



## The Power of Social Media Influencers: A Study of Public Perception of Credibility among Kuwaitis

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** This study aims to explore the perceived credibility of social media influencers and its effect on purchase decisions. The study does that through 3 axes that have to do with attraction, trust and experience. It also aimed to investigate the relationship between satisfaction with content promoted via social media and its relation to purchase intention.

**Method:** The present study uses the surveying methodology through a cross-sectional survey that asked the 1148 respondents (50.4% N=593 males and 49.6% N=584 females) to identify the nature and motive behind their social media use, overall satisfaction regarding the content, and purchase decisions of products and services promoted by influencers.

**Results:** The analysis of the data indicated that comedy and entertainment influencers are the most preferred type of influencers, while fashion influencers “fashionistas” are the least preferred. Based on the results of the regression analysis, positive significant relationship was indicated between the satisfactions with the social media content, realizing the credibility and between Purchase decisions; users’ satisfaction with social media content is positively related to decisions to purchasing decisions of products promoted by the influencers.

**Conclusion:** The study showed the huge influence of social media influencers on purchase decisions as attraction, trust and experience are all vital factors in the purchase decision.

**Keywords:** Social media influencers, SMI, Influencers, Fashionista, Credibility, Purchase intention.

## Introduction

Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of celebrity endorsements in Instagram, Youtube, Snapchat and many other social media platforms. They represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audiences' attitudes through their social media accounts (Erz et al., 2018). Their wide popularity and audience gave them the ability to spread information to millions of social media users. This popularity allows influencers to affect the public opinion, voting behavior, product adoption and shape attitudes.

The rise of social media and the continuous increase in the number of users have attracted many businesses to have a presence on these platforms through their own pages or through endorsed content by celebrities and influencers. This led to the emergence of social media influencers such as fashionistas, Instagrammers, Youtubers and bloggers. These influencers are usually social media users who have a large number of followers and a great amount of engagement through customized content, therefore they are called social media opinion leaders (Rebelo, 2017; Erz et al., 2018). However, they promote products and services they use and endorse for a fee. Although some believe that social media influencers are dishonest and fake, others recognize their influence in promoting businesses and brands (Freberg et al., 2011). Nevertheless, we cannot deny their ability to have a great impact on many people.

The emergence of social media influencers (SMIs) has shed the light once again on the two-steps flow of information model developed by Katz in 1946 (Katz, 1957). The two-steps flow of information suggests that people get their information from opinion leaders rather than from the media. Many researchers (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019) have found that social media users perceive their friends and opinion leaders as more credible sources of information than advertisers. In addition, Goodrich & Mooij (2014) argue that many social media users make their purchase decision during online search and when influencers recommend products. Statistics show that 71% of consumers are more likely to purchase products based on social media

endorsements, while 74% rely on social media to help with making purchasing decisions (Garvin, 2019), Therefore, brands are recognizing the power of influencers to impact social media users' purchasing decisions by making recommendations and product tutorials. As a result, business owners and communication managers are looking for the best ways to utilize influencers for communication and marketing. Communicators are challenged to use SMIs to deliver their messages, however their perceived credibility is unknown. This article aims to understand to what extent do social media users perceive the credibility of SMIs, social media users' satisfaction with the SMIs content and whether the perceived credibility of SMIs affects the purchase decision.

This study is significant because there is hardly any literature on social media influencers in Kuwait. Second, SMIs have changed the way youth's think and act in Kuwait (Alkhalidi, 2016), and it is very important to further understand their impact. Third, social media influencers have revolutionized the Kuwaiti culture and the way business is done in the region. Influencers in Kuwait lead the Arab region in terms of the number of followers and their income from advertising (Alkhalidi, 2016). Reports Mamoun (2018) indicate that Kuwaiti SMIs earn twice as much as other Arab influencers due to their openness in dealing with controversial issues which makes them more attractive and scandalous to follow. Correspondingly, a report by Kuwait time's newspaper argues that Kuwaiti SMIs are the richest and charge the most among their Arab counterparts because of the social, political and economic atmosphere.

These factors make Kuwait a productive context to examine social media influencers' perceived credibility. The findings of this study have theoretical, political and practical implications. The study will make a contribution to the research efforts throughout the investigation of the relation between social media users' perceived credibility of SMIs and its impact on the purchasing intension of the products promoted.

This paper provides a framework for SMIs research in Kuwait and adds to the emerging literature in the world. The study will enhance the body of knowledge on the effects of social media by

drawing from literatures on endorsed content and credibility, thus updating current understandings of the perceived credibility of SMIs. Findings of this paper will provide theoretically grounded evidence for parliament members and policy makers to create and enact social media advertising legislation that will protect the interests of the involved parties. The findings will also provide deep understanding to communicators, practitioners and business owners of the role of trust and perceived credibility of SMIs for purchasing intention.

## **Approach Review**

### ***The Emergence of Influencers***

The term “Social media influencers” is widely used nowadays in practice and among the public, but there are scarce academic definitions that define their role (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). However, scholars Freberg et al. (2011) & Dhanesh & Duthler (2019) described SMIs as people who are expanding their image and self-branding by using social media platforms. Likewise, Westbrook (2009) claims that social media influencers are “micro-celebrities” who use their influential energy to shape people’s attitudes and influence their purchasing decisions. Influencers can be identified by the number of followers they have and the amount of engagement they make. Brands use these influencers to endorse their products and services due to their ability to shape people’s attitudes. In addition, governments and politicians also use influencers to promote their policies and polish their public images.

There are several types of influencers such as lifestyle, fashion or food influencers. Social media users perceive influencers as “common” people, which make them even more interesting and trustworthy than pop celebrities (Boyd, 2006). Through their instant and quick reaction with their followers, influencers are able to build intimate and individual relations. Furthermore, they usually publish posts that are considered more casual and fresher as opposed to traditional media, which allows them to build personal relations (Boyd, 2006). Therefore, specialists Merz et al., (2009) & Greenfield, (2013) argue that social media has revolutionized the media landscape and changed marketing

communication. Social media platforms like Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter have changed the way people shop, learn, get their news, and transformed their communication habits.

### ***Influencers in Kuwait***

Social media influencers in the Gulf region have gained a great popularity and fame in the past few years from advertisements and sponsorships. Social media influencers educate, post about their daily lives and showcase their travels with their followers. The sponsored travel trips, makeup tutorials and food trials offered them a huge stream of income (Fakih, 2018). Also, SMIs in the gulf have introduced a new type of celebrities in the region. Unlike the Western countries, there are no reality shows' celebrities in the Arab countries apart from star academy (Fakih, 2018). In addition, observers argue that celebrity culture is not very popular in the GCC region due to cultural barriers. Acting and creative arts in general are seen as disreputable professions and many famous Khaleeji actors struggle with the traditions and they do not use their family last names. Therefore, the introduction of social media normalized the celebrity culture by self-branding and content creation such as makeup tutorials and travel blogging. Fakih (2018) argues that there are hundreds of SMIs in every Gulf and Arab country. However, the Kuwaiti SMIs and "fashionistas" are the most prominent due to the liberal culture and openness (Mamoun, 2018).

In the past five years, Kuwait has witnessed a dramatic boom in the number of influencers and social media celebrities who use social media platforms to showcase their daily lives and endorse products and services (Rodrigous, 2018). The massive increase in the number of "bloggers", "instagrammers", "youtubers" and "snapchatters" is due to the evolution of social media and the increase in its popularity. The sponsored content in the influencer business is exceptionally customized for every influencer who gives their opinion about products and services for a fee (Abidin, 2016). However, observers argue that when SMI first started recommending places or products people used to believe them, but not anymore. The increase in the number of influencers and their overnight popularity has led many people to

doubt their intentions and their credibility (Rodrigous, 2018). Abidin & Thompson (2010) suggest that SMIs have hidden interests and that's why they put a lot of effort on their content and on keeping their impressions high. Therefore, consumers perceive influencers who receive cash payments to be less credible (Alkhaldi, 2016).

Scholars argue that influencers' credibility refers to whether the influencers' recommendations are perceived as unbiased, true and believable. Therefore, the effectiveness of influencers' messages can be explained by their perceived trustworthiness and level of expertise. Ohanian (1990) developed a way to measure the effectiveness of influencers by looking at their perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness. Therefore, this study uses Ohanian (1990)'s measurement of credibility to examine the perceived credibility of SMIs by looking at their attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise.

Social media has changed many aspects of life including marketing communication. Brands realized the increased relevance of social media and began to spend more money and efforts on their social media communication strategies. Many brands use social media for publicity and campaigns, while others developed special campaigns for their social media accounts. Banks, restaurants and airlines started to utilize social media platforms to market their products and services for their social media followers. Companies and brands use social media competitions and many other advanced communication strategies to engage their followers and increase their brand related communication. The development of marketing strategies and techniques in social media has transformed consumers from being passive recipients of information to active creators (Merz et al., 2009).

The development of social media marketing and SMIs communication has changed how people shop and take decisions. People use social media to look for product information, product-related photos, and feedback from influencers before they purchase. Scholars (Wells et al., 2011) stated that people depend on SMIs posts and reviews about products specially those posted on Instagram. Therefore, the main objective of brands and their advertising campaigns is to get consumers to form an intention to purchase the product. Therefore, social media

users' purchase intention happens when they are willing to buy or pretend to buy the product influencers promoted on social media platforms.

To conclude, although international research proves the importance of social media influencers and their ability to affect people's choices and purchasing decisions, there is lack of research on their role in the Middle East and especially in Kuwait. This study builds on the international approach and aims to provide a ground root for research of social media influencers in the region. This paper aims to provide an understanding of SMIs and their perceived credibility by social media users. The paper also aims at understanding the level of satisfaction with the content provided by SMIs and the impact they have on purchasing intentions. The study hopes to benefit scholars, communicators, public relations professionals, social media managers, politicians, marketing communication managers, and brand managers by providing insights on the effect of social media use, how influencers' credibility is perceived by social media users, and the impact it has on the purchasing intention of the product or service promoted.

Because of the scarce academic research on SMIs and because their perceived credibility is yet to be investigated, this study takes an exploratory and descriptive approach. The study therefore posits the following research questions:

RQ1: how satisfied are social media users with the content provided by SMIs?

RQ2: Which kind of the influencers do social media users prefer to follow?

RQ3: What are the beliefs of Kuwaiti social media users about SMIs credibility?

RQ4: What are the dimensions influence social media users' perception of SMIs' credibility the most?

RQ5: is there a relationship between credibility and purchase intention?

RQ6: Which are the main dimensions of credibility that better help explain the purchase intension of the product promoted by SMIs?

## Method

### Sample

To answer the study's research questions, a self-administered survey questionnaire was conducted for this study. A cross-sectional survey of Kuwait nationals was conducted with a sample of 1184. The data were collected from a convenient sample of Kuwait population; therefore, a bigger sample was chosen to make the study more representable of the original population. This sampling method was adapted by (Freberg et al., 2011). The study uses a non-probabilistic convenience sample because of limited resources and time. Convenience sample is less expensive and less time consuming than probability sample especially in a country like Kuwait where there is lack of population census data. In addition, probability random sampling in Kuwait is difficult due to issues that relate to privacy, trust and social resistance in an Arab society (Alterman, 1998; Mesbah, 2002). Thus, scholars argue that one of the main limitations of the lack of quantitative research in the Arab region is cultural resistance (Alterman, 1998). For these reasons, Mesbah (2002) argues that probability samples in Kuwait are very difficult to obtain.

The survey was pretested and peer reviewed by two mass communication professors at Kuwait University to make sure that there are no ambiguous questions and to avoid any misunderstanding. The surveys were completed via face-to-face methodology and were distributed over two months (November 1<sup>st</sup> till December 31, 2018) to all Kuwaitis in public places such as supermarkets, social gatherings, malls and cafes. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were administered in Arabic. After the data collection, the study used SPSS for data entry and analysis.

The larger proportion of the sample identified between 18 and 28 years of age (46.7%, N = 551), while 30.2% (N = 356) are between 29 and 39 years old. Respondents who reported their ages between 40 and 50 years old constituted 12.4% (N = 146), 5% (N = 59) are less than 18 years and 4.8% (N = 57). Respondents were 50.4% (N = 593) male and

49.6% (N = 584) female. The results show that 31.1% (N = 367) live in Farwaniya district, 16.1% (N = 190) live in Alasima, 16.5% (N = 195) live in Hawalli district and 16.6% (N = 114) in Jahra.

## Measures

The study developed a face-to-face questionnaire with 37 items and was divided into four parts. The first part of the questionnaire included questions about social media use. The second part of the questionnaire asked about the impact of social media on users' perceived credibility of influencers. The third part was used to measure social media usage motivations. Finally, the last part collected demographic data about the respondents, including gender, age and area of living.

To examine which platforms respondents use the most, the study asked: "do you use (Facebook, Instagram, twitter, snapchat)?" The answers were either yes (1) or no (2).

To examine the average time spent on social media, the study asked respondents to specify the amount of time on average they spend on social media daily. Respondents were asked a single question about the total number of hours spent using social media daily on a four-point scale: (1) 0 to 2 hours, (2) 2 to 4 hours, (3) 4 to 6 hours, (4) more than 6 hours per day.

To measure the impact of respondents' perceived credibility of influencers on purchase intention, the study used a credibility scale adapted from Ohanian (1999) and Rebelo (2017). Respondents were asked to rate, on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) their agreement or disagreement with fifteen statements regarding the credibility of social media influencers based on three dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness. The attractiveness dimension statements are: "I follow influencers on social media because they are attractive," "I follow influencers on social media because they are classy," "I follow influencers on social media because they are handsome," "I follow influencers on social media because they are elegant," "I follow influencers on social media because they are sexy." The trustworthiness statements include "I follow influencers on social media because they are dependable," "I

follow influencers on social media because they are honest,” “I follow influencers on social media because they are reliable,” “I follow influencers on social media because they are sincere,” “I follow influencers on social media because they are trustworthy.” The expertise statements include “I follow influencers on social media because they are expert,” “I follow influencers on social media because they are experienced,” “I follow influencers on social media because they are knowledgeable,” “I follow influencers on social media because they are qualified” and “I follow influencers on social media because they are skilled.” (Cronbach’s Alpha = .91).

To measure respondents’ purchase intention, the study used a purchase intention scale adapted from Rebelo (2017). Respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) their agreement or disagreement with three statements regarding the purchase intentions. These statements are: “I pretend to buy the products promoted by the influencers on social media,” “it is likely that I will buy the products promoted by the influencers on social media” and “I am willing to buy the products promoted by the influencers on social media.” (Cronbach’s Alpha = .70).

As for motivations to use social media platforms, the study adapted and modified Alhabash & Ma (2017) list of motivations. In total, the study asked respondents to express their agreement or disagreement with statements pertaining to the following motivations for “pass time,” “understand the political scene,” “weak social ties,” “make new friends,” “gain social acceptance,” “freedom of expression,” “break cross-gender interaction rules” and “jealousy.” Additionally, the study asked respondents to indicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the content provided by social media influencers.

## **Reliability**

In order to analyze the internal consistency of the two scales used in this study, Cronbach’s alpha was assessed. The Cronbach’s alpha for the credibility scale is 0.91 and for the purchase intention is 0.70. Therefore, the credibility scale and the purchase intention scale both reveal high level of internal consistency.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Use Patterns

Before discussing the analysis, the next section will present some descriptive statistical findings of the sample relevant to the research questions. Table 1 shows respondents' answers to the social media platforms they currently use. Instagram is by far the most popular (88.6%), followed by Snapchat (86.5%), Twitter (74.2%), and lastly Facebook (22.8%).

**Table 1**

*Social media popularity*

Which Social media platforms do you use?	N	%
Instagram	1048	88.6%
Twitter	876	74.2%
Snapchat	1023	86.5%
Facebook	270	22.8%

Results show that 27.7% of respondents spend more than six hours per day on social media, 27.6% spend between two to four hours per day on social media and 24.5% spend between four to six hours. Results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Average Time spent on social media daily*

Time spent on social media daily	N	%
0-2 hours	238	20.2%
2-4 hours	326	27.6%
4-6 hours	290	24.5%
More than 6 hours	328	27.2%
Total	1182	100%

Research question 1 asks about satisfaction of social media users with the content provided by SMIs. To answer this question, this paper asks a single question to examine satisfaction of users with content posted by SMIs. Results show 42.2% of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction (dissatisfied and highly dissatisfied) with the content of SMIs. On the other hand, 21.1% expressed their satisfaction (satisfied and highly satisfied) with the content posted by social media influencers. However, 36.7% of the respondents were neutral. Results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Level of satisfaction with social media influencers' content*

Satisfaction with content	N	%
Highly Dissatisfied	191	16.2%
Dissatisfied	306	26%
Neutral	432	36.7%
Satisfied	216	18.4%
Highly satisfied	32	2.7%

### **Motivations for Using Social Media**

As for motives for using social media, the research used Eight Likert-scale items were utilized to examine social media platform's use motivations. Results show that pass time is the highest motive for using social media among respondents ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) followed by breaking social rules for inter-gender communication ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and freedom of expression ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). Results are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Motivations for social media use*

Motivations	N	Mean	SD
Freedom of expression	1152	3.54	1.11
Weak social ties	1155	3.56	1.23
Break social rules for inter-gender communication	1152	3.76	1.11

**Cont. Table 4**  
*Motivations for social media use*

<b>Motivations</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Jealousy from others	1148	3.50	1.21
Pass time	1152	4.02	1.06
Understand the political situation	1150	3.31	1.16
Gain social acceptance	1153	3.31	1.11
Make new friends	1150	3.42	1.13

Research question 2 asks about the type of SMIs social media users prefer to follow. To answer the question, the study asked respondents to choose the type of influencers they prefer to follow from a list of eleven types of influencers adapted from (Rebelo, 2017) and modified to fit the Kuwaiti social media scene. Results show that comedy and entertainment influencers are the most preferred influencers by 14.3% (N = 168), followed by travel and tourism influencers preferred by 13.7% (N = 161), and 13.2% prefer healthy and fitness influencers (N = 155). Surprisingly, fashion influencers “fashionistas” are shown to be the least preferred influencers by social media users as the results show that only 4.9% of the respondents prefer “fashionistas” (N = 58).

A chi-square was calculated to examine the relationship between types of influencers and gender. A Significant deviation was found  $\chi^2 = (10, N = 1169) = 186.98, p = .00$ . The analysis shows that there are statistical differences between males and females in terms of the preferred type of influencer on social media. As can be seen in table 6 below, 97.2% of females prefer makeup and beauty influencers compared to only 2.8% of males.

**Table 5**  
*Social media users' preferred type of influencers*

Types of influencers	N	%
Technology	72	6.1%
Health and fitness	155	13.2%
Nature and photography	89	7.6%
Design and art	60	5.1%
Travel and tourism	161	13.7%
Comedy and entertainment	168	14.3%
Makeup and beauty	108	9.2%
Food	100	8.5%
Fashion "fashionistas"	58	4.9%
Culture and literature	105	9.0%
Religious "religious leaders"	97	8.3%
Total	1173	100%

**Table 6**  
*The gender difference in the preference of type of influencers*

Types of influencers	Males %	Females %	Total %
Technology	70.8	29.2	100
Health and fitness	63.2	36.8	100
Nature and photography	46.6	53.4	100
Design and art	36.7	63.3	100
Travel and tourism	50.6	49.4	100
Comedy and entertainment	58.1	41.9	100
Makeup and beauty	2.8	97.2	100
Food	47.0	53.0	100
Fashion "fashionistas"	15.5	84.5	100
Culture and literature	63.5	36.5	100
Religious "religious leaders"	74.2	25.8	100

Research question 3 asks about the credibility perceptions of SMIs among Kuwaiti social media users. To answer this question, all three means (attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise) were computed and analyzed. The overall mean average of credibility is 2.65 (SD = .78), which corresponds to relatively medium average value of credibility.

Research question 4 asks about the dimensions that influence social media users' perception of SMIs' credibility the most. To answer this question, the mean of each dimension of credibility was computed and analyzed. The results show that all three means fall between 2.47 and 2.82 on scale from 1 to 5. The strongest dimension of social media users perceived credibility of influencers is attractiveness (M = 2.82, SD = .89), the second is expertise (M = 2.66, SD = .98) and trustworthiness is the weakest perceived credibility (M = 2.47, SD = .87).

As for purchase intention, the means of the three items are set between 2.20 and 2.53 on a scale from 1 to 5. The overall mean for purchase intention 2.38 (SD = .99), what corresponds to a relatively medium average value for purchase intention. Respondents show a higher level of agreement when they are likely to buy the product promoted by influencers (M = 2.53, SD = 1.42). Detailed results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 7**  
*Purchase intention summary*

Statements	N	Mean	SD
I am willing to purchase products promoted by SMIs	1173	2.40	1.21
I will likely purchase products promoted by SMIs	1176	2.53	1.42
I pretend to purchase products promoted by SMIs	1174	2.20	1.08

Research question 5 asks whether perceived credibility of an influencer on social media influence purchase intention. To answer this question a linear regression was carried out to predict whether

perceived credibility could significantly predict purchase intention. The results of the regression indicated that the model explained 19.8% of the variance and that the model was a significant predictor of purchase intention,  $F(1,1169) = 288.88, P < .00$ .

To answer question 6 that asks about the predictors of purchase intention, a multiple linear regression was carried out to predict whether credibility dimensions and satisfaction with content could significantly predict purchase intention. The results of the regression indicated that the model explained 27.1% of the variance and that the model was a significant predictor of purchase intention,  $F(4,1148) = 106.47, P < .00$ .

The individual predictors were examined further and indicated that the perceived trustworthiness of influencers ( $\beta = .09, P = .01$ ), perceived attractiveness of influencers ( $\beta = .14, P < .00$ ) and perceived expertise of influencers ( $\beta = .08, P = .02$ ) contributed significantly in the model. In addition, satisfaction with content of influencers ( $\beta = .32, P = .00$ ) contributed significantly in the model.

**Table 8**

*Summary of linear regression analysis for variables predicting purchase intention (N=1152)*

Variables	$\beta$	t	P
Constant	-	6.48	.00**
Attractiveness	.15	4.61	.00**
Trustworthiness	.13	2.58	.01*
Expertise	.08	2.22	.02*
Satisfaction with content	.30	10.87	.00**
F	106.47		
R2	.27		

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

To conclude, perceived trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness of SMIs explain purchase intention of the products promoted by influencers. In addition, social media users' satisfaction with content posted by SMIs predicts purchase intention. That is, the higher the level of satisfaction with influencers' content the higher the purchase intention to buy the products promoted.

## Discussion

This study is among the first studies that examined social media influencers in the Gulf region. The study is also one of the few studies that examined how the perceived credibility of influencers influences the purchase intention of products promoted. The study investigated three dimensions of credibility including trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise. The significant value of this study is the examination of the perceived credibility of influencers and the type of influencer social media users prefer to follow. The current research proves that the attractiveness of influencers is the highest dimension of their perceived credibility, which was prevalent in the findings. In addition, although all dimensions of credibility positively related to purchase intention, attractiveness was the highest.

This study showed that more than half (51.7%) of the respondents spend four hours and more on social media every day. In terms of popularity, Instagram had the highest number of users with 88.6% of the respondents stated that they use the platform, followed by Snapchat with 86.5% penetration rate. On the other hand, almost two thirds (74.2%) of the respondents stated that they use Twitter compared with only 22.8% of respondents reported using Facebook. These findings are consistent with a previous study by Kircaburun et al., (2018), which suggests that Instagram and Snapchat are the most commonly used social media platforms among students. In addition, these results are consistent with a study by AlSalem (2019) which found that Instagram has the highest penetration rate in Kuwait followed by Snapchat and Twitter.

Concerning the motivations to use social media platforms, all respondents reported “pass time” as the main motive to use social media. This finding proves that the nature of social media is built around sharing and browsing picture and videos, which makes these platforms enjoyable and entertaining to pass time. Results show that the second motive to use social media is to “break gender interaction rules.” This finding is interesting as it shows that social media empowers users and allows more freedom of self-expression and

communication. In a conservative culture like Kuwait, cross-gender interaction is seen as inappropriate and culturally incorrect. Therefore, social media helped in breaking these “hidden” rules and allowed more freedom in terms of communication and self-expression. The third highest motive to use social media is the weak social ties. This involves that social media provides a space for making new friends and for bridging social relations. Weak “real-life” social ties make a lot of people use social media for socializing and building new relations.

In terms of the type of social media influencer respondents prefer to follow, the analysis shows that comedy and entertainment influencers are the most preferred among all other types of influencers by 14.3% of the total respondents. The second highest preferred type of influencers are travel and tourism by 13.7%, followed by health and fitness influencers 13.2%. Surprisingly, fashion influencers “fashionistas” are the least preferred type of influencers as results show that only 4.9% of respondents prefer them. However, the analysis shows that there is a statistically significant difference between gender and preferred type of influencers on social media. That is males and females do not prefer the same type of influencers  $\chi^2 = (10, N = 1169) = 186.98, p < .00$ . Males prefer religious leaders, technology and health and fitness influencers, while females prefer makeup and beauty, fashion (fashionistas) and art and design influencers.

In terms of credibility perception, the analysis indicates that the perceived credibility of influencers is a medium average value, which means that respondents do not perceive influencers as highly credible but rather average. However, there are differences in the dimensions of credibility. The results show that the strongest dimension of credibility is attractiveness ( $M = 2.82$ ), followed by expertise ( $M = 2.47$ ). Interestingly, the least perceived dimension of influencers’ credibility is trustworthiness ( $M = 2.47$ ). These results denote that social media users perceive influencers as attractive but not so much trustworthy.

In respect to purchase intention of the products and services promoted by influencers, the results of the current study show that the perceived credibility of an influencer is positively and significantly related to purchase intention, which confirms that higher levels of

credibility indicate higher levels of purchase intention. Although the study uncovered that all dimensions of credibility predict purchase intention, results show that the highest predictor of purchase intention is the perceived attractiveness of an influencer. This implies that social media users are more likely to purchase products promoted by influencers they perceive as attractive. In addition, satisfaction with content by SMIs showed positive and significant relation with purchase intention. This suggests that the higher the satisfaction with content posted by SMIs the more likely they will purchase the products promoted by them.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although this research has reported interesting findings in the context of social media platforms, some limitations were identified and need to be discussed for future studies. First, this study used a non-probability convenience sample, which limits the generalization of the findings. Future research should expand the scope of research to diverse demographic groups and probability samples.

Second, the current study applied a quantitative method (questionnaire) to examine the perceived credibility of influencers. A future study that uses qualitative approach needs to be carried out to discover the underlying perceptions of influencers and social media users' behaviors. In-depth interviews with social media users about their behavior and perception of influencers would be a suggestion to understand their attitudes.

Finally, although this study provides a clear explanation for perceived credibility of influencers, it does not wholly explain the underlying reasons for following them online. Future research should study the motivations and gratification for following influencers online.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, despite the leading role Kuwaiti social media influencers have in the region, statistics and quantitative data are very limited. This study was conducted to provide descriptive statistics and

understand the perceived credibility of influencers and its impact on purchase decision in Kuwait. This study identified credibility dimensions that influence purchase intention and found out that the most influential factor is the perceived attractiveness of an influencer. Although perceived expertise of influencers did not predict purchase intention in previous research (Rebelo, 2017), this study yielded different results. The current study found that all dimensions of credibility (attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness) predicted purchase intention. In addition, the study found that satisfaction with content predicts purchase intention.

Furthermore, this study identified the main motivations for using social media and found out that “pass time” is the main motive. This finding is consistent with previous research (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Charney & Greenberg, 2001) that suggests that pass time is one of the main motivations for using social media. The second highest motive is to “break gender interaction rules” followed by “weak social ties.” The possibility for online communication with the other gender is an important factor that fosters the high penetration rate of social media in Kuwait. Kuwaitis are bound by social norms and traditional values that prevent them from participating or communicating with the other gender publicly (Alajimi, 2000). However, researchers (Wheeler & Mintz, 2010; Alabra, 2012) have found that the Internet allows Kuwaiti youths to cross gender lines in their communication. Thus, the ability to communicate with the other gender in private on social media provides Kuwaitis with an opportunity to bridge the gender gap.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study we recommend the following:

- Enhance influencers’ social responsibility and their role in spreading positivity in the society.
- Because of influencers’ ability to influence their followers, we recommend that they invest their success in educational and awareness campaigns that would benefit the society.

- The study's findings suggest that social media influencers do influence people's purchasing decisions, therefore we recommend that they would publish a disclaimer with their sponsored content to aware their followers that these messages are paid advertising to avoid misleading the audience.
- We recommend that non-profit organizations and social media activists come up with influencers' code of ethics.

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## قوة مؤثري مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي: دراسة عن المصداقية العامة على عينة من المجتمع الكويتي

د. فاطمة سعود السالم

### ملخص

**الأهداف:** هدفت الدراسة إلى مناقشة مصداقية مؤثري مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، وأثر ذلك على قرارات الشراء من خلال ثلاثة محاور، تتعلق بالاجتماعية والثقة والخبرة. كما هدفت إلى الكشف عن مدى رضا المتابعين لمحتوى مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وعلاقته بالتأثير على قرار الشراء. **المنهج:** اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج المسحي من خلال استبانة متعددة المحاور، وعينة بلغت 1184 من أفراد المجتمع الكويتي، بلغت نسبة الذكور فيها 50.4% بينما بلغت نسبة الإناث 49.6%.

وقد احتوت الاستبانة على أسئلة، تتعلق بطبيعة استخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، والرضا العام عن محتوى مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، ودوافع استخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، وقرارات الشراء للمنتجات والخدمات التي يقوم المؤثرون بتسويقها.

**النتائج:** كشفت النتائج أن مؤثري الترفيه والمقاطع الكوميديية هم أكثر المؤثرين تفضيلاً من قبل مستخدمي مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، في حين أن مؤثري الموضة أو ما يسمى "فاشينستا" هم أقلهم تفضيلاً. وقد كشف اختبار تحليل الانحدار عن وجود علاقة إيجابية ذات دلالة إحصائية بين كل من متغير الرضا عن محتوى مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي وإدراك المصداقية وبين قرار الشراء؛ إذ تبين أن رضا المستخدمين عن محتوى مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي يرتبط إيجابياً مع قرار شراء المنتجات التي يروج لها المؤثرون.

**الخاتمة:** بينت هذه الدراسة التأثير الكبير لمؤثري مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي على قرارات الشراء؛ إذ إن الجاذبية والثقة والخبرة جميعها عوامل مؤثرة في قرار الشراء.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مؤثرو مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي، سوشال ميديا، إعلام إلكتروني.

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