

# Social media influencers effectiveness among Millennials and Generation Z in Malaysia: A conceptual framework

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Digitalization, sensory stimulation, societal scepticism, and personalised experiences are decreasing traditional advertising's effectiveness. SMIs are widely used by marketers to promote their products and businesses. It is unclear how social media users pick influencer loyalty. Social media influencer authenticity is measured to promote emotional loyalty.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This quantitative survey will assess Malaysian social media influencers' brand endorsement effectiveness. 108 Millennials (Gen Y) and Generation Z who have social media profiles and follow at least one influencer will be surveyed.

**Findings:** The expected outcome is this study is that all of social media influencers' determinants has positively correlated with emotional attachment and emotional attachment also has positive.

**Research limitations/implications:** The first limitation is that hypothesized model was tested is too general way of determinants of influencers without any context. Next limitation is that the focus of research is conducted in Malaysia.

**Practical implications:** This research will assist social media influencer marketers to choose trustworthy influencers and be emotionally attached to the brand supported. It will also help brand managers reduce the uncertainty of advertising.

**Originality/value:** This study examines how social media influencers' credibility affects Millennials and Gen Z's emotional relationships. Previous research examined trustworthiness, sociability, and understandability. attachment and research is to link influencer-follower emotional attachment and loyalty using variables from various articles.

**Keywords:** attachment theory, social media influencer, social media marketing

## Introduction

In the days before the advent of influencer marketing, the majority of advertising was done through pop-up advertisements on websites, show-interrupting snippets on television, and the occasional broadcast on the radio. However, this form of traditional advertising is no longer effective because a large number of prospective buyers just refuse to pay attention to the

advertisement and either click away from it or miss it altogether (Peng, 2023). Numerous individuals have become more well-known on social media platforms over the course of the last ten years, as seen by the considerable number of followers they have amassed (Weismueller et al., 2020). According to the latest projections, the global user base of social media is expected to reach 4.89 billion by 2023, reflecting a growth rate of 6.5% compared to the present year. It is expected that the number of individuals utilizing social media will continue to increase, but at an accelerated rate (Oberlo, 2023). According to (Wong, 2023), Forbes mentioned that the average global individual spends approximately 145 minutes every day on social media. The wide-ranging establishment of social media has had significant consequences on all aspects of society, including communication, social interactions, politics, business, and cultural spheres. In light of the growing influence of digitization on globalization, it is crucial to do research on digital brand promotion and influencer marketing to strategically prepare for future international marketing endeavours (Syed Asim Shah et al., 2023; Boerman, 2020; and; De Veirman, De Jans, and Van Den Abeele et al., 2019). These astounding numbers provide evidence that the way in which people interact with one another and connect with one another has been drastically transformed as a result of the proliferation of social media. The valuation of the influencer marketing sector skyrocketed to \$9.7 billion in the year 2020, and it is anticipated that it will experience growth to \$15 billion by the year 2022 (Statistica, 2021). Given the perception of marketers regarding the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of this strategy, the term "social media influencers" is commonly used to describe as ***“those users who have the potential to create engagement, drive conversation, and/or sell products/services with the intended target audience; these individuals can range from celebrities to more micro-targeted professional or nonprofessional ‘peers’”*** (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2018). The rise of influencers has led to the emergence of a new marketing strategy known as 'influencer marketing' where influencer marketing is a process that involves identifying influencers in a market to find the perfect match between a brand and an individual. Through this collaboration, the brand can seamlessly integrate its products into the influencer's content, effectively promoting them in a genuine and subtle manner (Heming, 2020). In the dynamic world of Malaysian digital media, there is a diverse range of creative individuals and influencers who are actively engaging with an audience of 32 million people (Dhesi, 2023). These perspectives are especially important due to the fact that users of social media interact with their preferred influencers in the digital arena rather than in person. The fact that the digitalized qualities of social media influencers can have a higher impact on the perceptions, feelings, behavioural intention, and even actual behaviors of users than the visual traits of these influencers is a fascinating phenomenon (Kim and Kim, 2022). Having a large number of social media influencers will result in bombarded advertising, as social media users have recently become wary of influencers' commercial objectives and are expecting that influencer companies be highly legitimate. It's interesting to note that social media users might have reservations about brands that are deemed socially unacceptable, even if their favourite influencers are closely tied to those brands, and vice versa (Kim and Kim, 2022). To be more specific, this research takes into account psychological well-being as one of the primary factors that determines the loyalty of social media users toward their preferred influencers. It does so by concentrating on the underlying motives that drive users to consume digital information, such as enjoyment, pleasure, happiness, and friendship (Kim and Kim, 2022; and; Kim and Ko, 2019). In addition, users of social media who connect with their preferred influencers on a more frequent basis, both directly and indirectly, are more likely to report having a strong sense of parasocial ties with those influencers. The reason for this is primarily due to the fact that users have the impression that their interactions with influencers on social media are similar to regular meetings with their actual friends (Kim and Kim, 2022; and; Labrecque, 2014).

According to this study, interactivity plays a significant role in enhancing followers' perception of the influencer's characteristics. This, in turn, fosters a stronger emotional attachment and loyalty towards the influencer. This study also presents a mechanism that explains how emotional connection can be utilized to foster loyalty towards an influencer. As a consequence of this, a more powerful emotional attachment can be anticipated in the case of social media influencers and their following. This is because it is generally assumed that influencers are more approachable, intimate, and simple to relate to than celebrities (Abidin, 2016).

## **Literature Review**

### **Social Media Influencers**

The marketing sector has been significantly impacted by social media influencers, who are changing how customers interact with goods and services. A social media influencer creates and shares content on various social media platforms, including YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, that is relevant to specialised fields of interest or expertise, such as fitness, food, and video games. Individuals or customers with a vested interest in a particular domain can monitor and interact with influencers in order to remain abreast of the most recent trends and development (Weismueller et al, 2020). Most research has focused on social media influencers' unique characteristics (such as credibility and follower count and found that these factors contribute to their success. Therefore, SMIs communicate with consumers on a personal level with interactive affordances including livestreaming, short movies, and photos, and in real-time with two-way conversation. In fact, compared to brand-promoted commercials, ads supported by SMI produce noticeably higher levels of engagement and a more positive attitude (Lee and Eastin, 2021; and; Lou et al., 2019).

### **Underlying Theory**

The selection of attachment theory has been made as the framework for conducting this research. Attachment theory originated from the empirical examination of infants and young children's behaviours in the presence and absence of their primary carer (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory is appropriate since it allows for the affectionate link that underpins the influencer follower interaction. Influencers can be convincing when they create a strong emotional connection with their audience. Attachment theory has mostly addressed the issue of elucidating variations in individual attachment styles, whereas the underlying desire for belonging is a broader concept that surpasses various attachment kinds. Similar to attachment, there are powerful emotional mechanisms linked to a sense of belonging, but they can be viewed as mediating mechanisms rather than inherent qualities (Jun and Yi, 2020; and; Labrecque, 2014). Sharing one's good fortune, savouring the experience, seeking to continue or improve the rewards, and boosting physical activity are all examples of positive feelings. Positive emotions are sometimes accompanied by increased physiological arousal, increased optimism, improved recollection, and a shift from self- to other-centered orientations (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Followers develop personal relationships with influencers based on the assumption that the opinions of existing followers are trustworthy (Abidin, 2016). The presence of pleasant emotions and strong emotional connections between followers and influencers greatly contribute to the perception of influence. Social media viewers who have a strong connection to a human brand may also feel respected, powerful, and independent, which enhances marketing (Kim and Kim, 2022; and; Duffy, 2005).

## **Hypothesis Development**

### **Attractiveness And Emotional Attachment**

The attractiveness define as “a stereotype of positive associations to a person and entails not only physical attractiveness but also others characteristics such as personality and athletic ability.” (AlFarraj et al., 2021; and; Erdogan, 1999). According to research, endorsers who are viewed as physically attractive are generally more well-liked and can elicit a state of heightened arousal that can impact the way individuals process information related to advertising and brands (Chiu and Ho, 2023). This phenomenon was observed in a study by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), who made that discovery where individuals using social media platforms had the expectation that physically attractive micro-celebrities (Senft, 2008). This study categorizes attractiveness into two components: attraction, which refers to the exterior appeal that influencers possess in capturing the attention of social media users as providers of information, and the allure that is experienced in the development of social connections with others (Kim and Kim, 2022). Additionally, a research ascertained that social attractiveness has a positive impact on the para-social interactions of users, which subsequently fosters a sense of attachment to the influencer that have physical attractiveness (Madina and Kim, 2021; and; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

***H1: Attractiveness have a positive relationship towards emotional attachment with social media influencers.***

### **Trustworthiness And Emotional Attachment**

The concept of "trustworthiness" in the scholarly discourse on celebrity endorsement refers to the moral values, genuineness, and reliability of a celebrity endorser (Erdogan, 1999). Based on the context, researchers stated that the concept of trustworthiness can be characterised as a type of conduct that assumes a level of openness in communication and meets a reasonable expectation of honest exchange between parties who have a legitimate interest in the potential outcomes or effects of the communicative act (Bhatt et. Al, 2013; and; Plaisance, 2007). Attachment has been associated with trust (Thomson, 2006), and the capacity for consumers and influencers to develop and maintain a relationship based on trust can directly affect the character and progression of that relationship. By making commitments and upholding commitments and responsibilities related to the relationship, he can accomplish his goal (Heidari et al., 2023; and; Hewett and Bearden, 2001). The level of trust and loyalty between consumers and their influencers has been seen to have a favourable impact on the sustainability of the connections among followers. Trustworthiness pertains to the perceived integrity of the speaker. Goodwill is a measure of how much an individual or organisation is thought to care about their audience. This perception fosters a deep emotional connection in the relationship between followers and influencers (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

***H2: Trustworthiness have a positive relationship towards emotional attachment with social media influencer.***

### **Expertise And Emotional Attachment**

Expertise can be conceptualised as the degree to which a communicator is believed to possess knowledge and competence in a specific domain, hence being regarded as a reliable source of accurate information (Fernandes et al., 2022; and; Erdogan, 1999, p. 298). El Hedhli et al. (2021), Chekima et al. (2020) and Chaovalit (2014) stated that there exists a noteworthy correlation between expertise and purchasing behaviour through attachment, which impacts credibility. Professionals that possess expertise in their respective fields, such as doctors and scientists, are commonly regarded as individuals who possess a high level of professional

knowledge and are trustworthy sources of credible information (Chiu and Ho, 2023). Influencers have a huge impact on how viewers see them since they possess comprehensive and reliable experience regarding the products and services they give to customers. Masuda et al. (2022) found that the perception of one's own level of skill is a factor that can have an effect on the formation of parasocial interactions.

***H3: Expertise have a positive relationship towards emotional attachment with social media influencers.***

### **Homophily And Emotional Attachment**

Homophily refers to the sense of connectedness that arises from shared values, preferences, and memories between individuals in a partnership (Kim and Kim, 2022; and; Chu and Kim, 2011). This research utilises the idea of homophily to investigate the level of perceptual similarities across users of social media platforms, with a specific focus on interactions between influencers and their followers. This is consistent with prior research on social networks, which also utilised the notion of homophil (Kim, 2020). According to, homophily has become an important trait for communicators on social media. It is anticipated that homophily, characterised by similarities in identity, background, interests, and experience, will foster a sense of attachment among followers towards the influencer (Kim, 2020; and; Chapple and Cownie, 2017). Social media influencers (SMIs) can cultivate an emotional connection with their audience by sharing comparable interests and experiences Ki et al., (2020). stated that satisfying the followers' demands for interpersonal connection and belongingness strengthens the bond even further. Consequently, viewers will develop a more intense emotional connection when they perceive similarities between themselves and SMIs (Kim and Kim, 2022).

***H4: Homophily have a positive emotional attachment with social media influencers.***

### **Sociability And Emotional Attachment**

Sociability can be characterised as the act of engaging in verbal interactions, and it is impacted by various factors. These factors encompass the subtle nonverbal indicators individuals exhibit when entering a meeting space as well as the long-lasting interpersonal connections that contribute to a group's collective personality. According to Cheek and Buss (1981), sociability can be described as an inclination to engage in social interactions and exhibit a preference for companionship over loneliness. In a similar vein, it is reasonable to assume that a social media influencer will significantly provide a great communication between viewers such as being friendly where increment in the number of viewers and their level of engagement, as measured by metrics such as likes, comments, and shares, can be attributed to this phenomenon. It ought to acknowledge that a series of mutually beneficial exchanges has the capacity to elevate the nature of the exchange relationship to one of superior social exchange quality. (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Regular engagement between social media influencers and their followers fosters a stronger emotional attachment due to their openness and friendliness based from have a sense of elements of friendship and understanding.

***H5: Sociability have a positively towards emotional attachment with social media influencers.***

### **Interestingness And Emotional Attachment**

The degree of appeal that individuals experience while consuming social media content. It encompasses the subjective perceptions of satisfaction, gratification, and amusement that arise from the content (Zhang and Choi, 2022; and; Chen et al., 2014). Engaging and captivating content has been shown to effectively fulfil their desire for enjoyment (Zhang and Choi, 2022;



and; Lee et al., 2012). The sharing of appealing information on social media platforms is an advantageous approach for attracting the interest of individuals (Zhang and Choi, 2022; and; Rieh and S.Y., 2002). In this context, the act of seeking information can also be perceived as a recreational pursuit, undertaken for the purposes of amusement and enjoyment. Engaging in stated activities elicits positive emotional reactions, which include feelings of satisfaction, excitement, happiness, gratification, and enthusiasm (Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1998). This knowledge has the potential to influence one's self-perception, either as an individual deserving of love and appreciation from others, or as an individual who is not deserving of such affection or regard (Bowlby, 1979). This tendency can be explained by the fact that viewers are more likely to accept interesting information, as it fulfils their need for amusement and evokes positive emotional attachment with social media influencers (Zhang and Choi, 2022; and; Zhang et al., 2019).

***H6: Interestingness of content in social media influencers is positively correlated with the consumers' emotional attachment to influencers***

### **Novelty And Emotional Attachment**

Novelty is defining on which an individual perceives information to be new or different from previously acquired knowledge (Zhang and Choi, 2022; and; Xu et al., 2006). The term "novelty" can also pertain to the degree to which audiences perceive the material as being new, distinct, and dissimilar (Dabiran et al, 2023; and; Massetti, 1996). Individuals exhibit a natural inclination towards novel information during communication and seek out fresh stimuli, indicative of an attachment rooted in the "need for stimulation." The preceding research investigated the impact of delivering innovative and memorable brand experiences on enhancing brand attachment among users (Teng and Chen, 2021). When the influencer produces content that is unfamiliar or has been encountered only on rare occasions, consuming the content offers a fresh encounter for the user. As a result, the influencer has the potential to capture the user's interest and prompt them to publicly support the influencer's brand or product. According to the findings of Farivar et al. (2022), a strong relationship exists between the extent of social media influencers' presence in their postings and the level of engagement and attachment observed among their followers.

***H7: The novelty of content in social media influencers positively impacts consumers' emotional attachment to influencers.***

### **Understandability And Emotional Attachment**

The concept of understandability refers to the degree to which individuals view information as being easily comprehensible and interpretable (Zhang and Choi, 2022; and; Xu et al., 2006). Individuals tend to exhibit a preference for information that is easily comprehensible over information that is challenging to comprehend. It is easier for consumers of social media to comprehend a message when it is presented in their native language and includes the necessary advertising disclosures. In the realm of Social Media Influencers (SMIs), Jamil and Qayyum (2022) emphasised the significance of language as a basic determinant of information's use. In addition, the dissemination of information that is readily comprehensible can increase users' propensity to participate in reading activities and elicit positive emotions, thereby fortifying the emotional attachment between users and influencers. Influencer-generated content serves a dual purpose within the realm of consumer engagement, functioning as a source of entertainment and education and fosters the development of a deep connection between consumers and influencers by virtue of its capacity to captivate and educate (Zhang and Choi, 2022; and; Chen et al, 2014).

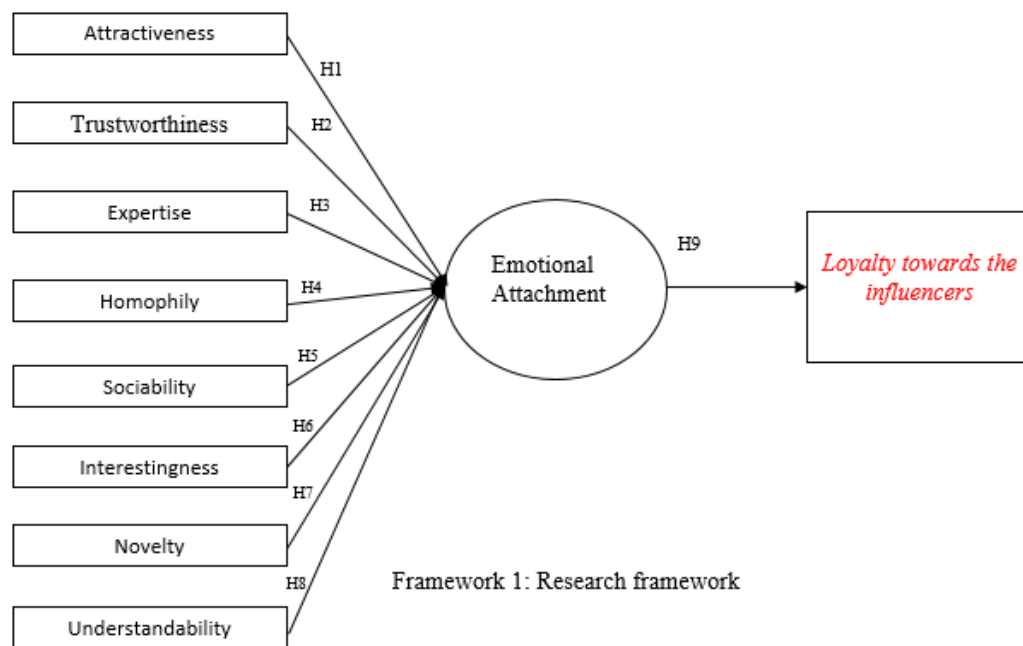
***H8: The content understandability in social media influencers positively affects the consumers' emotional attachment to influencers.***

### **Emotional Attachment Towards Loyalty To The Influencer**

The fundamental principle of emotional attachment highlights the complex connection that exists between individuals and a wide range of consumable entities, including brands, products, and people (Park and MacInnis, 2006; and; Hazan and Shaver, 1994). The bond that consumers form with brands or products on an affective level has a significant impact on their behaviour (Zhang and Choi, 2022; and; Dwivedi et al., 2018). Personal loyalty to such brands or products is significantly increased. Emotional attachment is heightened on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, where users actively pursue connections with personalities and place a premium on their online authenticity (Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016). A dedication to a celebrity's brand and persona can be inferred from their social media activity, which includes admiring or following them (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). This support generates favourable word-of-mouth advocacy. Consumer commitment can be reliably predicted by emotional attachment, according to scholarly research (Zhang & Choi, 2022; and; Drigotas and Rusbult, 1992). Additionally, it should be noted that emotional attachment also manifests in interpersonal partnerships, where fealty is established upon the basis of mutual interests and efficient communication. Thus, they establish partner loyalty by advocating the partner's opinion and sacrificing self-interest to preserve the relationship (Azios et al, 2021; Thomson et al., 2005; Rusbult and Van Lange, 1997). In order to achieve long-term success and exert influence, social media influencers must prioritise the development of emotional bonds with their followers; doing so generates increased interest and allegiance. Therefore, as influencers navigate the dynamic realm of social media, it is critical that they cultivate user loyalty (Li and Han, 2021).

***H9: Emotional attachment have positively effect to loyalty towards the influencers.***

Below is the research framework based on hypothesis development:



**Methods**

This study is to identify the determinants (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, homophily, sociability, interestingness, novelty, understandability) of social media influencers credibility's affect emotional attachment among Millennial and Gen Z and also to identify the emotional attachment influence consumer loyalty among Millennials and Gen Z for brand endorsement in Malaysia is diverse racial and religious society, giving rise to intricate dynamics among various ethnic groups, religions, and the state. These dynamics often carry significant political, social, and legal implications (Steiner, 2018). As of January 2023, 27.5% of Malaysia's total population of 34.13 million was actively engaged on social media, or 26.80 million users, according to Data Reportal. Malaysia's social media utilization has exhibited no observable decline since 2013 (Nur Suhaila Zulkifli and Latifah Abd Manaf, 2024). Hence, the study will be using quantitative self – administered. The questionnaire will have structured by using Google Form and will distributed through Social networking networks, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. The research employed a purposive sampling method, which falls under the category of non-probability sampling techniques (Rai and Thapa, 2015). Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, requires the researcher to exercise discretion when selecting the units of analysis, such as individuals, cases/organizations, events, or data points, to be included in the study. Furthermore, SmartPLS will be using to carry out several statistical tools such as reflective measurement assessment and also structural model assessment.

**Discussion and Conclusion*****Theoretical Implications***

It is expected that all independent variables will exhibit a positive correlation with emotional attachment as a result of this study. This study makes a substantial contribution to the current scholarly understanding of influencer marketing by delineating distinct influencer attributes (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, homophily, sociability, interestingness, novelty, understandability) that have the potential to enhance the relational bond between social media influencers and their audience. Attachment occurs between a brand (in this case, an influencer as a human brand) and its followers when the brand provides its followers with valuable social resources (Kim and Kim, 2022; Aronetal,2005; and; Parketal,2006). For influencers who build their fan bases through conversation with their devotees, the importance of interaction will only increase. Enhancing communication and fostering a stronger connection with one's audience can be achieved by actively acknowledging and integrating the feedback and recommendations provided by followers, while also infusing a sense of empathy and affability into one's responses (Kim and Kim, 2022; and; Chen et al., 2021). The phenomenon of attachment leads to increased levels of brand loyalty, which aligns with the concept of the human-brand relationship (Thomson et al.,2005). Attachment to the influencer helps followers to keep contact with the influencer and to regard the influencer's posts as more trustworthy. Remarkably, the phenomenon of attachment has been observed to elicit a reduction in followers' resistance towards marketing communications, thereby diminishing their inclination towards doubt and rebuttal of promotional messages disseminated by social media influencers. The aforementioned claim is supported by the significance of attachment in the consumer-brand relationship, resulting in instances of personal sacrifice (Sánchez - Fernández and Jiménez - Castillo, 2021).



***Practical and Social Implications***

The findings of this study have substantial managerial implications for professionals in the field of social media marketing and merchants aiming to optimise the impact of various endorsers on social media platforms (Ki et al., 2020). research suggests that marketers should work with SMIs who have a smaller number of followers but who have built trusting relationships with their target demographic in order to maximize the impact of their influencer marketing campaigns. This research is beneficial for marketers and brand managers because it reflects the fact that consumers frequently take endorsements from celebrities and other influential figures despite their inherent commercial bias. Brand managers have the opportunity to engage in the content produced by influencers and establish direct communication with their respective audience, and marketers can strategize transparent messaging by leveraging the emotive connection the influencer has with their audience.

***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

The present study possesses certain limitations that warrant consideration in future research endeavours. The initial step involved the testing of the hypothesised model in a broad manner to ascertain the determinants of influencers. Given that social media comes in a variety of forms, the context should be considered to be specific in certain findings. Future research can be extending into different contents such as food, travel and beauty. Furthermore, the present study was conducted in Malaysia, which may provide constraints on the generalizability of the findings. Potential areas of investigation in future research may involve examining the perceptions of consumers from various cultural background.

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