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Effect Of Social Media Influencers On Generation Y Purchase Intention: Evidence From Men's Skincare Products In Malaysia

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Abstract

Although the demand for men's skincare products is becoming increasingly popular in Malaysia, previous studies of social media marketing have shed little light on the effect of social media influencers on men's skincare purchase intention. Therefore, this research investigates the effects of social media influencers' attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise, likability, similarity, and familiarity on purchase intention in men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia. An online questionnaire was implemented, and 279 respondents were gathered using the snowball sampling technique. After obtaining the desired responses, multiple regression analysis was adopted to examine the research model and hypotheses. The findings showed that social media influencers' attractiveness, similarity, and familiarity positively affect the purchase intention of men's skincare products. However, this paper found that the effects of social media influencers' trustworthiness, expertise, and likability on purchase intention of men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia are insignificant. The research findings contribute to the current research literature by determining the six characteristics of social media influencers and purchase intention with new empirical insights from Malaysia in the context of men's skincare products.

Keywords: Social Media Influencer, Purchase Intention, Skincare, Generation Y

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1.0 Introduction

In this age of globalization, the worldwide cosmetics market has been expanding at an unprecedented rate due to growing consumer interest (Zakaria et al., 2021). This is because many individuals, regardless of gender, desire to enhance their appeal and health. The International Trade Administration (ITA) reported that Malaysia imported a total of \$1.3 billion in cosmetic and personal care commodities in 2019 and grew in 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic existing worldwide (ITA, 2021). Additionally, Chun et al. (2018), observing the skincare market, stated that the global market value for male grooming care products was around \$35 billion. Statistics proved that female customers no longer dominate skincare products (Zakaria et al., 2021). This shift in consumer behaviour reflects the changing dynamics of the cosmetics industry, where men's skincare products are gaining attraction in response to evolving preferences and enhancing their purchasing rate for skincare products.

In present-day society, men have started to have deep concerns about their skin health and tend to follow social media influencers' decisions in choosing skincare products. Consumers rely on paid and organic posts from social media influencers as they view them as one of the most trusted references to evaluate their purchase intention. One of the most successful strategies for bridging the gap between a brand's followers and customers is the rise of social media influencers to influence consumers' purchase intentions (Castillo et al., 2022). This was due to traditional product advertising being one-sided before the rise of social media influencers. Consumers could only become aware of the products' related information via billboards, radio, printed advertisements, and television commercials. However, social media platforms allow consumers to gain a deeper understanding of specific products by directly interacting with social media influencers and knowing about their experiences with the product information (Abdullah et al., 2020). It also provides opportunities for consumers to obtain purchasing suggestions and purchase order links from the social media influencers' posts without wasting any time with the rising trend of endorsing social media influencers (Geyser, 2022). Therefore, this marketing strategy has become the new way companies advertise their products to increase sales and expand market coverage. This approach helps develop a broader product reach that benefits the company.

Malaysia's skincare products' most extensive market share ranges from 25 to 34 at 30%, which can be considered millennials or Generation Y, who were born between the 1980s and early 2000s (Tan, 2020; Boon et al., 2020). The average monthly income for men in Malaysia was RM3,085 in 2021, compared to RM2,968 for females (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). Hence, this group of individuals is considered a potential customer segment, particularly men with high purchasing power. Statistics endorsed the potential of unlocking the men's market. Several studies were conducted on purchase intention in cosmetic products focused on Generation Y (Khan et al., 2020; Junaid & Faheem, 2013; Eze et al., 2012) and the effect of social media influencers on customer purchase intention (Marjerison et al., 2020; Isyanto et al., 2020; Hermanda et al., 2019). Still, there are scarce studies on the effect of social media influencers on purchase intention, specifically on men's skincare products with a focus on Generation Y. Therefore, this research intends to fill the research gap by determining the effect of social media influencers' characteristics on the men's purchasing intentions belonging to Generation Y for skincare products by using both the Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness Models.

2.0 Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Theoretical Background

The Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness Models are two theories adopted in this study to explain communication persuasiveness through communication sources' perceived credibility and attractiveness (Berlo et al., 1969; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). The models explain that individuals are more likely to be influenced by information from a trustworthy and credible source. Several characteristics concerning source credibility, such as source trustworthiness, are the perceived accuracy, honesty, and credibility of the individual who can be trusted to share credible information (Ohanian, 1990). Secondly, source attractiveness is the physical traits, including attractiveness and an individual's personality (Ohanian, 1990). Lastly, source expertise comprises the specialized knowledge, abilities, and qualifications an individual possesses to effectively share information or make credible statements (McCroskey, 1966). Prior research has

extensively used the concept of source credibility to examine the influence of favourable characteristics of celebrities, influential individuals, or endorsers on the consumer's behavioral intention, such as Fernandes Crespo (2023), Ooi et al. (2023), and Rani et al. (2022). Therefore, attractive endorsers can captivate the audience's attention by creating favourable relationships with an advertisement or product, enhancing their persuasiveness (Bogoevska-Gavrilova & Ciunova-Shuleska, 2022).

The Source Attractiveness Model is an attractive source that tends to increase the persuasion and influence level to which a communication source persuades a person (Kim & Park, 2023). This model comprises sources including an individual's likability, familiarity, and similarity, which substantially influence customer behaviour reactions. Customers with high likability and favourable responses toward idolized celebrities would strengthen their intention to purchase a particular product. The same applies to the influencer's familiarity when customers are highly familiar with one specific influencer; it often leads to a higher purchase intention (Amakyewaa et al., 2021). Lastly, similarity refers to the perceived resemblance between influencer endorsements and the consumers who receive information from them (Myers, 2021). When consumers perceive a similarity between themselves and the influencer, they are more likely to identify with that influencer which affects their purchase intention. In short, this study integrated a few critical sources, including trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise from the Source Credibility Model and similarity, familiarity, and likability from the Source Attractiveness Model as foundations for understanding how social media influencers' characteristics as the source of information affect the purchase intention among Generation Y male consumers of skincare products.

2.2 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to a person's desirability to purchase a product or a service in the future by surveying the related information from various sources (Peña-García et al., 2020; Vineyard, 2014). Aligned with previous research by Zhang et al. (2022), purchase intention is also represented as the individual's tendency to make an actual purchase, resulting in the product evaluation from all the information gathered and the product

comparison process. Wang et al. (2023) further discovered that factors such as perceived trust and customer attitudes would also influence consumers' purchase intentions to a certain extent. Therefore, when purchasing a product or service via social media influencers, these characteristics would play an important role in stimulating customers to increase their purchase intentions.

2.3 Trustworthiness

Trust is the source's legitimacy to shift customer behaviour significantly (Ohanian, 1990). Research revealed that trustworthiness has a crucial impact on the social media influencer's creditability and customers' intention to purchase a product or service (Saima & Khan, 2020). The outcome is aligned with Priester and Petty (2003), who said that a reliable endorser creates consequential supremacy through their argument quality and message-based thinking with the support of how reliable the customer viewed the sources. Customers view them as individuals who share homogeneous attributes and interests, where the social media influencer's viewpoint will have a crucial impact on the customer's purchase intention. Therefore, social media influencers will leverage the transparency of skincare products based on information shared through social media platforms (Chekima et al., 2020). This can be further supported by Martiningsih and Setyawan (2022) who identified that the sources of trustworthiness recorded as positively and significantly affected consumer's purchase intention. Therefore, this research shall conclude that:

H1: The trustworthiness of social media influencers has a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia.

2.4 Attractiveness

Attractiveness is a set of positive associations people hold toward an individual, including physical traits, personality, and athletic prowess (Erdogan, 1999). Awasthi and

Choraria (2015) explained that customers who mimic the mannerisms of a celebrity whom they find attractive are more likely to purchase from them. Liu (2007) also pointed out that businesses must select extremely attractive endorsers with exceptional performance and strong morals to enhance customer purchasing intention. High attractiveness of influencers can significantly influence customer behavior (Kurdi et al., 2022). Customers attracted by an influencer's physical appearance, personality, or traits tend to develop a positive attitude toward that influencer. Ultimately, this positive attitude can increase the likelihood of customer purchase intention. Another study conducted by Akturan and Bozbay (2017) disclosed that consumers are motivated and attracted by their intent to purchase a product that is well-known, favoured, and owed by the public. This statement can be further justified by AlFarraj et al. (2021) and Martiningsih and Setyawan (2022), who found that attractiveness significantly affected customers' purchase intention. In other words, high attractiveness will increase a customer's likelihood of purchasing a particular product. Therefore, this paper shall conclude that:

H2: The attractiveness of social media influencers has a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia.

2.5 Expertise

Marketers increasingly embrace celebrities to advertise their company's goods, services, or brands. Given the current circumstances, it has become more challenging for companies to differentiate their brands based on rational characteristics in competitive marketplaces (Silalahi et al., 2021). According to Hovland and Weiss (1951), expertise refers to the level of perceived comprehension, abilities, and information provided by endorsers, affecting their conviction level in persuading customers to purchase the recommended items. At the same time, consumers might focus on the products or services' objective and physical qualities since the evaluation process is more cognitively driven when the products or services are purely utilitarian (Wen, 2009), such as skincare products. Thus, the expertise of social media influencers shall play an essential role in

affecting customer purchase intention. A prior study by Ahmed and Karaduman (2021) found a significant effect of expertise on information adoption and its influence on the purchase intention of beauty products. This finding aligns with AlFarraj et al. (2021), who discovered that the determinant of influencers' credibility dimensions, such as expertise also significantly affects consumers' purchase intention. Therefore, an influencer in a more knowledgeable nation has higher influencing power to encourage customers to purchase as they are familiar with targeted consumers' requirements and preferences, which can provide an accurate point of purchase. Therefore, this study shall conclude that:

H3: The expertise of social media influencers has a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia.

2.6 Likability

Likability refers to how a brand, product, or service is demonstrated in terms of "physical attractiveness," "likability," "flattery," and "association," which can be described as a psychological component that can significantly affect customers' purchasing intention (Yeo et al., 2021). Social media is gradually increasing in popularity to both consume and create experiences among their customers. Evans et al. (2017) stated that an appealing social media influencer has the ability and power to positively impact customer purchasing intentions, as customers tend to admire or like the influencer. De Veirman et al. (2017) also reflected that Instagram influencers who have a higher number of followers are viewed as more likable due to the reason that they are more popular as compared to those who have fewer followers. Hence, they tend to have a significant effect on consumers' likability and tend to increase consumer's purchase intention. Similarly, Putri et al. (2023) claimed that the likability of social media influencers could be represented as a source that significantly affects consumers' attitudes and purchase behaviours among the consumers. Therefore, this paper shall conclude that:

H4: The likability of social media influencers has a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia.

2.7 Similarity

According to Liew et al. (2021), similarity is the degree to which the influencer has similarities or congruencies with their consumers or followers. Alternatively, it could also indicate the level of likeness between the person who follows and the influencer, which is considered an essential consideration in selecting an influencer (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). Previous research summarized by Al-Darraj et al. (2020) disclosed that an individual who positively values influencers, which positively influences consumers' purchasing intentions might feel like the influencer, which could have the exact attributes. Several past studies also emphasized that the similarity of an influencer will create positive purchasing intention among consumers such as Schouten et al. (2020); and Martensen et al. (2018). An individual would be more likely persuaded to purchase when they interact with another individual who shares their interests and viewpoints than when they do so with an individual who holds entirely different views (Li et al., 2012). Therefore, this study shall conclude that:

H5: The similarity of social media influencers has a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia.

2.8 Familiarity

Familiarity refers to the extent to which a customer is acquainted with or has developed experiences with a particular product or service over a period of time (Magano et al., 2022). Familiarity can significantly influence consumer decision-making processes as customers frequently select the products or services they are familiar with due to perceiving them as less risky and trusting. According to Lin et al. (2009), familiarity also

allows the consumer to avoid products that cannot perform the particular individual requirement. Therefore, a deep understanding to increase the customer's comfort level with the sender can make the sender appear more compelling (Martensen et al., 2018). From the brand perspective, familiarity and content quality can significantly influence consumer engagement with a brand's social media, which could affect the consumer's purchase intention (McClure & Seock, 2020). Similar findings also found in the area of social media influencers such as Karouw (2019) and Žvinytė (2017) concluded that a higher familiarity with a social media influencer will result in a positive association with customer's purchase intention. Therefore, this paper shall conclude that:

H6: The familiarity of social media influencers has a significant positive effect on the purchase intention of men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia.

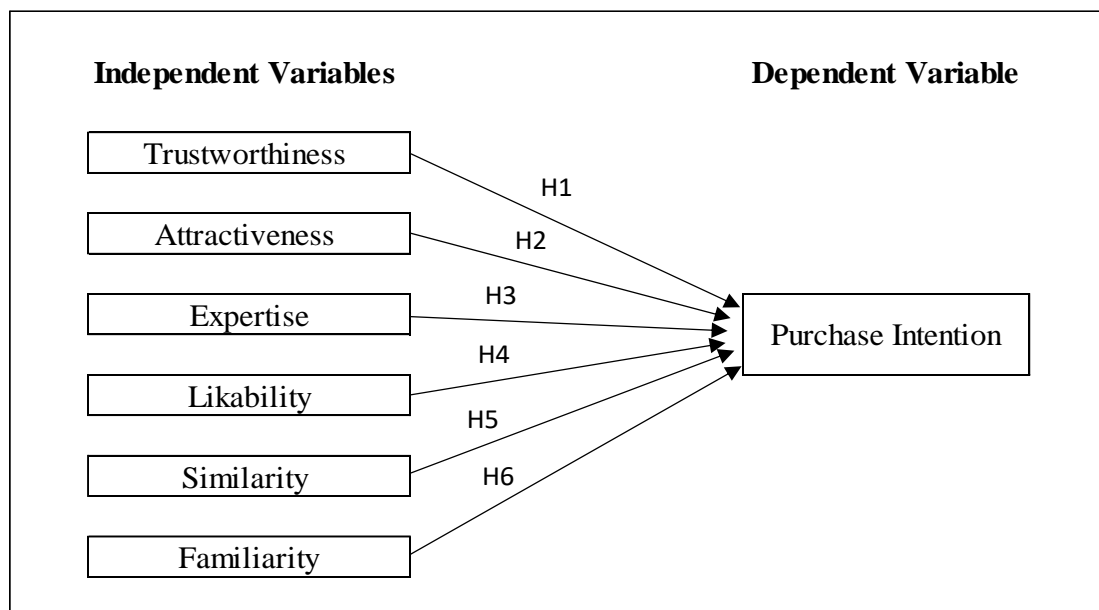


Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework

3.0 Research Methodology

This study focused on Malaysian Generation Y men's consumers aged 23 to 43 who have the purchase intention in men's skincare products or are currently using men's skincare products. Individuals who were born between the 1980s and early 2000s can be considered millennials or Generation Y (Tan, 2020). These inclusion criteria are based on the understanding that this demographic significantly influences the men's skincare products market because the skincare products are no longer exclusive to female customers but also for men due to changing lifestyles (Zakaria et al., 2021). A self-administered survey was distributed to the qualified respondents via social media channels like Facebook. The questionnaire was divided into three categories: A, B, and C. A total of 279 respondents were involved by using the snowball sampling technique. The measurement scales were adapted from past studies. Purchase intention was assessed through 3-item measures from Jamil et al. (2023). The survey of Magano et al. (2022) was adapted to measure familiarity (2 items), trustworthiness (3 items), expertise (3 items), attractiveness (3 items), similarity (4 items) and likability (4 items). We conducted the analyses involving descriptive analysis to understand information concerning respondents, a reliability test to assess data consistency, and multiple regression analysis to determine the effects of independent variables on dependent variables using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4.0 Results

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 2 illustrates that most respondents (154) have a degree in education, followed by 72 respondents with a master's or Ph.D. education level. Only four respondents had an STPM education level, while 34 had an SPM level. Lastly, 15 respondents obtained a diploma in education level. Based on the result, most respondents were from Perak (30.8%). Selangor (27.95%) and Johor (12.9%) were the second and third-highest states. Penang made up 9% of the respondents in this study. There were some respondents from Melaka, which was recorded as 5.7%. The respondents from Negeri Sembilan and

Pahang have the same number of respondents, which is 14 people, with 5% each. The remaining respondents were from Kuala Lumpur (1.4%), Kedah (0.7%), Sarawak (0.7%) and Kelantan (0.7%) respectively. From the perspective of respondents' expenses spent on skincare products per year, 197 respondents have spent less than RM 12,000 per year, and 66 respondents have spent around RM 12,000 to RM 24,000 on skincare products per year. However, only 13 of the respondents were willing to spend RM24,000 to RM48,000 on purchasing skincare products yearly. Lastly, only three respondents claimed that they would spend more than RM48,000 on skincare products yearly, and this was recorded as the lowest number of respondents throughout the study.

Table 2: Descriptive Summary

Characteristics	Number	Percentage (%)
Education Level		
SPM	34	12.10
STPM	4	1.40
Diploma	15	5.40
Degree	154	55.40
Master/PhD	72	25.70
State		
Selangor	78	27.95
Perak	86	30.80
Johor	36	12.90
Melaka	16	5.70
Negeri Sembilan	14	5.00
Pahang	14	5.00
Penang	25	9.00
Kuala Lumpur	4	1.40
Kedah	2	0.70
Sarawak	2	0.70
Kelantan	2	0.70
Expenses Spent on Skincare Products Per Year		
< RM12,000 (< RM100 monthly)	197	70.60
RM12,000 – RM24,000 (RM100 – RM200 monthly)	66	23.60
RM24,000 – RM48,000 (RM200 – RM400 monthly)	13	4.70
> RM48,000 (> RM400 monthly)	3	1.10

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Next, this paper conducted a reliability analysis to ensure the reliability of all collected responses (Tan & Omar, 2014). The results tabulated in Table 3 show that Cronbach's alpha values of trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, likability, similarity, familiarity, and purchase intention are above 0.80, which exceeds the acceptable level (0.70). Therefore, we can conclude that the collected responses can generate at least 0.80% reliable and consistent results.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Reliability Analysis			
Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Reliability Results
Trustworthiness	0.944	3	Excellent
Attractiveness	0.857	3	Good
Expertise	0.909	3	Excellent
Likability	0.921	4	Excellent
Similarity	0.925	4	Excellent
Familiarity	0.905	2	Excellent
Purchase Intention	0.876	3	Good

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4 shows that trustworthiness ($t=0.006$, $p>0.05$), expertise ($t=1.630$, $p>0.05$), and likability ($t=0.107$, $p>0.05$) are insignificant predictors of purchase intention. Consequently, H1, H3 and H4 were rejected. The remaining three characteristics, namely attractiveness ($t=2.786$, $p<0.05$), similarity ($t=4.323$, $p<0.05$), and familiarity ($t=3.546$, $p<0.05$), are significant at $p<0.000$. Hence, the hypotheses of H2, H5, and H6 were accepted. The beta value indicates that similarity ($\beta=0.252$) is the strongest contribution to explaining purchase intention in this study.

The R^2 value of 0.577 indicates that the independent variables in the model caused 57.7% of the deviations observed. In addition, the F-value of 61.872 with a significance level of 0.000 infer that the independent predictors were significantly related to the dependent variable. The regression model of this study is shown in the equation below. When one unit's attractiveness, similarity, and familiarity change, the purchase intention will increase by 0.185, 0.252, and 0.213 units, respectively.

$$y = \alpha + \beta_2(X_2) + \beta_5(X_5) + \beta_6(X_6)$$

$$y = 1.057 + 0.185 (\text{Attractiveness}) + 0.252 (\text{Similarity}) + 0.213 (\text{Familiarity})$$

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Coefficients				
Variable	B	Std. Error	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.057	0.173	6.115	0.000
Trustworthiness	0.000	0.059	0.006	0.995
Attractiveness	0.185	0.067	2.786	0.006
Expertise	0.120	0.074	1.630	0.104
Likability	0.008	0.075	0.107	0.915
Similarity	0.252	0.058	4.323	0.000
Familiarity	0.213	0.060	3.546	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Brand Awareness				

$R^2 = 0.577$; F-value = 61.872, $p < 0.000$

* Significant at p-value 0.05

The hypotheses testing summary developed in this study is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Variables	Sig Value (<0.05)	Results
H1	Trustworthiness	0.995	Rejected
H2	Attractiveness	0.006	Accepted
H3	Expertise	0.104	Rejected
H4	Likability	0.915	Rejected
H5	Similarity	0.000	Accepted
H6	Familiarity	0.000	Accepted

5.0 Discussion

This study found that the attractiveness of social media influencers significantly affects purchase intention. Notably, the increase in the attractiveness of the social media influencer is directly proportional to the increase in their desire to purchase the products. This result is in line with Nugroho et al. (2022), and Tamara et al. (2021), who supported that attractiveness is represented as a characteristic of social media influencers and has a direct effect on the customer's purchase intention of Generation Y. Therefore, the attractiveness of social media influencers may considerably drive the imitation behaviour of their followers (Kim & Park, 2023). It significantly leads to favourable sentiments of lifestyle consumers towards desired celebrities and ultimately increases their intention to purchase men's skin care products. In addition, the similarity of social media influencers found a significant influence on men's skincare purchase intention among Generation Y in Malaysia, consistent with Sumathy & Jisha (2023). Influencers on social media may be more approachable and convincing in their recommendations if they are regarded to be like their consumers regarding age, gender, lifestyle, or other factors that might increase their followers' intentions for purchasing. Moreover, the present study further discovered that social media influencers' familiarity significantly affects the purchase intention of men's skincare products among Generation Y in Malaysia. Laohasukkasem et al. (2021) found a similar result. This might be due to customers being more inclined to believe and abide by the guidance of social media influencers they are familiar with since they may view them as more dependable and trustworthy.

However, the current study has discovered that social media influencers' trustworthiness does not significantly affect men's skincare product purchase intention among Generation Y in Malaysia. This result was contracted with AlJaeed and Badghish (2021), who found that trustworthiness positively affects customers' attitudes towards purchase intention. Instead of trusting social media influencers, AlFarraj et al. (2021) stated that Malaysia's Generation Y consumers may have access to additional information sources, such as customer reviews, product evaluations, or recommendations from friends and family. As a result, consumers may not solely base all their decision-making on the trustworthiness of social media influencers. Furthermore, the result also concluded that social media influencers' expertise and likability had an insignificant effect on men's skincare purchase intention among Generation Y in Malaysia. The results aligned with past studies of Laohasukkasem et al. (2021) and Munasinghe and Gunatilake (2020). Laohasukkasem et al. (2021) discovered that the influencer's expertise did not significantly affect the customer's purchase intention. Owing to the abundance of information around various platforms, Generation consumer may be excessively overwhelmed by influencers who assert their expertise in skincare (Natanael & Permana, 2023). Regarding likability, Munasinghe and Gunatilake (2020) claimed that men's skincare products are often perceived as practical items. Men choose the products based on their effectiveness and suitability for individual needs rather than being influenced by the likeability or personal preferences of the influencer. Therefore, the product's suitability for the consumers' specific requirements holds more significant importance to Malaysia's Generation Y consumers than the likeability of the influencer.

6.0 Implications of Study

Despite the significant contribution of previous studies, this research has theoretical implications that integrate both the Source Attractiveness and Source Credibility Models to determine the effect of social media influencers' characteristics as different sources on men's skincare purchase intentions among Generation Y in Malaysia. By adopting an integrated model, the results verify the significance of the sources's credibility and attractiveness in shaping consumer perceptions and intentions, which might provide

helpful information for future research. Moreover, the study's findings not only highlight the theoretical integration of models but also provide valuable empirical evidence on how the characteristics of social media influencers influence men's purchasing intentions in Malaysia's Generation Y. More specifically, the study summarized that the attractiveness, similarity, and familiarity of these influencers have a significant impact on the skincare purchasing intention of men who belong to Generation Y, which holds an important value for the current body of literature, providing a substantial reference for future researchers interested in investigating corresponding subjects. This study also underlines the importance of recognizing social media influencers as influential individuals and focuses on their unique characteristics that might impact consumer intentions. Consequently, it serves as a definitive framework for researchers aiming to investigate the effect of these elements on consumer behaviour, establishing a strong basis for future exploration in this field.

These research findings also provide managerial implications for men's skincare businesses and marketers aiming to boost purchase intention among Gen Y consumers in Kuala Lumpur via social media influencers. Characteristics such as the attractiveness, similarity, and familiarity of social media influencers significantly influence the purchase intentions of Generation Y men in Malaysia. Therefore, marketers can apply these three identifiable characteristics in their marketing decisions by endorsing attractive or popular influencers who may share a cultural background with the target audience and whom they are most familiar with to promote skincare products, especially within the men's market segment. Most importantly, these research findings also suggest that social media influencers's similarity have the greatest influence on customer purchase intention. This is where skincare companies can focus their efforts when selecting potential social media influencers to endorse their goods, as this characteristic can significantly impact the purchase intentions of Generation Y men's consumers. Hence, this research provides statistically proven information companies can use to formulate marketing strategies.

7.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aims to determine the effect of social media influencers' characteristics as a source of information on skincare product purchase intentions among Generation Y male customers in Malaysia. The results of the present study have successfully identified three different social media influencer's characteristics that significantly affect purchase intentions: attractiveness, similarity, and familiarity. It offers valuable insights for businesses and marketers looking to select social media influencers based on these characteristics to attract and enhance purchase intentions for men's skincare products among Generation Y consumers. Consequently, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between the characteristics of social media influencers and men's purchase intentions by providing empirical findings, discussions, and theoretical and managerial implications for future studies seeking to explore the relevant topics using an integrated model.

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