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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON THE PURCHASE BEHAVIOR OF LOCAL PRODUCTS IN SABAH

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper investigates the impact of social media influencers on consumers' purchasing behavior towards local products in Sabah. The emergence of social media platforms has enabled social media influencers to reach a large audience and influence their purchase decisions, which is often overlooked in past literature. Statista reported that approximately 3.6 billion people use social media worldwide. In 2017, 2.86 billion people used social media; by 2025, that number will increase to 4.41 billion. As the widespread use of social media continues to shape consumer preferences and choices, understanding the role of influencers in promoting locally sourced products becomes essential for regional economies and sustainable development. We will adopt quantitative data collection methods through structured questionnaires related to social media influencers, local product manufacturers, and consumers to a diverse sample across Sabah. The survey will identify the frequency of exposure to influencer-led content, the extent of trust consumers place in influencer recommendations, and the subsequent impact on consumer purchasing behavior concerning local products. By conducting this research, we hope to shed light on the efficacy of social media influencers as potential catalysts for bolstering the demand and sales of locally produced goods in Sabah. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing literature on consumer behavior, social media marketing, and the sustainability of producers of local products. Ultimately, the study's insights will aid policymakers, marketing professionals, and local entrepreneurs in devising effective strategies to leverage social media influencers as powerful tools to promote homegrown products.

Keywords: Social media influencers, Purchase behavior, Local products, Entrepreneur, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Sabah is known for its diverse and unique handicraft products, attracting domestic and international tourists. The handicraft industry in Sabah plays a vital role in the state's economy, and the industry's growth can benefit the local artisans and communities. With the rise of social media and influencer marketing, it is crucial to investigate the potential impact of influencer marketing on handicraft products in Sabah. According to tourism.sabah.gov.my (2023), Sabah has been awarded the prestigious 2023-2023 ASEAN Tourism Standard Award, further elevating the reputation of Sabah's rural tourism products internationally. Despite the importance of increasing the purchase behavior of local products, there is a lack of knowledge on their marketing value and the credibility of social media influencer popularity with their online followers through live video, text, vlog, YouTube, Tik Tok, Facebook and Instagram.

The research background for this topic may include a review of previous studies on social media influencers and their impact on consumer behavior. This review may highlight the various theoretical frameworks and concepts used to understand the relationship between social media influencers and consumer behavior, such as the theory of planned behavior, social influence theory, and social identity theory. According to Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip (2014), influencers have a powerful channel to share their marketing messages towards their online committees with similar interests.

This objective aims to explore the role of source credibility's, such as attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, likeability and similarity, in shaping the relationship between social media influencers and consumer behavior towards local products in Sabah. Additionally, the research may explore the unique characteristics of Sabah's local products and their potential appeal to consumers. This analysis may consider these products' cultural and historical significance and how they differ from products available in other regions.

The research may include a survey or focus group study of consumers in Sabah on understanding their attitudes and behaviors towards social media influencers and local products. This study may examine factors such as the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of social media influencers, the role of social media in the purchase decision-making process, and the influence of cultural and social norms on purchasing behavior.

Overall, the research background for assessing the influence of social media influencers on the purchase behavior of local products in Sabah will draw on a range of disciplinary perspectives, including marketing, consumer behavior, and social media studies, and will involve an in-depth exploration of the unique characteristics of Sabah's local products and consumer attitudes and behaviors.

2. Literature Reviews

Literature Reviews for assessing the influence of social media influencers on the purchase behavior of local products in Sabah will involve a comprehensive review of existing studies on social media influencers, consumer behavior, and local products. The following are some of the key studies that may be included in the literature reviews:

Social media influencers and consumer behavior: A study by Chen et al. (2022) examines the influence of social media influencers on consumer purchase intentions and behavior. The study finds that social media influencers can significantly impact consumer behavior, particularly for products perceived as hedonic or experiential.

Consumer behavior towards local products: A study by Xiao, Zhang et al. (2020) explores the factors influencing consumer behavior towards local products. The study identifies factors such as product quality, product uniqueness, and consumer patriotism as key factors in determining consumer behavior towards local products.

Cultural and social norms: A study by Khan et al. (2021) examines the influence of cultural and social

norms on consumer behavior towards luxury brands. The study finds that cultural and social norms significantly shape consumer behavior and attitudes towards luxury brands.

<mark>Social media influencers and local products</mark>: A study by Argyris, Wang et al. (2020) examines the influence of social media inf
luencers on consumer behavior towards local food products. The study finds that social media influencers can significantly impact consumer behavior towards local food products, particularly for products perceived as unique or authentic.

Overall, the literature for assessing social media influencers' influence on local products' purchase behavior in Sabah will draw on various studies from different disciplinary perspectives, including marketing, consumer behavior, and social media studies. The literature review will help to identify the research gaps and develop a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

3. Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

Attractiveness

Physical attractiveness has long been known to influence human perception and judgement. In the context of advertising, when an influencer possesses qualities that are culturally or socially considered attractive, it can positively impact how their audience perceived them (Lim et al, 2017; Bardia et al. 2011). Thus, this can lead to higher engagement rates and a more favorable response to the advertising message.

Trustworthiness

Xiao et al. (2018) describes trustworthiness as the perception of how honest and reliable a source appears to be, coupled with the level of confidence the listener has in the source's trustworthiness. In the context of communication and information dissemination, trustworthiness plays a crucial role in influencing how individuals perceive and interpret the message conveyed by the source. A high level of trustworthiness fosters credibility and inevitability, leading to a greater likelihood of acceptance and adherence to the information the trusted source provides.

Expertise

Ismagilova et al. (2020) defined expertise as the ability of a person to provide accurate and reliable information on a given subject or domain. It encompasses the individual's knowledge, skills and experience, which enable them to offer informed and credible insight, advice or guidance in their area of expertise. Expertise is often valued and sought after in various fields as it instils trust and confidence in the information provided by the expert.

Likeability

Yeo et al. (2021) assert that likeability plays a pivotal role in shaping individual responses towards a brand, product or service. This influence is contingent upon several factors, including the physical attractiveness, likability, flattery and affinity associated with the offering. Likeability emerges with entities that evoke favourable emotions and perceptions, ultimately impacting their attitudes and behaviours towards the brand, product or service.

Similarity

In the context of relatedness and likeness, Deci & Ryan (2000) propose that the ideal definition revolves around experiencing a sense of closeness and camaraderie with other individuals, representing a feeling of proximity and companionship. This concept emphasizes the significance of social connections and

interpersonal relationships as crucial factors influencing human behaviour and well-being.

Purchase intention

Dadwal et al. (2020) define consumer behaviour as the amalgamation of individuals' perceptions, emotions and actions concerning the acceptance, acquisition and utilization of a product, service, concept or specific behaviour. The concept of buyers' buying intention exhibits variability across different scholarly perspectives (Liu et al., 2020). However, despite these variations, a certain level of convergence can be observed among scholars. It is worth noting that the notion of "intention" finds its origins within the field of psychology.
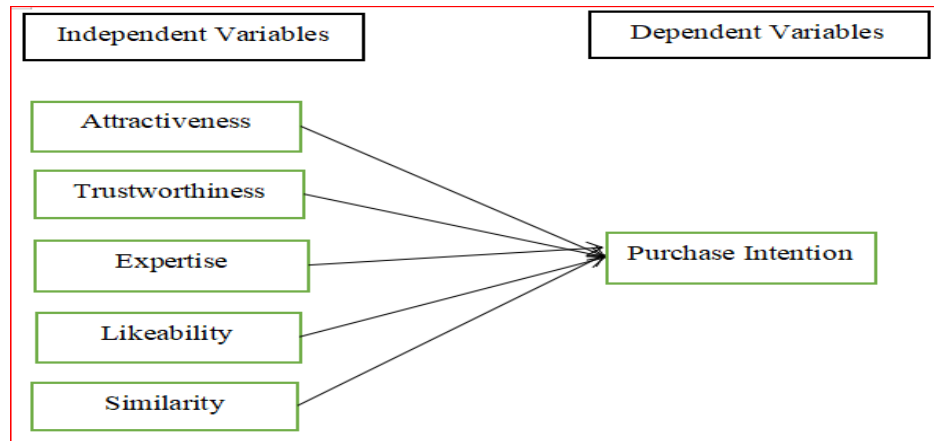

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
(Source: Van der Walt, 2020; Chekima & Chekima, 2020)

4. Description of Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach that utilizes a probability sampling technique to ensure the validity of the data and a representative sample that aligns with the study's objectives. The primary data collection method utilized in this study is the distribution of questionnaires to elicit pertinent information from respondents. A 5-point Likert scale will be used to measure respondents' agreement level or disagreement with each series of statements. The sample size was determined through G*Power 3.0 analysis based on the research hypotheses, and 400 questionnaires will be distributed among potential respondents. Multiple items are utilized to examine the constructs before using SmartPLS 4.0 to test the hypotheses, enhancing the study's robustness and validity.

5. Expected Outcomes

The study is expected to identify the key determinants influencing purchase intention of local products in Sabah. These determinants could include factors such as influencer credibility, the perceived quality of the product, the perceived value for money, and the relevance of the product to the target audience. The study could also assess the impact of influencer marketing on purchase intention of local products in Sabah. It may examine the effectiveness of different types of influencer marketing, such as sponsored content, product reviews, and endorsements, in driving purchase intention.

Apart from that, the study may provide valuable insights into the consumer behavior of Sabah residents when it comes to purchasing local products. This could include their preferences for different types of products, the factors that influence their purchase decisions, and the extent to which they are willing to pay a premium for local products. The study's findings may have important implications for the marketing strategies of local businesses in Sabah. For instance, businesses may need to build trust and credibility with consumers through influencer partnerships or highlight their products' unique qualities and benefits to

encourage purchase intention.

Overall, the expected outcome of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the role of influencer marketing in driving the purchase intention of local products in Sabah and to offer insights that could help local businesses to develop effective marketing strategies that resonate with their target audience.

6. Conclusion

This study revealed the role of source credibility, such as attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, likeability, and similarity, in shaping the relationship between social media influencers and consumer behavior towards local products in Sabah. The findings align with prior research conducted by Schouten et al. (2020), Chekima & Chekima (2020), Kaye & Johnson (2017) and Muda et al. (2014), collectively corroborated the credibility of social media influencers as a persuasive source and their capability to positively influence consumers towards local products in Sabah.

The findings of this study could provide insights for local businesses and marketers on how to leverage social media influencers to promote local products in Sabah. These social influences must be able to grab the attention of local businesses and marketers on how to use social media influencers to promote local products in Sabah effectively. The result can assist with maximizing the social media influence's impact towards consumers' choice and preferences for locally produced products in Sabah.

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