techniques, more especially cluster sampling, in order to meet the target demographic. Additionally, a study by Ahmad Tajuddin et al. (2022) showed that when working with broad geographical areas, cluster sampling gives advantages like relatively inexpensive cost and efficiency. Moreover, the table of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) served as a guide for determining the sample size. This selection was supported by research conducted by Croes and Bartels (2021) which emphasised the impact of social media influencers' content on young adults, which frequently results in their purchasing endorsement-related products. Additionally, the youth from 13 states and 3 federal territories that were included in the study were divided into five zones: East, North, Central, Borneo, and Southern. Three of the five clusters were chosen at random, and the youth within each state was given a questionnaire in Google Forms format.

In constructing the items for the questionnaires, the researchers adapted instruments from previous studies. The instruments were derived from the works of Chetioui et al. (2020) and Ohanian (1990) to measure the perceived expertise of social media influencers, Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2020) for perceived trustworthiness, and Jansom and Pongsakornrungsilp (2021) for perceived attractiveness. Subsequently, additional instruments were also developed to gauge the level of followers' sharing intention. Cronbach's alpha for a pilot test ranged from 0.8 to 0.9, exceeding the normal suggestion of 0.70 and suggesting very good reliability. The test yielded high-reliability values. The data were presented using mean, frequency, percentage, range, and standard deviation in a quantitative descriptive analysis conducted for the first and second study objectives. Subsequently, for the third objective, quantitative inferential analysis was applied to determine statistical correlations. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis, conducted using SPSS software, was employed to assess the strength and significance of the relationship between the variables under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of social media influencers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness towards the food content among Malaysian youth. The descriptive analysis in the next section explains the nuances of the extent to which Malaysian youth perceive the attractiveness of social media influencers, particularly concerning food-related content.

Descriptive Analysis of Social Media Influencers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness

As the researchers navigated through the findings, the understanding of the relationship between perceived attractiveness and followers' preferences emerged, providing valuable insights into the study of social media influencers. In this section, we conduct a descriptive analysis to examine these dimensions of social media influencers' expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness among Malaysian youth. Social media influencers play a significant role as opinion leaders and innovators, particularly in the area of food content, where their recommendations and endorsements can heavily influence consumer choices (Añaña & Barbosa, 2023). By analyzing their perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness,

we aim to provide the interconnectedness of the key dimension that shapes followers' sharing intention on the food content.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of social media influencers' variables

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Attractiveness				
Low (1 ± 2.33)	26	6.5		
Moderate (2.34 ± 3.66)	183	45.8	2.41	0.61
High (3.67 ± 5)	191	47.8		
Trustworthiness				
Low (1 ± 2.33)	15	3.8		
Moderate (2.34 ± 3.66)	83	20.8	2.71	0.52
High (3.67 ± 5)	302	75.5		
Expertise				
Low (1 ± 2.33)	18	4.5		
Moderate (2.34 ± 3.66)	85	21.3	2.61	0.55
High (3.67 ± 5)	297	74.3		

The Level of Social Media Influencers' Perceived Attractiveness
Based on Table 1, the highest frequency is 191, accounting for 47.8% of responses, while the lowest frequency is 26, representing 6.5% of responses. This indicates that the majority of respondents' answers were concentrated within the range of 3 to 5, corresponding to slightly agreed, agreed, and strongly agreed. Furthermore, the mean value is 2.41, with a standard deviation of 0.61. Considering the mean and the data falling within the moderate range of 2.34 ± 3.66, we can infer that the perceived attractiveness of social media influencers regarding food content among Malaysian youth is moderate.

The Level of Social Media Influencers' Perceived Trustworthiness
The analysis of Table 1 also shows that the highest frequency recorded is 302, constituting 75.5% of responses, while the lowest frequency is 15, representing 3.8% of responses. This distribution pattern indicates that respondents' answers fall within the scale range of 3 to 5, corresponding to slightly agreed, agreed, and strongly agreed. Additionally, the mean value stands at 2.71, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.52. Based on this mean and the data clustered within the moderate range of 2.34 to 3.66, it can be inferred that the perceived trustworthiness of social media influencers towards food content among Malaysian youth falls within a moderate level.

The Level of Social Media Influencers' Perceived Expertise
The findings presented in Table 1 show that the highest frequency, totaling 297 responses, accounts for 74.3% of the data, while the lowest frequency, comprising 18 responses, represents 4.5%. Furthermore, the mean value is calculated at 2.61, with a standard deviation of 0.55. Thus, it can be inferred that the perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness of social media influencers regarding food content among Malaysian youth are at a moderate level.

The Level of Followers' Sharing Intention

Regarding the level of followers' sharing intention, the highest frequency is 177 with a percentage of 44.3%, while the lowest frequency is 54 with a percentage of 13.5%. This shows that most of the distribution of respondents' answers is focused on a scale of 2 to 4, which is slightly disagreed, slightly agreed and agreed. Furthermore, the mean value is calculated at 2.28, with a standard deviation of 0.69. Considering both the mean and the data concentrated within the low range of 1 ± 2.33, it can be concluded that the level of followers' sharing intention towards food content among Malaysian youth is low.

Inferential Analysis of Social media Influencers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness and Attractiveness

The relationship between social media influencers' perceived attractiveness and followers' sharing intention is a crucial aspect of understanding the dynamics of influencer digital marketing.

Table 2: Inferential analysis of social media influencers' variables

Variables	Coefficient Correlation (*r*)	Significant
Attractiveness	0.613	0.001
Trustworthiness	0.290	0.001
Expertise	0.295	0.001

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Relationship between Social Media Influencers' Perceived Attractiveness and Followers' Sharing Intention

The analysis of Table 2 reveals a significant correlation between social media influencers' perceived attractiveness and followers' sharing intention, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.613 and a significance level (p) of 0.001. This correlation, falling within the moderate range, highlights a positive and moderate relationship between these two variables. With the correlation coefficient exceeding zero (r ≥ 0), it indicates a positive association. Consequently, the results signify a noteworthy relationship between social media influencers' perceived attractiveness and followers' sharing intention, with statistical significance observed at the 0.05 level.

The Relationship between Social Media Influencers' Perceived Trustworthiness and Followers' Sharing Intention

Based on Table 2, the correlation coefficient (r) between social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness and followers' sharing intention is 0.290, with a significance level (sig-r) of 0.001. Given that the ρ-value is below 0.05 (ρ < 0.05), this result is considered statistically significant. As indicated in Table 2, this coefficient falls within the category of weak correlation, suggesting a modest degree of association. This interpretation aligns with the positive correlation (r ≥ 0), indicating a positive yet weak relationship between social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness and followers' sharing intention. Consequently, this study emphasizes the significance of this relationship at the 0.05 level of significance.

The Relationship between Social Media Influencers' Perceived Expertise and Followers' Sharing Intention

According to the findings in Table 2, the analysis reveals a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.295 and a significance level (sig-r) of 0.001 for the relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise and followers' sharing intention. With a ρ-value below 0.05 (ρ < 0.05), indicating statistical significance, this result carries notable weight. As indicated in Table 2, the coefficient of 0.295 falls within the category of weak correlation, suggesting a modest level of association. Since the correlation coefficient is positive (r ≥ 0), it signifies a positive albeit weak relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise and followers' sharing intention. In summary, this study underscores the significant relationship between social media influencers' perceived expertise and followers' sharing intention at a significance level of 0.05.

CONCLUSION

Many social media influencers are experiencing fewer shares of their content due to a lack of credibility. To be seen as trustworthy, influencers need specific qualities like expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness. In a similar vein, just as graduates are expected to possess a range of communication and personal qualities skills crucial for their profession (Ahmad Tajuddin et al., 2022), social media influencers must also embody specific qualities to be perceived as trustworthy sources. Following the insights of Monacho and Slamet (2023), whose research explored social media engagement through factors like influencer credibility, attractiveness, brand content aesthetics, and followers' attitudes toward endorsed brands, this study moved toward followers' sharing intention on food content. The findings revealed a significant correlation between the perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise of influencers and their followers' intention to share food-related content, particularly among Malaysian youth. This highlights the importance of influencers cultivating these qualities to enhance engagement and sharing among their audience.

The findings also corroborated with the dimensions outlined in the source credibility model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian 1990) and earlier studies indicating that source attributes are associated with consumers' responses toward brand trust and purchase intention (Añaña & Barbosa, 2023; Chaihanchanchai et al., 2024; Kalam et al., 2024; Mir & Salo, 2024; Wang & Weng, 2024). The study showed that there is a positive and moderate relationship between social media influencers' perceived attractiveness and followers' sharing intention. This study also concurs with the previous study looking at the dimension of source credibility that was correlated with purchase intention (Chaihanchanchai et al., 2024), where they found that the highest was between attractiveness and purchase intention. In a similar study on followers' positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) involving social media influencers, attractiveness has the greatest effect on PWOM, followed by trustworthiness and expertise (Wang & Weng, 2024). In this study, however, the findings discovered that the strength of the relationship between social media influencers' perceived trustworthiness and expertise with followers' sharing intention was weakened. Social media followers with higher perceived trustworthiness and expertise were less likely to share social media content from social media influencers. This suggests that, while perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise have a significant relationship with followers' sharing intention, it is also important to consider the wider context which includes for example the quality of the creation of the content itself.

Future research into social media content creation should concentrate on gaining a better understanding of how source credibility dimensions and related constructs influence social media followers' experiences and motivate them to share content from social media influencers. By focusing on these aspects, researchers can provide valuable insights into the mechanisms driving engagement and sharing behaviors on social media platforms. This will not only enhance our understanding of user dynamics but also inform strategies for optimizing influencer digital marketing efforts in the digital landscape.

BIODATA

Muhamad Shukur Suhaimi is a Master's student at Sultan Idris Education University. His academic journey has sparked a keen interest in researching areas such as social media marketing, branding, and corporate communication. With a robust background in strategic communication and public relations, he currently serves as a strategic communication officer at the Department of Biosafety, Ministry of Natural Resources, and Environmental Sustainability. Email: shukursambest@gmail.com

Siti Nor Amalina Ahmad Tajuddin is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Communication and Media within the Faculty of Languages and Communication, UPSI. With a focus on strategic communication, marketing communications, advertising, media literacy, and culture, she possesses expertise in qualitative methodology as well as a mixed-method approach. Email: sitinoramalina@fbk.upsi.edu.my

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