

THE IMPACT OF CONTENT, PERSONALITY, AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF  
SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION  
AND EWOM IN FASHION INDUSTRY

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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AND EWOM IN FASHION INDUSTRY

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my main supervisor PROF. DR. FAUZIAH BINTI SH. AHMAD and DR. SUZILAWATI BINTI KAMARUDIN, who taught me advance research techniques to accomplish the PhD journey.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The rising popularity of social media is causing a shift from traditional to digital media in advertising and marketing communications. It also affects a trend towards advanced social media influencer marketing. The increased presence of influencers effectively links businesses and consumers and helps improve communication and purchasing power. However, according to previous research, influencer marketing strategies are still in their infancy compared to other digital marketing approaches, and many firms have yet to tap into their success. Although digital marketing is slowly becoming more popular in Saudi Arabia, empirical research on the link between influencers and buying intentions are scarce. Similarly, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries have expressed worry over a lack of specific supporting ideas and related research findings. Thus, it is critical to undertake more research studies focusing on Saudi Arabia to close this gap, expand the theory, and examine the factors that determine the marketing impact of influencers on customer purchase and electronic word-of-mouth intention. This study aims to address this research gap by assessing the impact of social media influencer content, personality, and trustworthiness on consumers' fashion brand attitudes, purchase intentions and electronic word-of-mouth intention in Saudi Arabia. To support the study's objectives, the author adopted the theory of reasoned action and the halo effect. A close-ended questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from 539 selected fashion brand consumers in Saudi Arabia. The data was analyzed using SmartPLS software. The result showed that influencers' personalities, content, and trustworthiness significantly impacted brand attitude, purchase intention, and electronic word-of-mouth intention. Furthermore, brand attitude significantly mediated the relationship between influencer content and trustworthiness towards purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth intention. On the other hand, brand attitude did not mediate the relationship between influencer personality and electronic word-of-mouth intention. This study aimed to assist fashion retailers, and marketing professionals in better understanding social media influencer factors in improving consumer purchase intention and electronic word-of-mouth intention.

## ABSTRAK

Populariti media sosial yang semakin meningkat menyebabkan peralihan daripada media tradisional kepada media digital dalam komunikasi pengiklanan dan pemasaran. Ia juga mempengaruhi aliran ke arah pemasaran dipengaruhi media sosial yang maju. Peningkatan kehadiran dipengaruhi secara berkesan menghubungkan perniagaan dan pengguna serta membantu meningkatkan komunikasi dan kuasa beli. Walaubagaimanapun, berdasarkan penyelidikan terdahulu, strategi pemasaran dipengaruhi masih di peringkat awal berbanding pendekatan pemasaran digital lain, dan banyak firma masih belum memanfaatkan kejayaan mereka. Walaupun pemasaran digital perlahan-lahan menjadi lebih popular di Arab Saudi, penyelidikan empirikal mengenai hubungan antara dipengaruhi dan niat membeli adalah terhad. Begitu juga, negara-negara Majlis Kerjasama Teluk telah menyatakan kebimbangan mengenai kekurangan idea sokongan khusus dan penemuan penyelidikan berkaitan. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk menjalankan lebih banyak kajian penyelidikan yang memfokuskan pada Arab Saudi untuk menutup jurang ini, mengembangkan teori dan mengkaji faktor yang menentukan kesan pemasaran dipengaruhi terhadap pembelian pelanggan dan niat komunikasi elektronik dari mulut ke mulut. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani jurang penyelidikan ini dengan menilai kesan kandungan dipengaruhi media sosial, personaliti, dan kebolehpercayaan terhadap sikap pengguna fesyen berjenama, niat membeli dan niat komunikasi elektronik dari mulut ke mulut di Arab Saudi. Untuk menyokong objektif kajian penulis menggunakan teori tindakan beralasan dan kesan halo. Soal selidik tertutup telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data kuantitatif daripada 539 pengguna fesyen berjenama di Arab Saudi. Data telah dianalisa menggunakan perisian SmartPLS. Hasil menunjukkan bahawa personaliti, kandungan dan kebolehpercayaan dipengaruhi memberi kesan ketara kepada sikap jenama, niat membeli dan niat komunikasi elektronik dari mulut ke mulut. Tambahan pula, sikap jenama secara signifikan menjadi pengantara hubungan antara kandungan dipengaruhi dan kebolehpercayaan terhadap niat membeli dan niat komunikasi elektronik dari mulut ke mulut. Sebaliknya, sikap jenama tidak menjadi pengantara hubungan antara personaliti dipengaruhi dan niat komunikasi elektronik dari mulut ke mulut. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membantu peruncit fesyen dan profesional pemasaran untuk lebih memahami faktor dipengaruhi media sosial untuk meningkatkan niat membeli pengguna dan niat komunikasi elektronik dari mulut ke mulut.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

COINF	-	Content by influencer
TRINF	-	Trustworthiness of Influencers
BA	-	Brand attitude
PINT	-	Purchase intention
eWOM	-	Electronic Word-of-Mouth



## LIST OF SYMBOLS

$f^2$  - Effect Size

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This chapter presents the background of the study to explore the dynamic contribution of social media influencers in developing brand equity, awareness, and loyalty among fashion brand consumers in Saudi Arabia. The problem statement describes the hindrances that most companies experience in relation to brand marketing and advertising through social media influencers. Therefore, several research objectives and questions were developed to support the problem statement. The researcher proposed the theory of reasoned action and halo effect to determine the study objectives. The research scope deliberates on the total sample population focusing on the followers of social media influencers in Saudi Arabia, while the section on the study's significance describes the fundamental contributions of this study to the literature. The final part of this chapter presents operational definitions of the dependent, independent, and mediating variables discussed in the present study.

### 1.2 Background of the Study

Over the last decade, the number of social media users has steadily increased. According to a recent report, 3.8 billion people subscribe to different social media channels around the world (Datareportal, 2019), thus significantly transforming global communication patterns through creating a new way to collaborate, socialize, and connect (Sistek-Chandler, 2012; Enke & Borchers, 2019). As a result, more commercial brands and organizations have opened official accounts on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest (Lee et al., 2015; Greenwood et al., 2016; Piwek & Joinson, 2016). The rising

popularity of social media has prompted leading companies to advertise their brands through digital media marketing approaches, including social media influencers (Glucksman, 2017).

As part of their marketing activities, organizations used to hire self-opinioned social media celebrities as brand ambassadors (third parties) to promote their specific products or services (Maheshwari, 2009). These individuals would post tweets, pictures, or videos on their social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest to endorse and promote paid products or services of a company to their followers (Senft, 2013; Abidin & Ots, 2016; Khamis et al., 2017; Glucksman, 2017). Today, this role has been taken up by self-appointed social media influencers who use their own social media platforms to promote certain brands.

The effective product presentation leads to a significant relationship between the brand and the influencers' online followers (Abidin & Ots, 2016) resulting in increased intention to purchase, communication, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Wojdyski et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2017). Social media influencers play a significant role in promoting the brand's dynamic reputation and business goals (Kim et al., 2019). They present themselves as potential endorsers by creating a whole range of buzzwords and are much more successful than other marketing trends such as celebrity endorsement (Bafna et al., 2019). Furthermore, influencer marketing activities are more cost and time-effective (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Gandhi, 2019).

According to a Nielsen marketing survey completed in 2019, companies spent more than \$15 billion on social media influencer marketing in 2022, as compared to \$6.5 billion then (Business Insider, 2019). Also, the 'return on investment' (ROI) rate was 11 percent higher than digital media marketing (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Furthermore, Table 1.1 presenting the global social media marketing market share and platforms and agencies from 2016 to 2019.

Table 1. 1 Global influencer marketing benchmark

Year	Number of new platforms and agencies	Market share (in USD)
2016	335	1.7 billion
2017	420	3.0 billion
2018	740	4.6 billion
2019	1120	6.5 billion

Source: Business Insider (2019), Influencer Marketing Hub (2019)

According to another report, 69 percent of influencers endorse their marketing services as business to customers (B2C), while another 31 percent target business to business (B2B) activities (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2019). Influencer endorsement plays a dynamic role in developing brand awareness, engagement, and loyalty among potential customers in social media platforms (Tapinfluence, 2017a). Most brands believe that social media influencing is a convenient marketing strategy that reaches the targeted audience immediately and at low cost (Sassenberg et al., 2012; Jalilvand et al., 2017). Media Kix reported that approximately 80 percent of e-shop marketers claim that social media influencers have enough subscribers to boost their online sales (Media Kix, 2019).

Given the pervasive influence of social media today, Saudi Arabian companies have started to approach social media influencers to promote their products and services. In the country, 42 percent of social media users shop online and respond to their favorite social media influencers (Alotaibi et al., 2019). Similarly, a report published by Step Feed stated that 73 percent of all online users shop for products or services posted by social media influencers (Step Feed, 2019). Further, it is estimated that commercial companies in Saudi Arabia will spend \$15billion on social media influencers by 2022.

### 1.2.1 Country Context – Saudi Arabia

According to the Arab Social Media Report, Saudi Arabia is the leading social media user among the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. This is because 64 percent of the region’s users are younger than 30 years (Salem, 2017). Given that the impact of social media is more substantial when it comes to influencing buyer decisions (Crowd Analyzer, 2018), Saudi Arabia has the highest social media penetration rates in the region, where YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram have a maximum number of subscribers (Alotaibi et al., 2019). According to the same report, Saudi Arabia has 27.80 million active social media users (YouTube 31.40 million users; Instagram 26.80 million users; Facebook 25.92 million users; Twitter 25.05 million users; and LinkedIn 13.96 million users) (GMI, 2021). Thus, it is no surprise that most companies have shifted their marketing attention to social media.

The top industries that advertise through social media influencers in Saudi Arabia are presented in Table 1.2 below.

**Table 1. 2 Top industries that advertise through social media influencers in Saudi Arabia**

Industry	Percentage (%)
Entertainment	94%
Food and Beverage	92%
Travel	91%
Technology	90%
Lifestyle (Fashion Industry)	89%
Interior	80%
Automotive	78%
Gaming	75%

Source: Step Feed (2019)

As the number of social media users in Saudi Arabia is rapidly increasing, social media platforms have become the primary tool in making purchase decisions (Khatib, 2016). Additionally, more and more consumers actively share their electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) with other users in the local social media platforms. The rising social media trend among Saudi Arabian youth further suggests that more and more users have started to follow social media influencers (Binsawad, 2020; Salem, 2017). At the same time, their exposure to traditional mass media has drastically declined.

However, an empirical study by Konstantopoulou et al. (2019) found that several brands in Saudi Arabia failed to reach targeted audiences due to poor and traditional marketing activities. For this reason, companies are barely inclined to promote their products through different marketing activities Cuevas et al. (2020). This marketing issue may be rooted in inexperienced modern marketing techniques where most companies and marketing agencies lack practical marketing knowledge (Abed, 2020). Thus, the concept of modern marketing, mainly the social media influencer, is a novel marketing practice for brands in Saudi Arabia. Learning lessons from the past marketing activities of companies in developed countries, the companies in Saudi Arabia are still struggling to find the right marketing approach that could positively and significantly impact their intention to buy (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). However, the user of social media is higher in Saudi Arabia compared to the GCC countries (Abed, 2020). But still, the concept of social media influencer marketing is novel and un-matured for the companies (Hussain, 2018). However, most companies still practice traditional marketing techniques as a primary marketing strategy. Nefaie (2019) empirically confirmed that social media influencer marketing activities significantly affect the purchasing intention and eWOM of Saudi Arabia's youth towards brands. Still, since it mostly involves young people, it fails to affect the buying intention of older customers toward particular brands (Talkwalker, 2019).

Therefore, many organizations and marketers believe that social media influencer marketing techniques are not mature enough to build a higher level of brand awareness and loyalty among Saudi Arabian customers (Alotaibi, 2019; Binsawad, 2020). Due to the lack of literature, practical and theoretical evidence, the

researcher chose to measure social media influencer' impact on the consumer buying intention and eWOM towards fashion brands in Saudi Arabia. Table 1.3 below presents the top social media influencers in Saudi Arabia in 2020.

**Table 1.3 Top social media fashion influencers in Saudi Arabia in 2020**

Influencer Names	Occupation	Followers on Instagram	Followers on Facebook	Subscriber on YouTube	Followers on Twitter
Noha Nabil	Media personality, socialite, model, businesswoman	8,800,000	241,000	267,000	363,000
Model Roz	Model	12,300,000	354,000	177,000	22,500
Nora Bo Awadh	Make-up artist	3,100,000	462,000	892,000	-
Yara Alnamlah	The Riyadh-based beauty expert	1,000,000	-	33,200	-
Reem Alswaidi	Make-up artist	1,000,000	-	-	-
Tamara Al Gabbani	Saudi fashion designer, television personality and model.	211,000	41,000	1,860	11,700
Aljuhara Sajer	Owner of a boutique	334,000	7,000	516,000	61,700
Nada Baeshen	Saudi Fashion	404,000	-	1,220	-



Influencer Names	Occupation	Followers on Instagram	Followers on Facebook	Subscriber on YouTube	Followers on Twitter
	Entrepreneur				
Aram Kabbani	Saudi fashion stylist and Image expert	113,000	940,000		
Najla Zainy	Make-up artist	102,000	3,200	-	-
Hala Alharithy	Saudi fashion designer	101,000		71	
Ghalia Mahmoudi	Personal style blogger, social media coordinator, Marketing student	91,500	437	11,300	203
Rana AlGhamdi	Photographer expert	94,800		651,000	11,600
Nasiba Hafiz	Saudi fashion designer	37,800	833		
Fayaz Almalki	Television actor and humanitarian	4,400	-	-	5,500

Source: Compiled by the researcher (2021)

### 1.2.2 Fashion Industry in Saudi Arabia

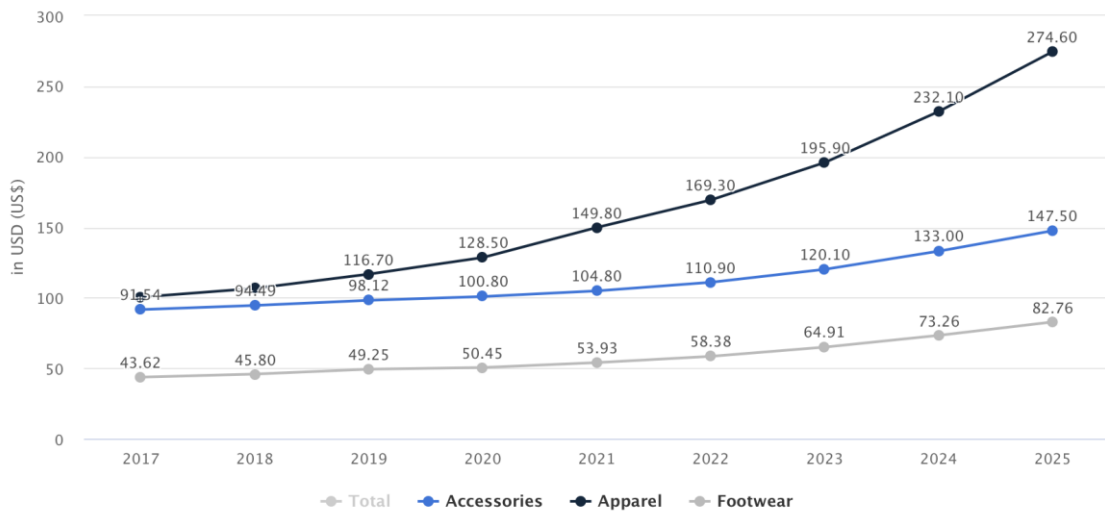
Dynamic e-commerce activities facilitated via social media sites boost the profits made in the global fashion industry. According to Heuer et al. (2015), the business competition in the fashion industry is intense; therefore, it has become

crucial for companies to be actively engaged in e-commerce and use social media sites to remain competitive. According to Dasgupta and Kothari (2018), social media sites have made fashion marketing more accessible and affordable.

According to a recent business report, the fashion industry in GCC countries generated \$50 billion of revenue in 2018. Saudi Arabi ranks among the highest per capita income countries globally at approximately \$500 to \$1,600 per person annually (McKinsey, 2018). At the same time, the number of social media site users for e-commerce in the local fashion industry has increased rapidly. A report published in 2017 by Statistica showed that the number of social media sites users linked to the Saudi Arabian fashion industry increased to 50% in 2017, a number that was expected to exceed 70% by 2021 (Nefaie et al., 2019). Similarly, Arabiya (2016) stated that over 90 million videos with fashion-related content were watched every day on YouTube. In contrast, the total revenue growth in digital marketing advertisements for fashion products on social media sites decreased from 23% in 2016 to 20% in 2017 (Statistica, 2017) and was expected to drop to 9% by 2021 (Statistica, 2017).

In addition, a recent report by Statistica illustrated that the fashion industry in Saudi Arabia generated USD3.88billion in 2022 revenue; furthermore, it is expected to reach USD7.11 billion by 2025 (Statistica, 2022). Most fashion consumers buy apparel, footwear, and accessories in Saudi Arabia (see Figure 2.1).

AVERAGE REVENUE PER USER BY SEGMENT



**Figure 1.1 Top Fashion Products sale in Saudi Arabia**

Source: Statistica, (2022)

<https://www.statista.com/outlook/dmo/ecommerce/fashion/saudi-arabia#revenue>

Revenue in the Fashion segment is projected to reach US\$3.88bn in 2022. Revenue is expected to show an annual growth rate (CAGR 2022-2025) of 22.32%, resulting in a projected market volume of US\$7.11bn by 2025. With a projected market volume of US\$312.20bn in 2022, most revenue is generated in China. In the Fashion segment, the number of users is expected to amount to 19.0m users by 2025. User penetration will be 42.5% in 2022 and is expected to hit 51.1% by 2025. The average revenue per user (ARPU) is expected to amount to US\$255.10.

Some brands have already shifted their focus to designing marketing strategies for their social media websites to maximize their consumer numbers and shorten their campaign times (Jelfs & Thomson, 2016). In this context, social media marketers need a well-defined strategy for social media site marketing that is tailored to specific consumer perceptions (Moctezuma & Rajagopal, 2016).

Approximately 75% of potential Saudi consumers believe in social media influencer e-WOM and other marketing campaigns on social media sites. Most online consumers are women under 35 years (Saudi Arabian Bloggers, 2017). In

response, fashion brands have started to send their product samples to female Saudi influencers who then review them on their multi-social media channels (Saudi Arabian Bloggers, 2017). However, Nefaie et al. (2019) suggested that further research should explore the effect of social media influencers on consumer eWOM intention in Saudi Arabia. Given the socio-economic context of Saudi Arabian society, marketing activities and product promotions must reflect social values, norms, ethics, and traditions to be effective (Gautam, 2017).

The fashion industry in Saudi Arabia plays a wide role in the financial contribution to the economy and also the development of local culture (Ishaque and Tawfiq, 2022). In this regard, officially, the government of Saudi Arabia planned to develop the “Waseem” fashion district in Jeddah, in which the fashion entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and retailers of the fashion industry can develop and introduce more fashion products which could show the local Saudi culture and lifestyle to the world (Algumzi, 2022). After the successful development of the “Waseem” fashion district in Jeddah, the government also planned to facilitate and provide opportunities to the fashion industry in new developing modern cities called Neom city, as could show off the Saudi traditional culture and lifestyle (Algumzi, 2022).

In the context of Saudi Arabia, this study presents a model to measure the effect of social media influencer marketing effect on consumer eWOM intention and purchase intention for marketers and support the design of different digital marketing strategies based on the target consumers’ society and social media environment. Further details relevant to the theoretical, conceptual, and practical gaps in the existing research are discussed in the section below presenting the problem statement of this study.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Over the last decade, social media platforms have become the primary mode of communication; it is raising the people’s living standard through the development of the appropriate ports to collaborate, socialize, and communicate to the world

(Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Vinerean, 2013; Stephen, 2016; Enke & Borchers 2019). The primary role of social media is to minimize the communication gap among its global users and to provide easily accessible communication ports to individuals and organizational users. Simultaneously, it increases the collaboration between users and companies, thus making buying and selling activities far more convenient (Sistek-Chandler, 2012). Considering these facts, social media has a substantial impact on the buying behavior of users, which helps businesses to venture on social media platforms and reach the maximum number of users to accomplish their business goals (Godey et al., 2016). The rise of social media has changed the ways companies advertise their products and services, as it ultimately affects the consumers' purchase intentions (Schaffer, 2013).

Today's dominance of social media has also led to a more sustainable way of advertising and initiated a trend from traditional to digital media marketing (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012). This trend also includes the move towards advanced the global modern marketing phenomenon of social media influencer marketing (Glucksman, 2017). However, influencer marketing is still a novel business practice and has yet to be properly defined; for example, the concept of engaging key individuals to leverage their influence by transmitting through eWOM (Jeong & Jang, 2011; Glucksman, 2017). As a result, eWOM intention has a significant impact on the decision-making process of consumers, brand preference, and purchase intention (See-To & Ho, 2014).

Drawing from the literature, people all over the world are switching from traditional mass media such as TV and radio or the printed press to social media platforms for shopping and searching for any kind of information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). According to a recent report, 65 percent of companies have shifted from traditional marketing to social media marketing activities (Big Commerce, 2020). Brands using social media influencer marketing techniques are more likely to be successful and have prominent strategies in place to deliver a clear message of products or services to the maximum number of consumers (Argyris et al., 2020). In this era of intense competition and opportunity, every company is trying to build a broader business capacity with high consumer intention (Porter, 1989). Bilgihan

(2016) and Hussain et al. (2018) offered that creative marketing and advertisement strategies play a significant role in supporting the consumers' intention to buy products and services. Further, creative marketing advertisements significantly change the consumers' buying intentions (Hussain et al., 2018).

In this respect, Glucksman (2017) stated that social media influencer marketing techniques are the most dominant sources used to promote brands, which are also easy to convey and thus immensely cost and time effective. Similar to Sudha and Sheena (2017) it concluded that many commercial companies worldwide have shifted their attention towards new social media influencer marketing techniques to gain maximum consumer attention. The unstoppable trend of social media has changed the medium of advertisement; for that reason, most companies have started relying on this medium to promote their brands, thus affecting consumer behavior and purchase intention (Ahmad, 2018). Influencers significantly maximize consumer purchasing confidence and reduce uncertainty in the buying process. Today, the integration of social media influencers and marketing activities have proved to be very good for business growth; it also increases brand engagement, customer awareness, loyalty, and interaction while enhancing the sales ratio (Smilansky, 2017; Lee et al., 2019).

In this context, Choi and Kim (2019) examined the successful personality of social media influencers and their significant effect on the consumers' buying intention and eWOM intention. Similarly, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that a social media influencers' dynamic personality builds a positive image in the eyes of their followers, as most followers judge the influencers' character based on their published content (Smith, 2018). However, more research is needed to interpret the impact of the social media influencers on the consumers' purchasing intention and eWOM intention. Overall, there is a lack of studies available to predict the main factors for the kind of personality of the influencer that enhances trustworthiness (Nouri, 2018; Chae, 2018; Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019; Cuevas et al., 2020).

Similarly, influencer marketing techniques have not fully matured in some developing economies as compared to other digital marketing approaches

(Olanrewaju et al., 2018). According to Yang et al. (2009), this delayed development is problematic and caused certain brands to remain unaware of influencer marketing techniques. Likewise, the same brands tend to assume that their targeted audience is not aware of the role of social influencers. Therefore, Singh et al. (2020) argued that influencer marketing may not always be more effective than other digital marketing strategies, depending on the online environment. Similarly, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that social media influencer marketing does not significantly influence consumer purchase intention.

Therefore, a new avenue of research is identified to understand the key factors of influencer marketing that impact consumers' purchase intention (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017) and eWOM (Dasgupta & Kothari, 2018). Thus, Lou & Yuan (2018) and Choi & Kim (2019) identified that the different social media marketing activities of the brands widely change the consumers' intention to buy, which ultimately enhances overall sales, yet, it is crucial to know what kinds of social media marketing activities have potential to change the consumers' positive intention to buy the products (Lim et al., 2017). However, there is a current paucity of research that seek to identify predictors of consumers' positive intention to buy and eWOM (Evans et al., 2017; Kalu, 2019).

Researchers are yet to conclude factors that impact the intention of individuals to buy fashion brands. This is mainly for three reasons; first, lack of large-scale empirical research in the field (Kalu, 2019); second, lack of clear theoretical underpinnings (Abokhodair et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2018) and third, lack of research in the context of GCC countries (Mahdi 2016). Therefore, it is essential to conduct quantitative research in GCC countries to expand theories and find out the social media marketing factors that impact consumers' purchase intention and eWOM.

Several studies examined the factors that significantly affect consumer purchasing intention and eWOM intention (Zahratu & Hurriyati, 2020; Sheikhalizadeh 2020; Anggraeni et al., 2020; Rashedi & Siah 2020). Lawless and Medvedev (2016) concluded that the fashion industry is the most fluctuating industry in the world, which makes it difficult for companies to choose reliable influencers for

their advertisements. Similarly, Sedeke and Arora (2013) agreed that the constantly changing fashion trends make it hard for companies to draw up short-time marketing plans.

Moreover, Evans et al. (2017) and Kalu (2019) highlighted a lack of empirical studies that investigate the impact of influencer marketing strategies on the consumers' buying intention in the specific context of the local fashion industry in Saudi Arabia. Also, there is a lack of explicit underpinning theories and research studies in GCC countries (Mahdi 2016; Abokhodair et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to conduct such research studies, expand the theory, and determine the significant factors for the influencer marketing impact on consumer purchasing intention and eWOM intention in this specific context.

The empirical study of Trivedi and Sama (2020) applied the theory of reasoned action to measure social media influencers' marketing determinants. It suggested that influencer marketing experience and attraction directly influence consumer purchase intention moderated by perceived message process. According to Lim et al. (2017), the consumers' buying intention is influenced by the influencers' trust values mediating by attitude. However, according to Lou and Yuan (2019), the influencers' personality has no significant direct impact on purchasing intention, while Diza (2018) argued that the influencers' trust positively changes both consumer attitude and buying behavior.

Similarly, Diza (2018) applied the Halo effect to justify and measure the reputation of social media influencers among consumers. The study concluded that influencer marketing positively influences the brand's reputation and builds a strong relationship with the consumers. Furthermore, Cheung et al. (2009) indicated that brand endorsement has a negative effect on consumer attitude and behavior. Geiger-Oneto and Minton (2019) examined the consumers' buying intentions and perspectives by using the halo effect model. Earlier, Zboja and Voorhees (2006) carried out a study with 436 participants and found that trust and satisfaction significantly influenced re-purchase intention. Therefore, they suggested the halo



effect model fit to analyze trust and satisfaction towards purchase intention (Butt & Aftab 2013)

Addressing the existing study gaps, the nature of influencer marketing varies from country to country and can be studied from practical and conceptual perspectives. However, this issue has not been enough attention in GCC countries (Khan et al., 2018) and developing countries (Olanrewaju et al., 2018). This research is drawing from the literature on the significant effect of social media influencer marketing on the consumers' purchasing intentions in developed countries (Olanrewaju et al., 2018) and GCC countries (Kamal et al., 2013). It suggests that there is a need to conduct these kinds of studies in GCC countries to justify the effect of influencer marketing on consumer purchasing intention and eWOM intention. Notably, social media influence marketing literature is scarce in Saudi Arabia (Arab et al., 2019; Binsawad 2020) and lacks theoretical frameworks and studied models to guide the measurement of the influencers' marketing effect on the consumers' purchasing intention (Nasser et al., 2019).

In this context, several studies investigated the development of social media influencer marketing from traditional marketing techniques in Saudi Arabia (Khatib 2016; Konstantopoulou et al., 2019). However, more studies need to be conducted to better understand the significant effect of social media influencer marketing on the consumers' buying intention and eWOM intention in Saudi Arabia (Binsawad, 2020). There is an equal lack of research studies on the Saudi fashion industry that investigate the effect of influencer marketing activities on the consumers' intention and eWOM intention (Abalkhail, 2018; Alvarez, 2020).

Several fashion companies are still advertising through traditional media marketing. As shown in Cuevas et al. (2020), some fashion brands do not regard influencer marketing as an essential aspect of advertising. However, influencer marketing advertises the brand on the site and targets all groups and gender of the consumers (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). This made it difficult for companies to identify reliable influencers who can reach the targeted audience in the region. Influencers were advertising many products at the same time, and the high number of

different products they were recommending made it hard for the consumers to choose quality products.

According to Talkwalker (2019), Saudi Arabians aged over 35 do not actively follow any social media influencers. Therefore, it is not advisable for companies to use social media influencers as the primary marketing tool if they want to include all age segments. Nonetheless, Albalawi and Sixsmith (2017) argued that influencer marketing in Saudi Arabia deserves more attention as a novel advertising technique; it may take more time to approach consumers but has much higher potential.

These changing trends in marketing activities pose a significant challenge to Saudi companies, as the traditional marketing techniques fail to reach the maximum audiences in less time and with less cost (Abed, 2020). Even though most companies still advertise in the traditional media, the change to online advertising is irreversible (Todor, 2016). Several empirical studies investigated the role of social media influencer in marketing activities were conducted in western context. Thus, few researchers examined that relationship in developing countries, mainly in Saudi Arabia. However, as per the empirical evidences people are more accepting the influencer marketing idea because of social media influencers are young, more modern.

In this regard, the new research stream calls for further studies to determine the role of social media influencer marketing and the causes responsible for making it a primary tool for advertisement. This is to address the gaps relating to mixed and inconclusive opinions on the role of social media influencers as well as the lack of empirical evidence on the role of personality, content, and trustworthiness of social media influencers in shaping brand attitudes and the consumers' eWOM intention and purchase intention in Saudi Arabia. Mansour (2015) stated that in Saudi Arabia, only few companies advertise through influencer marketing. Therefore, this study proposes a framework for influencer marketing determinants that influence the consumers' purchasing intention and eWOM intention. The framework considers the consumers' perceptions toward influencer credibility (personality, content, and

trustworthiness) as the antecedents, while brand attitude plays a mediating role towards the consequent variables of purchase and eWOM intention.

#### **1.4 Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the phenomenon of social media micro-influencer marketing and its effect on the purchase and eWOM intention of consumers in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the researcher developed a framework to understand how personality of the influencer, content, and truthfulness directly influence buying intention, with eWOM intention and brand attitude as mediators. The current study model can support companies on how influencer marketing significantly affects consumer purchase decisions in Saudi Arabia.

#### **1.5 Research Question**

This study aims to measure the impact of social media personality of the influencer, content, and trustworthiness on consumer purchase intention towards fashion brands in Saudi Arabia. It identified the current research gaps developed with the support of the existing literature. To bridge these gaps, the following 17 research questions were proposed:

RQ1: Does influencer personality have a significant direct impact on eWOM intention?

RQ2: Does influencer personality have a significant direct impact on purchase intention?

RQ3: Does influencer personality have a significant direct impact on brand attitude?

RQ4: Does influencer content have a significant direct impact on eWOM intention?

RQ5: Does influencer content have a significant direct impact on purchase intention?

RQ6: Does influencer content have a significant direct impact on brand attitude?

RQ7: Does influencer trustworthiness have a significant direct impact on eWOM intention?

- RQ8: Does influencer trustworthiness have a significant direct impact on purchase intention?
- RQ9: Does influencer trustworthiness have a significant direct impact on brand attitude?
- RQ10: Does brand attitude has a significant direct impact on eWOM intention?
- RQ11: Does brand attitude have a significant direct impact on purchase intention?
- RQ12: Does brand attitude mediate the relationship between influencer personality and eWOM intention?
- RQ13: Does brand attitude mediate the relationship between influencer personality and purchase intention?
- RQ14: Does brand attitude mediate the relationship between influencer content and eWOM intention?
- RQ15: Does brand attitude mediate the relationship between influencer content and purchase intention?
- RQ16: Does brand attitude mediate the relationship between influencer trustworthiness and eWOM intention?
- RQ17: Does brand attitude mediate the relationship between influencer trustworthiness and purchase intention?

## **1.6 Research Objectives**

The study objective is to determine the impact of social media influencers on consumer purchase intention and eWOM intention towards fashion brands in Saudi Arabia. To obtain fair study objectives the researcher adopted the theory of reasoned action and the halo effect. Purchase intention and eWOM intention was measured as the dependent variable, while perceptions on the influencers' credibility construct (i.e., influencer personality, influencer content, influencer trustworthiness) was measured as the independent variable. Finally, brand attitude was measured as the mediating variables of the study.

## **1.7 Scope of Research**

This study mainly focuses on understanding social media influencer marketing determinants that impact consumers' purchase intention and eWOM towards fashion brands in Saudi Arabia. To obtain the research objectives, the researcher collected the data from walking male and female consumers from the age of 18 to 40 above in different shopping malls in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; Xu (2007) advocated that the young adults from the age of 18 and above has higher spending power for the shopping. According to Kalaba et al. (2021), most of the world's famous fashion and luxury brands opened their outlets/franchises in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, because Jeddah is a highly populated city of Saudi Arabia and also the purchasing power of the consumers is high; thus, the obtained results cannot be generalized to the whole county. In addition, the researcher admitted that the contextual and environmental factors had been excluded from the current study. This exclusion is important because a researcher can't investigate all the potential factors that shape consumers' purchase intention and eWOM towards fashion brands. Accordingly, in the current study, the researcher applied the theory of reasoned action and the halo effect to develop a conceptual framework for the current study. Trivedi and Sama (2020) pointed out that the reasoned action theory support researcher to predicate the individual's intention, not the organizational level. Finally, the present study is limited by time, and the research only covers a specific timeframe from May to July 2021.

## **1.8 Significance of the Study**

This study significantly contributes to the knowledge of practitioners, marketing professionals, influencers, and companies, in addition to the literature. Theoretically, the development of the influencer marketing effect on consumer purchasing intention and eWOM intention model consisting of perceptions on the influencer credibility construct (i.e., personality, content, and trustworthiness) and brand attitude contributes to the academic knowledge in the field. The results of this study would shed light on the critical role of micro-influencer marketing in

influencing the positive purchasing intention and eWOM intention of consumers in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, brand attitude was used as a mediator variable to measure the effect of perceptions on influencer credibility on consumer purchase intention and eWOM intention. Accordingly, Rahmah et al, (2019) defined that the micro-influencer are individual who has been followed by 10,000-50,000 users on different social media channels. To the best of our knowledge, these aspects have not been empirically investigated, even though there are numerous studies on the effect of social media marketing on consumer purchase intention and eWOM intention towards the fashion industry in Saudi Arabia. The empirical result would give better support in understanding the studies related to influencer marketing.

Considering the overall scarcity of research on factors of social media influencers that support brands to shape consumers' purchase intention and eWOM towards fashion brands in Saudi Arabia, the present study is significant from theoretical and empirical perspectives.

Theoretically, the present study contributes to the theory by integrating the theory of reasoned action and the halo effect. To date, limited researchers integrated these two theories to investigate the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' purchases and eWOM intentions. Anchoring on the theory of reasoned action and the halo effect, the present study has developed a new model to understand the role of social media influencer personality, content, and trustworthiness on consumers' eWOM intention and purchase intention towards fashion brands in Saudi Arabia.

From the empirical perspective, the present study findings are highly significant for social media influencers, marketing agencies, marketing professionals, fashion retailers, and academicians. Knowing the key factors that influence the consumers' purchase intention and eWOM provides support in strategizing marketing plans and designing promotion activities to attract maximum audiences and achieve marketing goals. The significant findings revealed that the marketing practices of social media influencers help retailers and marketing professionals to obtain positive eWOM intention and purchase intention. By knowing factors that influence the consumers' purchase intention and eWOM intention, the fashion

retailers and marketing professionals can organize effective marketing plans for promoting the fashion brands in Saudi Arabia.

In addition the findings of this study can help companies and marketing practitioners in their efforts to choose appropriate influencers to advertise for their brands. It can also add insight into the digital marketing strategies, as influencer marketing is the fastest growing sector in the world. Equally, academia will also derive some benefit from the updated knowledge related to influencer marketing strength. This can help them to better understand how influencers change buying behavior and attitude of consumers towards a brand.

## **1.9 Operational Definition of the Variables**

The operational definition of the key terms, dependent variables, independent variables, and the mediating variable are stated below.

**Word-of-Mouth Intention:** Prayogo et al. (2016) defined eWOM as the positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is available to many people and institutions via the internet. Therefore, in the current study, eWOM intention is applied to observe the individual level of sharing experiences and information spread among consumers whenever they are satisfied or dissatisfied with social media influencers.

**Purchase Intention:** Mirabi et al. (2015) defined purchase intention as a situation where consumers tend to buy a particular product in certain conditions. It mainly refers to the behavior, perceptions, and attitudes of consumers. The purpose of taking this construct in the current study is to investigate the purchase intention of consumers, usually concerning their attitudes and perceptions towards social media influencers.

**Influencer Personality:** Social media influencers have specific measurable characteristics or certain (features or qualities belonging typically to a person, place,

or thing. They serve to identify what they acknowledge about the subject matter and have the potential ability to determine the best time to make an endorsement (Liang et al., 2017; Gunnarsson et al., 2018). Influencer personality is a dominate dimension of the social media influencer, the aim of taking this dimension to investigate its impact on the consumers' purchase and eWOM intention

**Influencer Content:** Social media influencers' contents are something that can be expressed in term of speech, writing or any of various arts (Yu & Kimm, 2020). In the current study context, content by influencers is used to measure their influence on the consumers' eWOM and purchase intention.

**Influencer Trustworthiness:** Trustworthiness possibly concerns the receivers' perception of a source as truthful, sincere, or honest (Wallace et al., 2020). In the current study, trustworthiness applies to the influence of influencers' trustworthiness on eWOM intention and purchase intention.

**Brand Attitude:** Brand attitude is defined as a favorable or unfavorable, rational evaluation, emotional feeling, and behavior tendency of consumers towards a product that has a brand (Kudeshia & Kumar 2017). In the present study, the brand attitude plays a mediating role and can be used to test the direct influence of this construct on eWOM intention and purchase intention.

## **1.10 Organization of the Thesis**

This study consists of five chapters, briefly summarized below.

Chapter 1 presents the introduction and describes the history of social media and social media influencer marketing techniques, in addition to the involvement of purchase intention and eWOW intention. Hence, it includes the problem statement, research hypothesis, research questions, and research objectives which are discussed in detail, followed by the strength of influencer marketing in Saudi Arabia and its significance in the fashion industry.



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Appendix A Questionnaire

**Section: A**

Dear Respondents,

I am a doctoral student at Azman Hashim Business School, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study “impact of social media influencers marketing on consumer’s buying intention.” The purpose of conducting this study to examine measuring the impact of social media influencers personality, content and trustworthiness on consumer’s buying intention in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Your participation in this survey will be a volunteer, and it will take around 10 minutes to complete. In this survey, every respondent will enter as anonymous. If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact me at k.aggad12@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and participation.

Note: Please read given instructions below before filling of your questionnaire

- a. For your kind understanding data collector will give you a demo about the social media influencer on the smart device.
- b. Please respond to all stated questions as per your perceptions.

**Section: B**

Dear respondents, please read the following statements carefully and tick (√) on anyone any given box.

S. No	items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
1	<i>I feel like I know the social media influencer well'</i>					
2	<i>Social media Influencers have attractive personalities</i>					
3	<i>Their channels are genuine.</i>					
4	<i>It is important that paid posts match with social media influencers' personalities</i>					

5	<i>It is important for the social media influencers to show his/her true selves</i>					
6	<i>'The information regarding the fashion product that the social media influencer provides is accurate</i>					
7	<i>Social media influencers provide information about fashion product that I need</i>					
8	<i>Social media influencers provide quite professional information about the fashion product.'</i>					
9	<i>I am satisfied with the content generated on social media sites by social media influencers about the fashion brand</i>					
10	<i>The level of the content generated on social media sites by social media influencers about the fashion brand meets my expectations</i>					
11	<i>The content generated by social media influencers about the fashion brand is very attractive.</i>					
12	<i>Most social media influencers are dependable.'</i>					
13	<i>'Most social media influencers are sincere</i>					
14	<i>Social media influencers are reliable</i>					
15	<i>Social media influencers are sincere</i>					
16	<i>Social media influencers are believable</i>					
17	<i>I have a pleasant idea about fashion brands recommended by social media influencers</i>					
18	<i>Fashion brands recommended by social media influencers are of good reputation.</i>					
19	<i>I prefer fashion brands recommended by social media influencers over the other brands</i>					

20	<i>Fashion brands recommended by social media influencers are sensible'</i>					
21	<i>I do trust fashion brands advertised by fashion influencers I follow'</i>					
22	<i>I am willing to buy fashion product/brand that advertised by social media influencers'</i>					
23	<i>I am likely to purchase the fashion product advertised by social media influencers rather than any products available.'</i>					
24	<i>I intend to purchase the fashion product advertised by social media influencers in the future also</i>					
25	<i>I most frequently have intentions to purchase fashion products advertised by the fashion influencers I follow.</i>					
26	<i>I generally recommend products and/or services advertised by the fashion influencers I follow.</i>					
26	<i>I mention quite frequently fashion items advertised by social media influencers'</i>					
27	<i>I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about fashion items advertised by social media influencers.</i>					
28	<i>I have told people on social media channels about fashion items advertised by social media influencers</i>					
29	<i>When I tell others about the fashion items on social media channels, I tend to talk in great detail</i>					

**Section: C**  
**Personal information**

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**Gender**

- Male
- Female

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**Age**

- 18 years to 25 years
- 26 years to 32 years
- 33 years to 40 years
- Above 41 years

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**Education level**

- High school
- Bachelor
- Masters
- Doctorate
- Diploma

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**Monthly income (in SAR)**

- SAR 1,001 to 2,000
- SAR 2,001 to 3,000
- SAR 3,001 to 4,000
- More than SAR 4,001

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**Select the following social media channel you usually use? (You may choose multiple channels)**

- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Snapchat

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**Approximately how much time you spend on social media channels by every day?**

- less than 1 hour
  - 1 – 2 hours
  - 2 – 3 hours
-

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More than 3 hours

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**Do you know about social media influencers?**

Yes

No

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**Select the social media sites where you follow one/more social media influencers?**

Facebook

Instagram

YouTube

Twitter

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**How many influencers do you follow on social media?**

Less than 5

5 – 10

11 – 20

More than 20

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**Did you ever think of purchasing any fashion items which advertises by any social media influencer, if yes then please specify the category of item\_\_\_\_\_?**

Apparel

Shoes

Decoration

Makeup things

Accessories

Jewelry

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**How much do you spend on shopping for fashion items monthly?**

less than SAR 500

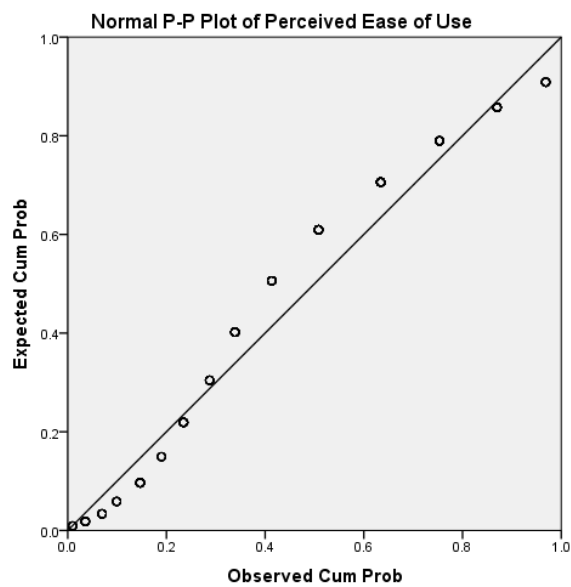
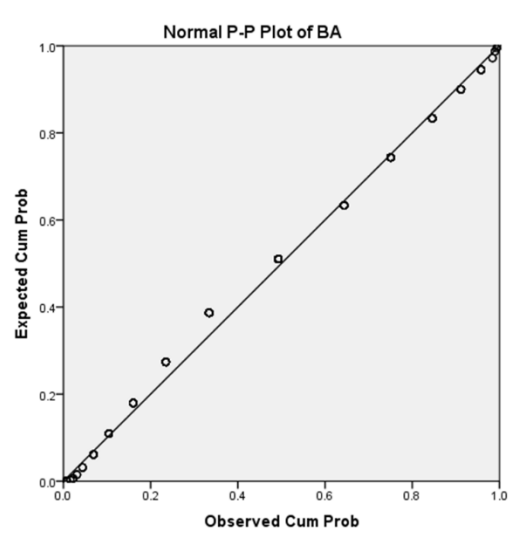
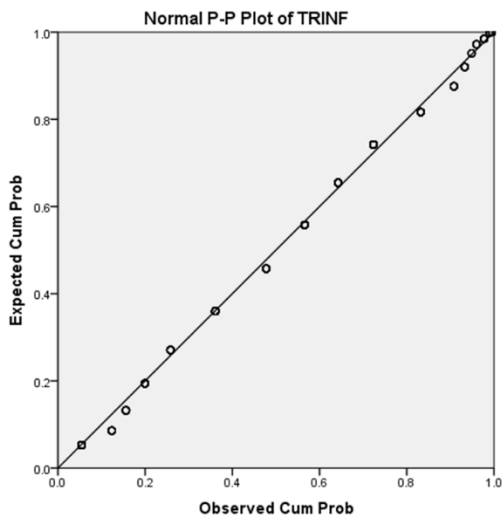
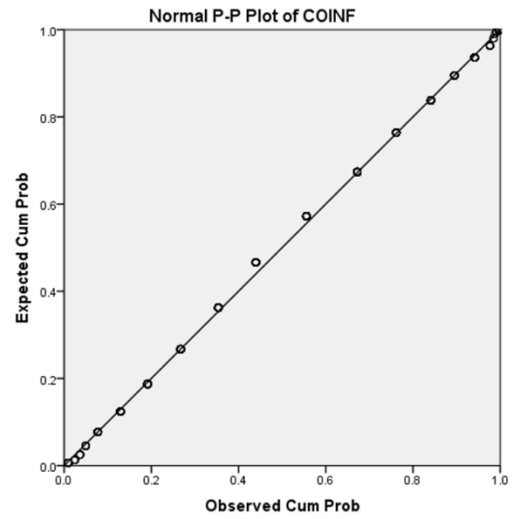
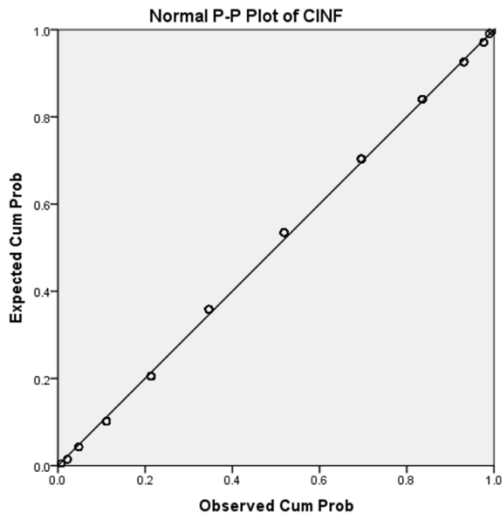
SAR 501 to 1,000

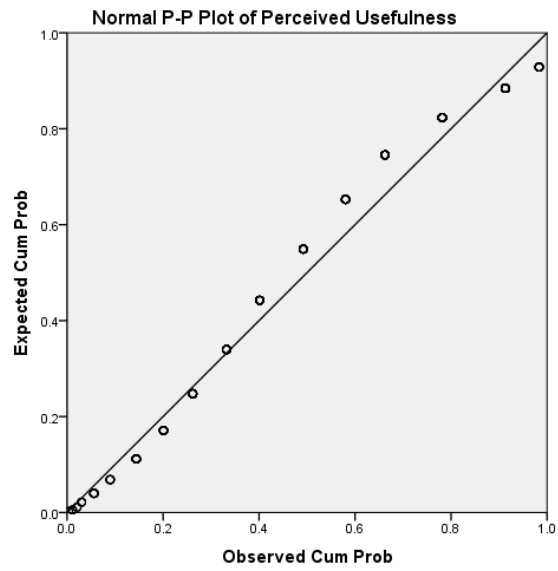
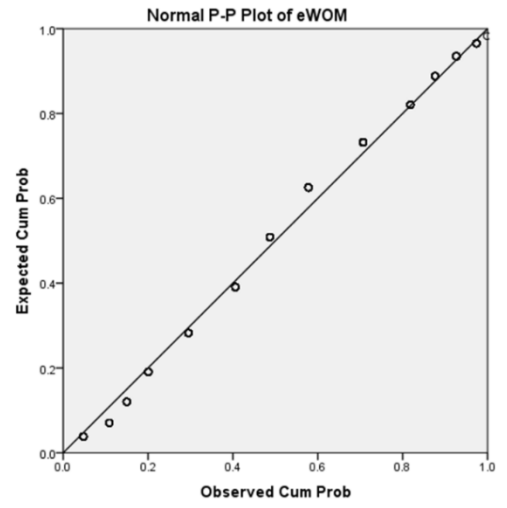
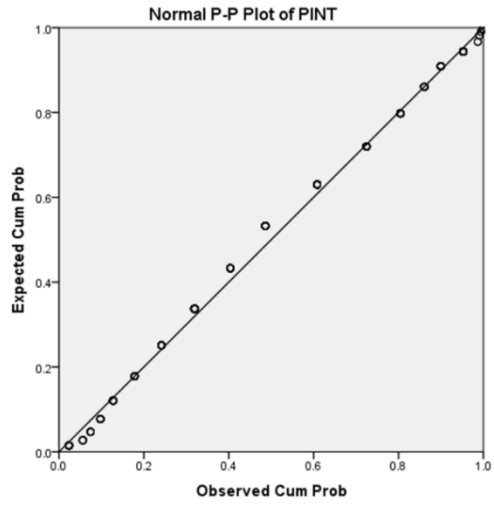
SAR 1,001 to 1,500

More than SAR 1,500

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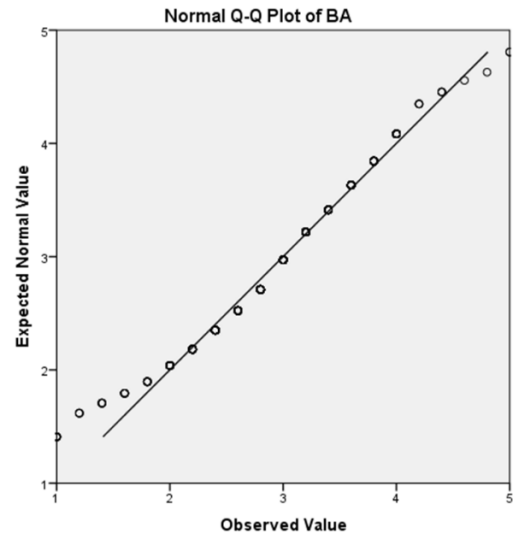
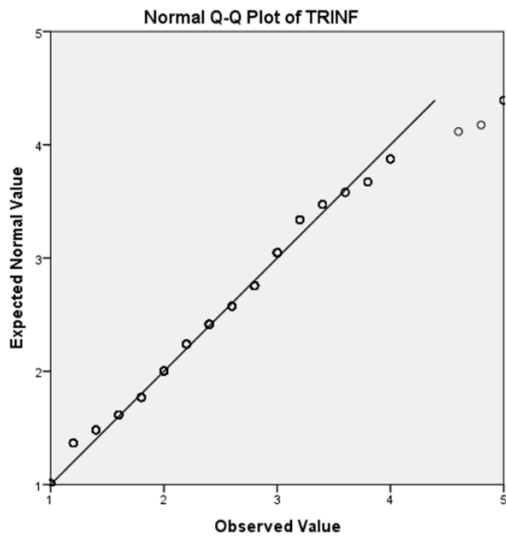
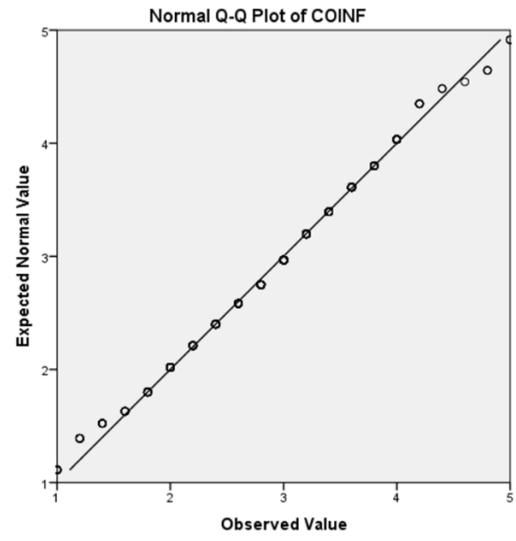
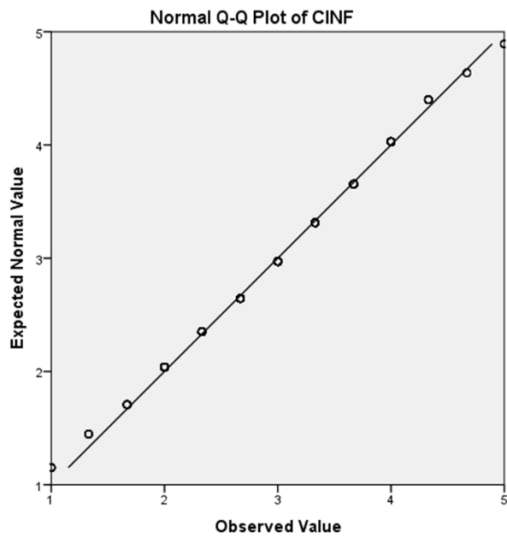
## Appendix B P-P Plot

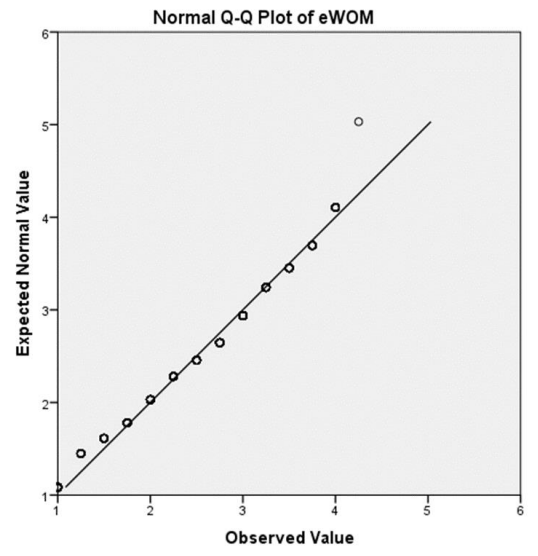
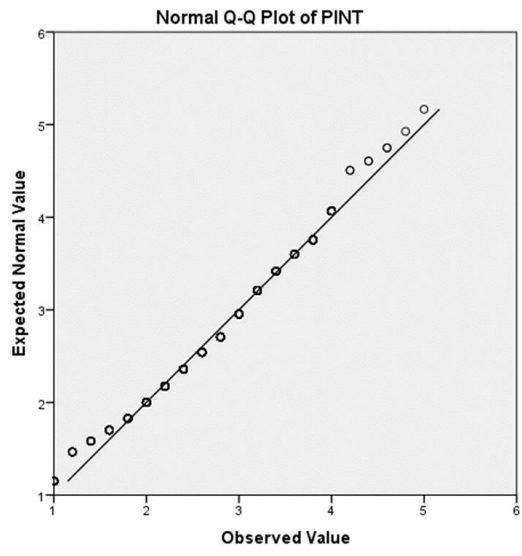




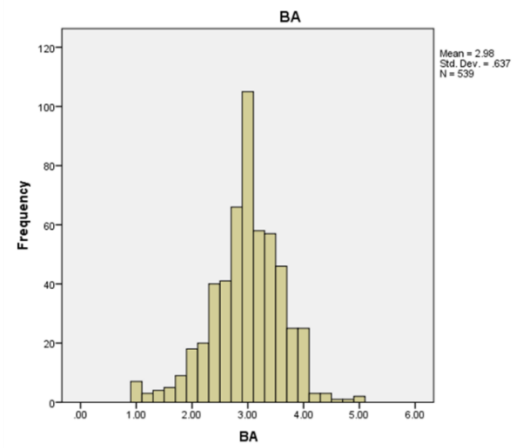
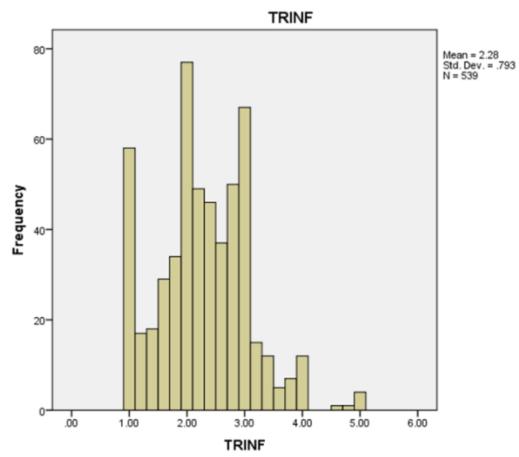
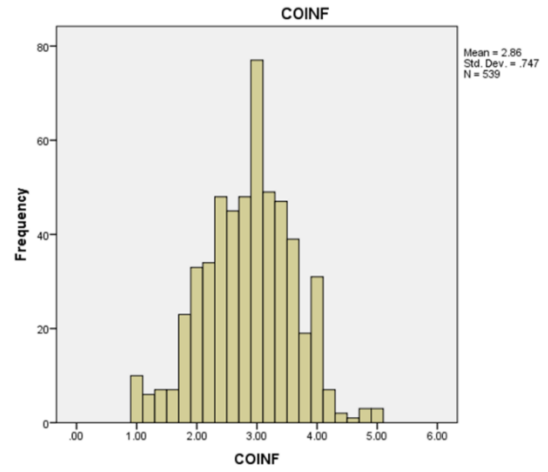
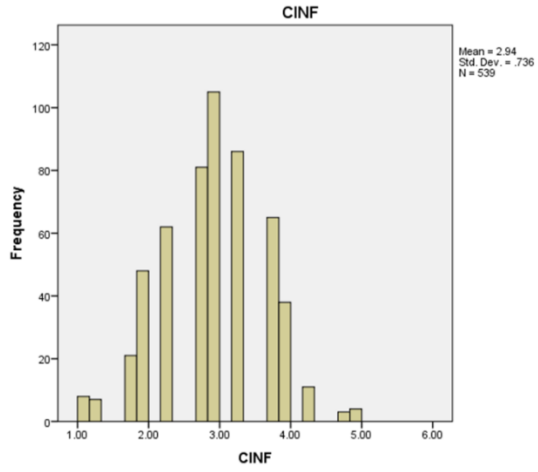


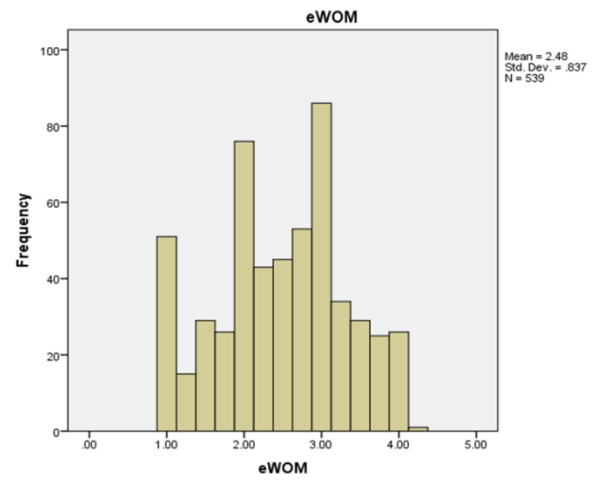
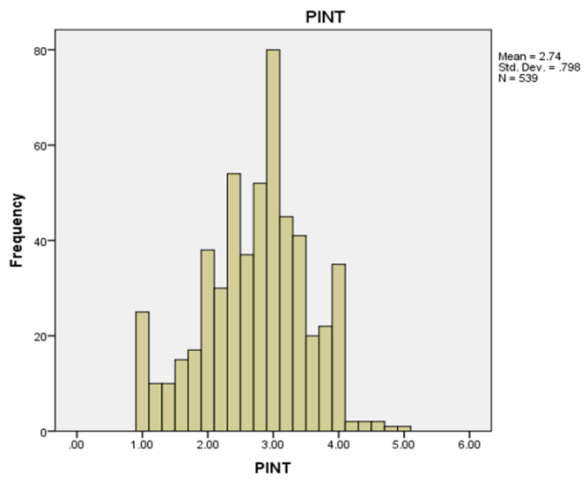
## Appendix C Q-Q Plot





## Appendix D Histograms





## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Aggad, K.; Ahmad, F. and Kamarudin, S. (2021) Investigating the Impact of Influencers', Characteristics, Contents, and Trustworthiness on Consumers' Purchase Intention. *Review of International Geographical Education (RIGEO)*, 11(6), 885-902. doi: 10.48047/rigeo.11.06.106

Aggad, K. K., & Ahmad, F. S. (2021). Investigates the Impact of Social Media Influencers' Personality, Content, and Trustworthiness on Consumers' Purchase Intention and eWOM. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(12), 2368–2384.