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THE ROLES OF INFLUENCERS ENDORSEMENT OF LOCAL SKINCARE BRANDS ON ONLINE PURCHASE INTENTION

Yura Nada Khairunnisa[1], Rifelly Dewi Astuti[2]

[1]University of Indonesia, yura.nada@ui.ac.id
[1]University of Indonesia, rifelly.dewi@ui.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Regardless significant roles of influencers in brand communication strategies, there are still some issues about the factors that may determine the strength of their influence and how the power of influencers can influence their followers in shaping perception and behavior towards the brands they support. This study aims to determine the role of the perceived information value and emotional attachment in the influencer's influence process, which later creates the expected value of the brand, brand engagement in self-concept, and the intention to buy the recommended brand. This research will be conducted with quantitative research. The context of this research is Indonesian local skincare products which contribute to local manufacturers in developing communication strategies for their products. The results of 300 respondents as a sample show that perceived information value and emotional attachment are determinants of the perceived influence, and the power of influence of influencers increases brand engagement and brand value will have an impact on the intention to purchase the recommended product. Besides, brand engagement also increases brand value, and brand value also affects purchase intention. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of the effect of an influencer's persuasion. The implications for practitioners and researchers are also discussed in the study.

Keywords: Digital Influencer, Endorsement, Electronic Word-of-Mouth, Skincare Products

1. Introduction

Companies or business entities deploy specific marketing communication strategies to grasp their targeted consumer by using many types of communication methods (Shrivastava & Dawle, 2020). The most important objective is to sell and increase brands or product awareness which is also the core function of marketing communications (Fill & Jamieson, 2006). Social media marketing has become one of the most popular digital media platforms to attract customers' attention (Rolandi et al., 2020). Social media activities are deliberately created and disseminated in a virtual environment (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). It is not only companies who act as communicators, but the consumers can also actively participate and join as the creators and disseminators of online content related to the marketed brands (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Companies are required to engage in many interactive practices related to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) brands, such as blogging, online brand communities, influencer marketing, and vlogging (Ladhari et al., 2020; Childers et al., 2019; Kapoor et al., 2018). Related to social media marketing activities, companies are turning to influencer marketing to support their brands; this is because influencers can connect their targeted audience with their brands (Childers, Lemon, & Hoy, 2018). Some studies have studied the power of influencers to attract their followers' attitudes and behavior toward a product (Casalo et al., 2018).

The roles of influencers in promoting brands and influencing consumers' decision-making process have become interesting topics to be studied (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Casaló et al., 2018). This research focuses on local beauty care products, commonly called skincare, as the research subject. This topic is selected due to of increasing sales rate of local skincare during the Covid-19 pandemic (Compas, 2019) and the increasingly fierce competition among the skincare products. Therefore, skincare manufacturers must formulate specific ways for

their marketing communication strategies (Adiyono et al., 2015). The influencers also play an important role in the marketing strategies to make the consumers re-purchase the products (Yasmin, 2020).

As there is a practical and academic need to expand the research, also there is debate about the potential role of influencers as opinion leaders; this study will develop a model of the persuasive power of influencers on their followers. That model will examine whether the perceived informational value of their messages is related to the perceived influence of followers and emotional attachment to influencers. Also, perceived influence can result in response to a brand endorsed by the influencer. Thus, this study aims to provide an understanding of the effectiveness of influencers as a communication tool for related brands eWOM and provide evidence on the power of perceived influence in shaping follower behaviors and perceptions towards endorsed brands, which is still limited. In addition to the concept of influencers from an opinion leadership perspective, This research refers to media dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, 1989) and social influence theory (Kelman, 1961) to look at the influence process by which influencers and followers can develop relationships that can be useful in influencing followers' perceptions and behaviors about endorsed brands to their followers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perceived Influence
The influence is generated from the development of consumers' attitudes and behavior patterns caused by the interaction with the influencers (Casaló et al., 2018). This social media marketing strategies involve a major influencer on potential customers, which will generate profits for the company (Ananda et al., 2016). Two-step flow communication theory explains opinion leadership in social networks (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Consistent with this theory, influencers act as information intermediaries, where followers seek and then develop the message through WOM (Magno, 2017; Bao & Chang, 2014).

2.2 Emotional Attachment
Concerning the influencers' influence, emotional attachment describes a willingness to adopt the opinions and behaviors of the followers. This statement can also be found in social influence theory (Kelman, 1961). The research suggests that cognitive and emotional processing is important to deeply understand the power of influencers' influence on social media (Kelman, 1961; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). Social influence theory explains that influence processes according to the patterns of thoughts and feelings that individuals engage in when they receive these influences from others (Kelman, 1958; 1961).

2.3 Perceived Information Value
Someone may be influenced by others; thus, he will adapt his actions and beliefs to build his value system (Kelman, 2006). Kelman explained that social influence might happen during the internalization process, where an individual has fully met the expectations of the group, both privately and in public (Kelman, 2006). Specifically, perceived information value and emotional attachment are consistent with Kelman's theoretical perspective on the process of identification and internalization being the antecedents of perceived influence (Kelman, 1958; 1961).

2.4 Brand Engagement
In a digital environment, there will be interdependence relationships and interactions with opinion leaders that can trigger the creation of shared value (Obra et al., 2007), where consumers will develop brand attachment, which in turn can contribute to the development of their perception of brand value (King & Sparks, 2014; France et al., 2016). Media dependency theory states that someone's strong dependency on certain platforms to meet his personal needs will make the platforms to be crucial parts of his life. The relationship intensity between the individuals and the sources can encourage the messages to be influential on their attitudes and behavior (Ball-Rokeach, 1985).

2.5 Brand Value
Aaker (1991) stated that brand value indicates the number of assets associated with a brand. Therefore, the brand value is expected to influence individuals through some information sources that positively and significantly affect a product or service (Castillo & Fernández, 2019). In the digital context, dependency on electronic media means that the relationship among consumers on social media is significant, and they will be strongly involved in purchasing activities (Hahn & Kim, 2013).

2.6 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention means something that exists after having a stimulus from a promoted product. Next, the consumers will be attracted and interested in trying the product, and finally, there will be a sense of purchasing and having the product permanently (Kotler, 2017). Therefore, the purchasing decision-making process is influenced by the opinions of influential individuals (i.e.influencers) disseminated through eWOM. It is considered quality content, while the influencers enjoy stronger credibility, even generating purchase intentions for their followers (Cosenza et al., 2014).

3. Research Method

Based on some theoretical frameworks previously explained, the proposed conceptual model is the model developed by Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández (2019), which uses perceived influence, brand expectation value, and brand engagement in self-concept variables in predicting purchase intention. This research tries to deeply explore the persuasive power of influencers and how they can bind their followers to build specific behavior towards endorsed brands (Castilo & Fernández, 2019).

Apart from its contribution, there are some limitations that can be improved in future research, especially in other parts of the construct (Castillo & Fernández, 2019). Based on some suggestions in previous studies, this research will further examine and study some factors that determine the power of the influencers' influence. This research will also identify an additional model carried out in Castilo & Fernández (2021) and its relevance to influencers in brand communication strategies. This study will examine the factors that perceived influence through the role of perceived information value and emotional attachment in the influence process that can lead followers to realize behavioral intentions towards a brand that is supported by an influencer (Castilo & Fernández, 2021). The proposed model is drawn as follows:
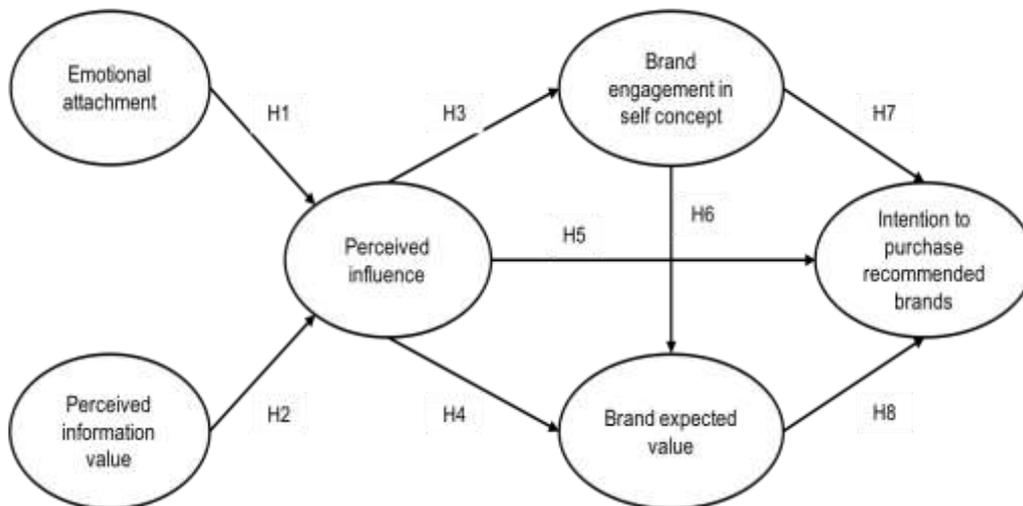

Figure 1 Research framework
(Source: Modification of Castillo & Fernández, 2019; 2021)

This is quantitative research that aims to explain the relationship between research variables and hypothesis testing that has been formulated previously and to test the hypotheses among variables. This research uses a single cross-sectional design descriptive method that functions to gather relevant information from respondents once in one period. The targeted population is the respondents who have been at least 18 years old and are active followers of beauty influencers. This research uses a non-probability sampling technique and convenience sampling method. The targeted sample is active users who follow influencers on Instagram social media endorsed by local skincare products.

The questionnaires are distributed via social networks. The respondents will go through screening questions to set the criteria according to the research. They are suggested to share the questionnaire on their social networks and forward it to their contacts to create a snowball effect. In measuring the constructs in the proposed model, the multi-item scale was adapted from previous research that already exists, but there were modifications to suit the context of the current study in measuring emotional attachment variables based on Castillo & Fernández (2021). The perceived value of information is measured by Lee et al. (2014). Brand involvement in self-concept was assessed based on Sprott et al. (2009), and the value of brand expectations is measured using a scale by Walsh,

Shiu & Hassan (2014). And lastly, the purchase intention s measured using a scale modified from Spears & Singh (2004). All items are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The questionnaire aims to collect primary data. Before distributing the questionnaires, the researcher conducted a preliminary test, i.e., wording test and pretest. The wording test is done on seven respondents to ensure that the questionnaire contains proper words and sentences so that there will be no misinterpretations or ambiguities in each of the questions. The pretest is given to thirty respondents to check their understanding of each question instrument.

4. Results and Discussion

During the four-week survey period, of the 396 questionnaires returned, it turned out that 96 of them were invalid. Therefore, we obtain a final sample of 300 respondents. Table 1 describes the summary of the demographic profile of the respondents in detail, consisting of gender, age, last education, and occupation. The research respondents have significantly different contributions based on gender (19% or 57 are men, and 81% (243) are women). Then, most of the respondents are between 21-30 years old (66% or 198), while some are below 20 (32.3% or 97), and the rest are about 31-40 years old (1.7% or five people only). It means that most skincare users are still young, and they are generally early workers or students (Hakim, 2020). The table shows that most of the respondents who fill out the questionnaire are high school and college students. 48.3% or 45 persons graduated from senior or vocational high schools. Next, 44.7% or 134 respondents have bachelor's degrees (S1/S2/S3), 6.3 % (19) hold Diploma degrees (D1, D2, and D3), and only 0.7% (2 respondents) who complete their education at junior high school level. Based on the respondents' occupations, the data show that most of them already have regular income to buy local skincare products. It seems that 36.7% (36.7) of respondents work as private employees, 7.7% (23) of the respondents establish their own business, 11 respondents (3.7%) work as civil servants, and 6% of them (18) work as housewives, freelancers, etc. Most of the respondents (46% or 138) are still high school or college students for whom they do not yet have a fixed income.

Table 1 Sample descriptive (N = 300).

Demographic Characteristics	Category	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	57	19%
	Female	243	81%
	< 20 years old	97	32,3%
Age	21 - 31 years old	198	66%
	31 - 40 years old	5	1,7%
	Junior High School	2	0,7%
Latest Education	Senior High School	145	48,3%
	Diploma degrees (D1/D2/D3)	19	6,3%
	Bachelor's degrees (S1/S2/S3)	134	44,7%
Occupation	Civil Servants	11	3,7%
	Private Workers	110	36,7%
	Entrepreneurs	23	7,7%
	Students	138	46%
	Others (housemaids, artists, nurses, etc)	18	6%

The data analysis technique used is Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis using SmartPLS 4.4 software. In testing the reliability and validity using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Table 2 shows that the instruments for all variables have a close relationship so that the variables are declared reliable with the provision that if the α valueis higher than 0.7, CR is higher than 0.7, and AVE is higher than 0.5, then each variable has been fulfilled. A validity test aims to check if an instrument can measure the concept or not. The validity test is measured by a loading factor of higher than 0.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Table 2 Scale reliability and confirmatory factor analysis

Variable	Item Code	Factorloding	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Emotional attachment	AE1	0,812			
	AE2	0,868	0,799	0,870	0,627
	AE3	0,727			
	AE4	0,751			
Perceived informationvalue	PV1	0,816			
	PV2	0,798	0,844	0,896	0,682
	PV3	0,838			
	PV4	0,850			
Perceivedinfluence	PI1	0,710			
	PI2	0,757			
	PI3	0,780	0,866	0,900	0,601
	PI4	0,784			
	PI5	0,771			
	PI6	0,843			
Brand engagementin self-concept	BE1	0,816			
	BE2	0,810	0,848	0,898	0,687
	BE3	0,849			
	BE4	0,839			
Brand expectedvalue	BV1	0,848			
	BV2	0,818	0,844	0,895	0,682
	BV3	0,810			
	BV4	0,826			
Intention topurchase	IP1	0,837			
	IP2	0,798			
	IP3	0,800	0,859	0,899	0,640
	IP4	0,759			
	IP5	0,807			

As shown in Table 3, the results about item and variabel are valid and reliable. In summary, the measurement model shows that there is adequate internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Table 3. Quadratic correlation between constructs and average variance extracted.

	BE	BV	EA	IP	PI	PV
BE	0,829					
BV	0,583	0,826				
EA	0,755	0,583	0,792			
IP	0,723	0,618	0,677	0,800		
PI	0,680	0,738	0,724	0,689	0,775	
PV	0,487	0,649	0,545	0,511	0,752	0,826

Hypothesis measurement in this stidy using structural equation analysis. The fit of the model showed that the fit of the model was good (SRMR=0,057, d_ULS=1,231, d_G=0,595, Chi-Square=991,179, NFI=0,854). Figure 2 shows the results of hypothesis testing. The findings indicate that the path coefficients are statistically significant as predicted. They provide great support for the proposed model. There is a positive relationship between emotional attachment and perceived influence (t value = 8,53, p<0.000). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is accepted. As predicted in Hypothesis 2, the results show that the value of perceived information is positively related to perceived influence (t value = 8,56, p<0.000). There is little empirical evidence that validates Hypothesis 3 regarding perceived influence and brand engagement (t value = 6,99, p<0.000). Furthermore, Hypothesis 4 shows a positive relationship between perceived influence and brand value (t value = 8,93, p<0.000). However, in Hypothesis 5 there is a positive influence between perceived influence and purchase intention (t value = 4,59, p>0.000). Similarly, Hypothesis 6 is also significant. It talks about the relationship

between brand attachment and brand value (t value = 2,05, p>0.020). Then, Hypothesis 7 shows that brand attachment is positively related to purchase intention (t value = 3.44, p<0.004). Finally, Hypothesis 8 shows a positive relationship between brand expected value and purchase intention (t value = 7,23, p> 0.000).
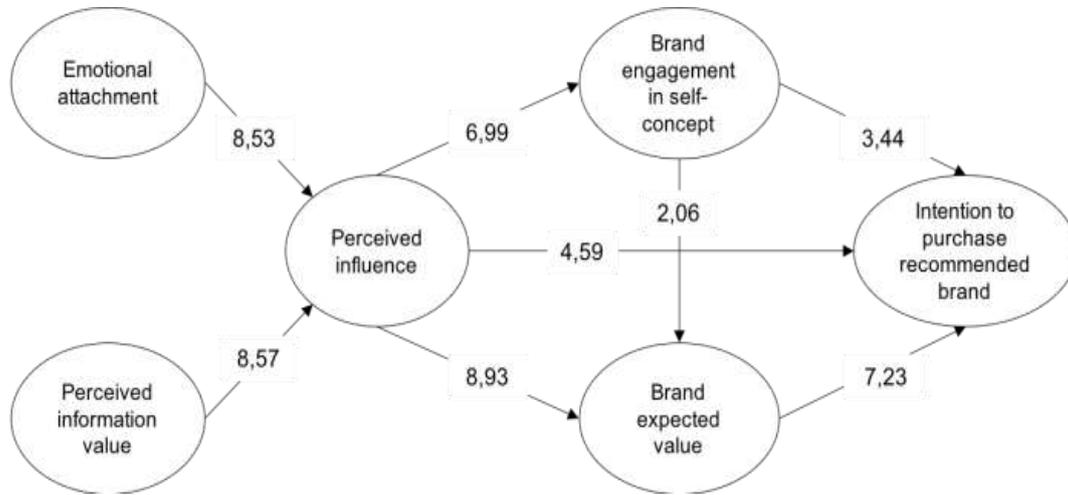

Figure 2 Hypothesis testing results.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study examines the effect of the persuasive power of influencers on the behavior of followers in the context of local skincare products. The model shows factors that can help increase the influence of influencers on their followers, namely emotional attachment and quality of information associated with brand involvement, brand expected value, and intention to buy an endorsed product based on perspectives of opinion leadership, social influence, and media dependence.

From this study, empirical data shows that all hypotheses are supported, which indicates that emotional attachment and the perceived value of information positively affect influencer perceptions. In addition, perceived influence positively increases brand engagement and brand value, as well as brand purchase intentions supported by influencers. Brand engagement has a positive relationship with purchase intention and increases brand value, and value has a significant effect on purchase intention of endorsed products. This research contributes to the explanation of how followers respond to brand information disseminated by influencers. Managers should use influencers as a brand communication strategy that can generate engagement, value, and intention to buy their brand.

On the other hand, this research also contributes to research on the role of influencers as opinion leaders in generating the level of dependence and impact on their followers. This study attempts to reduce the gap by providing empirical evidence that explains the relationship between the perceived influence of followers and local skin care product brands, in accordance with previous research which states that perceived influence positively increases followers' brand engagement, brand value, and intention to buy brands recommended by influencers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Castillo & Fernández, 2019). This finding implies that the influence exerted by influencers is quite important in developing positive cognitive and affective connections to the brands they recommend. In addition, the evidence for influencers' influence on brand engagement also broadens the understanding of how engagement can be facilitated through social media, as well as contributing to research exploring the effectiveness of brand communication activities in terms of their ability to create consumer engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2016; Magno, 2017).). The study also found that influencers have an impact on brand value formation. In other words, influencers also contribute to the value creation process, which can increase the appreciation of the utility of the brand itself. Therefore, eWOM opinion leaders can indeed create value. This is in accordance with the literature, which shows that eWOM disseminators can provide added value to community members through their opinions on products/brands (Bao & Chang, 2014). The influence of influencers can also affect the formation of followers' perceptions (Castillo & Fernández, 2019).

From a practical perspective, this study provides an explanation that potential influencers can build more effective brand communication and can increase the possibility of using this tool as a campaign on social media. First, this study supports managers to be able to invest in influencer marketing in their brand communication strategies based on their ability to create emotional bonds with their followers. In addition, managers should also be aware that the potential influencers who disseminate valuable information in developing these promotional activities can support the brand and create value for their followers through this information. Third, the results of this study look at the ability of influencers to influence the behavior of followers in their role as consumers first; this shows that the influence they give can affect perceptions, evaluations, and purchase intentions about the brands they recommend. Therefore, this research can help managers to understand how the power of influencer brand communication works. Furthermore, this research also shows that companies should focus on selecting influencers who are able to generate impact to create brand value and greater engagement. Finally, to influence the intention to buy local skincare products, managers must be able to consider the brand value variable. Therefore, choosing influencers who can increase brand value will be the right choice; influencers, especially those who understand and have knowledge about skincare products, will provide messages that can attract the attention of their followers.

Despite its contribution, this study has limitations that can certainly point toward future research. First, this study uses a non-probability sampling technique which provides an unequal opportunity or opportunity for each respondent to be selected as a sample, and in this study, the sample is not evenly distributed; future research must use probability sampling so that each individual in the population has an equal chance. Same for the sample. Second, this study uses cross-sectional data so that the actions of followers from time to time cannot be measured; therefore, this study cannot provide definitive conclusions regarding causality. As a result, future research could use longitudinal data that can help predict follower behavior over time. Third, further research can examine influence based on the digital platform they use (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Abidin, 2015); further research could also examine whether followers react and behave differently depending on the type of social network they use (Casalo et al., 2018). Furthermore, this study does not differentiate between types of influencers based on the number of followers, so further research can examine the proposed relationship by considering the latest influencer categorization based on the number of influencers' followers (Ladhari et al., 2020). Fifth, differences in follower personality and characteristics may influence the results, for example, with regard to age or education level. Therefore, future studies can better understand how personal characteristics might influence followers' perceptions and behaviors in their interactions with social media influencers. Furthermore, other antecedents of perceived influence can be added with others, for example, characteristics and attitude/behavioral loyalty (Hsu et al., 2014) and negative/positive influencers of WOM (Wang & Yu, 2017).

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