

INFLUENCERS ER SOM INFLUENSA": A CASE STUDY OF MALAYSIAN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i></p> <p>Received : 6 March 2022 Revised : 16 March 2022 Accepted : 20 March 2022 Published : 1 April 2022</p>	<p>In Norway, there is a common joke that has been circulating among its digital citizens: influencers are like the flu. Metaphorically explained, the statement refers to Norwegian influencers whose postings spread like wildfire as they feverishly build trust and drive engagement. Similarly, Malaysian social influencers have attracted legions of followers and established credibility through their online postings. To the average social media users, influencers have their own pull factors causing them to keep coming back to check the latest updates, like and share them and perhaps leave some comments too. Hence, the researchers aim to find out the ways these social media influencers (SMI) curate their engaging content and construct a conceptual framework based on Elaboration Likelihood Method (ELM). Using qualitative approach, structured interview questions were given to one well-known, active SMI as the subject of this case study. communication platform. Thematic analysis is applied on the responses to generate common ideas or patterns in the subjects' choice of content, length of post and other attributive factors. An expansion of ELM theory is constructed based on the findings which will also contribute to the expanding literature of social media theory and other theory of persuasive communication.</p>
<p><i>Keywords:</i></p> <p>Elaboration Likelihood Model Social Media Influencers Social Media Persuasion</p>	

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INTRODUCTION (11 PT)

For the millennials or digital natives of today's generation, social media influencer (SMI) is a term which does not require any semantic explanation. Ask any teenagers and young adults today about online influential figures and they can easily roll out some local and international figures of whom they are ardent followers. However, to the academicians, the concept of influential figures might be limited to renowned world leaders, politicians, scientists, and individuals who have graced the pages of history for innovations and victories. In this digital age, social media influencers are not limited to celebrities who naturally have their own fanbase: most interestingly, many influencers are members of the public who turn into "micro celebrities" (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016) by building their reputation through specific knowledge and expertise. According to Marwick (2013) being a social media persona "is a state of being famous to a niche group of people" and it involves the curation of content as well as development of identity that feels authentic to the readers. In fact, SMI understand the significance of "follower engagement" and they will try to maximize their performance to garner positive results (Grave, 2019). Unlike celebrities in the entertainment industries whose fame translates into legions of followers both in fandom and on online platforms, individuals who succeeded in building a strong foundation online through crafting various content curation are indeed part of an interesting communicational phenomenon to explore.

At the heart of social media influencers' fame is the art of persuasion itself. Persuasion involves the use of verbal messages, written communication, and visuals to change people's perceptions and at times, it also involves the change of behaviors (Wang, Dai, Li & Song, 2021). In the past, persuasive communication among the public might have been restricted to written articles and various types of advertisement materials on mainstream media. Today, as social media becomes part of everyday life, persuasive messages are the key to reaching out to the global digital citizen with huge social and economic impacts (Singh, Crisafulli, Quaminina & Tao Xue, 2020). Malaysian digital citizens are also part of this phenomenon. Digital Business Lab (2021) reported that "as of January 2021, 86% of the people in Malaysia use social media. It was a rise of 24% from 2016, when social media users accounted for only 62% of Malaysia's entire population".

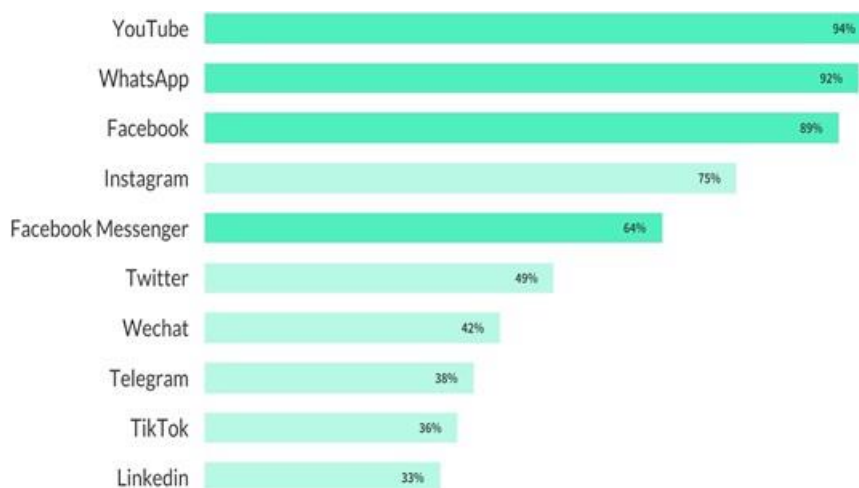


Figure 1 : Social Media User Penetration in Malaysia in 2021

(source : <https://digital-business-lab.com->)

Data presented in Figure 1 above indicate that Malaysians are active social media users which also means that they are exposed to all types of online persuasive messages. YouTube (94%), WhatsApp

(92%) and Facebook (89%) rank as the most commonly used platforms, likely due to the fact that they are some of the longest-standing platforms among the rest. Other platforms, most of which are comparatively more niche in their reach, such as Twitter (49%), telegram (38%) and TikTok (36%), also happen to be newer varieties on the social media front, which could explain their comparatively smaller popularity. Most of these social media users are followers and a fraction of them are the local SMI (they are also followers of other individuals) who have managed to create strong online presence. Hence, this research aims to study the local SMI's approach to persuasive communication. From the findings, a conceptual framework will be developed based on theoretical premises of Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). ELM is one of the well-known theories of persuasion introduced by Petty and Cacioppo (1984). It explains the central and peripheral routes of persuasion which lead to individual attitude change. For individuals who are motivated and given adequate time, persuasion happens through the central route in which they carefully measure their decisions. On the other hand, when elaboration is low (or content is not well-elaborated), persuasion happens through peripheral route where individuals might end up making decisions based on irrelevant input. According to O'Keefe (2019), the ELM highlighted that persuasion "can occur at any point along the elaboration continuum; that is, persuasion can occur even if the receiver is not especially engaged with the message contents. But how persuasion works varies depending on the degree of elaboration". Hence, ELM as a theory of persuasion is able to unravel the dynamics of SMI efforts in ensuring that their postings are appealing and appropriate to generate positive responses. When SMI develop strong engagement among the users, they could eventually use the high number of interactions for other purposes such as personal branding, social campaigns and most importantly, business opportunities. To explore the persuasive communication in SMI content development and produce a conceptual framework based on ELM, the researchers establish two research questions: 1) How do social media influencers curate content and establish engagement among their followers? 2) How should the elements of persuasion in the content be conceptualized based on the ELM persuasive model. This case study applies a qualitative approach via data triangulation method which involves an interview with a social media influencer, and an analysis of data from an e-book content produced by the subject. Findings from this analysis will be used to innovate conceptual framing based on the theory of persuasion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media influencers are individuals who are actively involved in content curation or more commonly known as postings on social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Tiktok (Taillon, Mueller, Kowalczyk & Jones, 2020). Having developed constant postings and gained the attention of many social media users, SMI continue to produce relevant content to ensure that they could evoke interest and trust among the readers. Initially, they might share opinions, thoughts, tips and images. All of them have had a significant turning point where a particular posting went viral, and this immediately threw them into the social media limelight. The rest, as some would say, is history. When the number of followers grows, the level of engagement increases and eventually most SMI turn into brand ambassadors (Cheng, Hung Basaeke & Chen, 2021; Nafees, Cook, Nicolav, & Stoddard, 2021) or start selling their own products. Companies and brands have also shifted their attention on SMI whom they perceive as individuals with powerful persuasive power. By engaging SMI to promote their products and services, companies hope to reach a wider network of potential customers effectively and fast. This phenomenon has obviously not gone unnoticed to many researchers. Growing attention on SMI and their marketing potential has attracted more studies on their commercial roles. For instance, Abidin (2016) and Burke (2017) reported that in the fashion industry, SMI promotion affects consumer perception: the former observed that "everyday users began to model after influencers" via tags, posts and OOTD (Outfit of the day). Similarly, SMI were able to develop consumer trust in computer applications (Haihua, Dandan & Chengjun, 2019) as their postings effectively create brand awareness and purchase decisions (Adreani, Gunawan & Haryono, 2021). Indeed, SMI have managed to penetrate

deep into the marketing and business dimensions using social media as their main platform and their loyal followers as consumers and at times voluntary promoters.

Since the word influencer itself suggests varying degrees of persuasion, studies in SMI from many aspects involve analysis on the theories of persuasion which focus on the way people are persuaded. Some well-known theories are Cognitive Dissonance Theory by Festinger (1957), and Social judgement theory (Sherif & Hovland, 1980). Another significant approach to understanding persuasion is to trace the cognitive process that is involved. According to Gradikiotis and Crano (2015), Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) enables researchers to study cognitive responses to messages and this “has sparked a new approach to persuasion” which largely influences current comprehension to persuasion process. ELM provides the persuader, in this context, SMI, to provide contents that will prompt their readers to “elaborate” on the message conveyed. As they elaborate on this persuasive message, the readers will evaluate it, and then decide whether it will be accepted or rejected. O’Keefe (2019) explained that based on ELM, people react to persuasive messages through two main channels called the central and peripheral routes. Within Central Route processing, readers are highly motivated, and they elaborate the message extensively. In contrast, within Peripheral Route processing, readers are less motivated to digest the persuasive message, often being prone to distractions in the form of other elements online such as pop ups and advertisements. Ultimately, if the persuasive message is accepted and understood, there will be changes in attitude which tend to last. There is a stream of research regarding ELM and social media communication, most of which have applied ELM in their studies with some applying it in constructing a conceptual framework, like Teng (2014) who found that, ELM is useful and appropriate to be applied to social media communication studies as it provides an overall picture of persuasion. Still in the context of social media communication and business, Phung and Qin (2018) utilized ELM in their study on the impact of SMI in acceptance intention for beauty products. Similarly, Wang and Lee (2019) used the same model and they found that SMI did influence purchase decisions for beauty products. Results showed that influencers did influence the consumers in the cosmetics industry through factors such as credibility, accuracy, information quality and usefulness. Findings from a study conducted by Saima and Khan (2020) consolidated Phung and Qin’s (2018) as well as Wang and Lee’s (2019) results that from applying ELM, it is evident that SMI were the strongest influential factor behind consumers purchase intentions via Instagram. Saima and Khan (2020) also reported factors such as trustworthiness, information quality as well as an additional element that is entertainment value as SMI most significant persuasive communication. Clearly, researchers acknowledge SMI’s persuasive power that has caused a significant change in marketing, and consumer management.

Similarly, local research on SMI revolves around their roles in shaping consumption culture (Khalid, Jayasainan & Hasim, 2018) in Malaysia, and purchase intentions on Instagram and Tiktok (Abdullah et al, 2020; Pang, 2021). The focus of these studies is on influencer marketing and consumer behaviors (Mohd Johan, Mohd Zain, Miura & T Mcxin, 2022; Khan & Phung, 2021). The researchers elaborated on the role of SMI in promoting products through “review of products, services and social trends”. All conclusively agreed that SMI have the capability to influence “massive” numbers of followers through visibility of their content postings. Nevertheless, the studies mentioned above did not specifically look at the language aspect of the persuasive messages. In addition, there are few studies that delved into SMI and their roles in the discussion of social issues such as cyber-bullying (Hassan, Yacob, Thuan & Zamri, 2018) and donation drive (Noor, et al., 2021). It is observed that results from these studies further acknowledge the presence of SMI in many aspects of Malaysian life, through their engagement on social media. However, based on the discussion on this established literature in SMI and persuasive communication on social media, it is conclusively evident that studies on the metrics of SMI content curation, have not been given adequate emphasis. It would thus be academically significant to explore the linguistic aspects of digital influencers postings, choice of words, types of content and overall strategies based on the application of ELM as one of the theories of persuasion. Results from this study will fill in the gap in the literature of SMI persuasive communication, particularly from the aspect of local SMI content development

METHODOLOGY

Context and analysis

For this study, the researchers applied a qualitative method as it offers an organized investigation of social phenomena in natural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and it enables data triangulation to be used for data analysis. To explore the development of persuasive messages developed by the SMI, the researcher used interview approach and analysis of the subject's book. This exploratory research involved only one SMI; hence it is also a case study which enables the researchers to take a phenomenon (SMI persuasive content development) and narrow it down to manageable research questions. By obtaining qualitative data from the subject, the researcher was able to go deeper into the phenomenon than relying only on one data. Initially, in 2020, the researcher had planned to interview seven (7) Malaysian SMI who were chosen based on their social media engagement, active postings, and number of followers. Unfortunately, due to movement restrictions imposed by the government to curb the spread of COVID-19, the researcher found it more feasible to conduct interviews by email. As time passed, only two agreed to be interviewed – one for the pilot test and another as the subject. Interview prompts that were constructed to achieve the research objectives were 1) What are the factors that influence your choice of content? 2) Describe the common processes you go through in deciding what to write 3) How do you make your post engaging? 4) Which type of audience engagement do you prefer? These questions were pilot tested, and revisions were made wherever necessary. Next, the researcher analysed a book entitled 'Formula Rahsia : Personal Branding dan Penulisan Viral di Facebook', which was written by the subject Kamarul Ariffin Nor Sadan. Triangulating these two different data sources was conducted by examining evidence from the sources, which were then used to develop a conceptual framework. To ensure the qualitative reliability of this method and analysis, regular documented meetings were carried out to discuss the codes and share analysis.

Sample

As an exploratory case study, the researcher has chosen Kamarul Ariffin Nor Sadan as the subject. The subject is a medical practitioner who is also a director at Greatlife Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation in Johor. The table below specifies the number of followers for his social media accounts.

Social Networking Sites	Followers
Facebook	370, 902
Instagram	10, 000
Twitter	60, 200
Telegram	19, 059

Table 1: Numbers of followers by social media accounts of the subject

The average number of likes he received for each posting on Facebook is from 2000 to 9,000, and the posting is shared by at least 200 followers. He was chosen after his social media presence was evaluated using BRAND24, a media monitoring tool. Brand24 generate percentage of factors such as "number of mention", "social media reach" and "non social reach".

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. The interview

a) What are the factors that influence your choice of content?

Kamarul Arifin listed three main factors which determine his choice of content namely profession, positivity and point of interest. For profession he concluded that part of a doctor’s job is to educate the public on health issues and health concern, and most Malaysians use the internet to find answers regarding health topics. So naturally, he viewed health information as the preferred content of his social media posts. Next, Kamarul Arifin mentioned positivity: although negativity garners more hype and engagements(reactions), he reiterated that he would try to avoid posting negative content. It would only attract negative audience, which in most cases deter new people from following. Lastly, he considered point of interest which explains that social media is about people socializing and discussing a common interest. Hence, he conceded that posting content that typically attracted a large following such as recipes, DIYs, sports or parenting guide is inevitable.

b) Describe the common processes you go through in deciding what to write.

There were five processes listed by Kamarul Arifin. His first step is to read, listen and be aware of aware of current issues. Next, the SMI has to evaluate the need and credibility to address the issues. This is followed by the SMI writing a post by taking information from credible sources to ensure that the content of the post would lead to a positive outcome. The second last step is to re-evaluate the need and credibility to address the issues. Lastly, the SMI has to post his content and be open to criticism as well as avoid being overly defensive if he or she is criticized or misunderstood

c) How do you make your post engaging?

Every post, according to Kamarul Arifin, should have these 4 elements namely fact, language, emotion and impact. For facts, they have to be from credible and reliable sources. SMI also has to use phrases that would be understood by the masses. Moreover, SMI has to carefully select words which evoke emotions among the readers. On top of everything, he states that the aim and conclusion of the post must be clear.

d) Which type of audience engagement do you prefer?

Kamarul Arifin prefers shares. Shares expand the reach of a posting. It helps a post to reach to new circles or community. However, likes and comments are important to keep engagement active and strengthen the bond of an influencer with his/her audience. He has observed that audience prefers to follow an influencer that reacts back (replies comments, and exchanges likes).

2. The e-book

“Formula Rahsa : Personal Branding dan Penulisan Viral di Facebook”, in summary, listed seven main steps to become a successful SMI and effective content curator as shown in the table below.

Steps	Variable
One	Setting of name, profile picture and profile setting i. Choice of name: it has to be real name and not descriptive or company name. ii. Profile picture: a clear, actual picture of the SMI iii. Profile setting : public
Two	Fundamentals of writing i. Spelling: must avoid typo errors and use of all capital letters ii. Punctuation: avoid exclamation marks and excessive use of ellipsis as well as emojis. iii. Paragraphing: clear paragraphing with information being compressed
Three	Choice of Niche and Personal Branding i. Niche: specific topic that the SMI could focus on

	ii. Personal branding: establishing an identity for the followers
Four	Idea and content i. Ideas can be developed from reading, socializing, outdoor activities and taking notes ii. Content: the value of shared postings. SMI must choose appropriate topics to write about
Five	Storytelling and article i. Narrative technique must be applied to ensure the content is engaging ii. Article writing technique
Six	Postings must be i. Time sensitive ii. evergreen
Seven	Engagement and Timing i. shares ii. comments and likes iii. time to post

Table 2: The subject’s seven steps to become a successful SMI and effective content curator

DISCUSSIONS

Based on content analysis of the two main sources of data, the researcher is able to conceptualize a model of SMI persuasive communication online, by applying the ELM as shown in Figure 2 below. Input from the SMI is focused on four main elements of persuasive message curation namely language, fact, emotion and impact. All four elements are crucial to the outcome that he wants to achieve for every posting. It is important to note that ELM emphasizes that an individual can be persuaded at any point along the elaboration continuum (Okeefe, 2019) and persuasion functions differently according to the level of elaboration. SMI want their readers to active their central route so that readers are able to reach high level of elaboration.

1. Central Route to Persuasion

From both the interview and his book, the SMI has identified seven (7) main variables which could influence the reader’s likely amount of elaboration. Effective profiling is the first variable which entails the need to use full name, actual photo that carries professional image and setting of the account to “public” to ensure full accessibility. The second variable is fundamentals of writing which involves taking into consideration spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing. For a persuasive message to be effective, according to Kamarul Ariffin, SMI must use standard spelling. Abbreviations, especially from local slangs could create confusion. Additionally, visually impaired social media users have their own applications (text-to-speech or TTS) which enable them to listen to postings on social media. Hence, abbreviations not only confuse common readers, but it would also not be of any help to those who are visually impaired. In addition, punctuation is key behind creating content which can lead to high elaboration among the readers. SMI have to avoid excessive use of exclamation marks and ellipsis. Ellipsis for instance disrupt the process of reading which may hinder comprehension of the message. Using a lot of emojis will make the posting appear “messy” and the persuasive message might be overlooked. Each posting requires only four to five emojis, above which might render the posting problematic and visually messy to the readers.

The third variable is SMI’s choice of niche and personal branding which are no less significant under conditions of high elaboration. Firstly, what is a niche? In the context of SMI and social media platform,

carving a niche would mean the SMI has his or her own speciality that makes him or her stand out more as compared to others. It could be an area that the SMI can succeed in and this sparks an interest among the followers. In fact, SMI can develop their personal brand (their authentic self) through the value they deliver to their target audience (niche). The degree to which a message is viewed favourably by the follower in part, is influenced by the view supported in the message. Hence, SMI who have developed their own niche are able to post messages with credibility as their arguments are perceived by their readers to carry more weight.

The next variable comprises ideas and content. SMI need consistency in posting their messages to establish strong online presence and significance. Lack of inspiration in curating a content for postings might cause SMI to be viewed by their readers as less significant. Contents for these postings have to be engaging hence the selection of topics is crucial too. Kamarul Ariffin suggested topics which educate, inform and entertain. Followers pay more attention to postings which persuade them to enhance their knowledge and at times, these persuasive messages can come in the form of light topics and comedy. Another type of content that is equally important is the SMI opinions on current issues which are backed by credible sources. This type of content effectively attracts followers' attention, and motivates them to give more thought to the content which in the end causes the high elaboration condition.

One key factor in persuasive content is the quality of postings (Lee & Theokary, 2021; Teng et al, 2014) and Kamarul Ariffin listed four main corresponding components namely information, language, emotion and impact. The researcher believes that these four main components are key to online persuasive communication particularly for SMI postings. The onus is always on SMI to only use reliable content that they have double checked before the postings are uploaded. Lack of credibility will cause the loss of trust among their followers. Language, which lies at the core of SMI postings, has to be suitable for the targeted audience or followers. Most Malay SMI write in Bahasa Melayu because they know it will reach almost all local social media users from all walks of life. Kamarul Ariffin urged SMI to not use terms and jargons as well as words which give the impression that the writer is arrogant and condescending. Moreover, emotion must be infused into a posting but not just through a single word. The sentences must evoke certain emotions that can be visualized and empathized with by the followers. Lastly, all postings must be impactful. SMI aim to convince their followers and potential followers the message that they share will lead to positive behavioral changes which eventually will make them a better person.

The fifth variable introduced in the book is storytelling or narrative technique. In social communication, online or in real life, storytelling has often had a compelling effect. Kamarul Ariffin observed that serious issues that run the risk of appearing complex or high-handed could also be well-delivered through a narration. Therefore, SMI often begin their postings with storytelling before they switch to different techniques. In fact, Kamarul Ariffin observes that female followers prefer the narrative approach more because they could relate to the emotions in the postings. Technical article writing, on the hand, might work only for some SMI. Kamarul Ariffin postulated technical article posting for highly influential SMI with more than 25000 followers. For the sixth variable to develop a strong persuasive presence online, Kamarul Ariffin highlighted the issue of time sensitivity. An excellent write up on the most current issue may lead to the posting going "viral" and this attracting new followers. It is a common strategy among SMI to establish their influential status online. However, the key to this type of posting is time – it has to be posted at the right time, under the right circumstances. Being the first to write about a hot issue does not guarantee a "viral", influential topic but rather, the posting has to be complete and valid. These qualities are ideal to put SMI posting under the factors which will spark high elaboration among the followers. Sustainability of SMI postings are attainable as they grow more influential and significant among their followers. Kamarul Ariffin suggested topics that inspire or educate the social media users in both narrative and technical writing to ensure that they remain relevant in future. With some updates, older postings which are "evergreen" would still be significant to followers.

Lastly, Kamarul Ariffin highlighted engagement among the followers as a variable to be considered. For all SMI, the persuasive power they have is built on the followers' engagement. This engagement is recorded in the form of comments, likes and shares. Kamarul Ariffin prefers shares since it expands the message to new circles or communities. However, likes and comments are needed to ensure that the SMI remain active online and followers prefer influencers who give feedback to their comments in the form of comments and likes. The last aspect of the seventh variable is the timing of the post. Postings must be uploaded in the morning between 7am to 8am, when most followers are having breakfast or just arrived at the office. Next, postings can also be uploaded in the afternoon at 12pm to 1pm when most followers are having lunch or taking a break. Narrative posts or posts that evoke emotion are best uploaded from 8pm to 11pm because most followers will be at home, and they could reflect on the postings with their spouses or other family members. The key to all these is consistency. Without frequent postings, the level of interest will start to decline.

2. Peripheral Route to Persuasion

In the peripheral route of persuasion, followers are not motivated by information provided by SMI. Instead, they are persuaded by other less important factors such as fame and even the person delivering the message. In this route, the followers' motivation to elaborate the message is weak and they will be distracted by other factors like credibility, SMI personality, presentation and others. If persuasion is activated in peripheral route, most likely the followers would be unsure whether to agree or disagree with SMI postings.

Data acquired from the sample's interview and e-book provided some insight into some factors that SMI must avoid in order to ensure that persuasion does not take place in the peripheral route. Weak profiling like using descriptive name like "gadis metropolitan", "lelaki penggodas" or "babygirl", animal names and company names such as 'Ariff Prudential' or "SehaFarmfresh" are not suitable. Social media users dislike the idea of following product agents. Profile picture too, must be properly selected. SMI benefit largely from a professional photo as compared to caricature, animal or company logo as profile pictures. Weak profiling can cause persuasion to be activated in the peripheral route which in the end fails to get the outcome that is anticipated. In addition, a persuasive message cannot be written with too many technical jargons, and ellipsis. Too many emojis in a posting is also not ideal to contribute to high ability to process the message. Postings that have weak organization of paragraphing and punctuation cause difficulty in reading and this also leads to low motivation to elaborate any given information.

Other source factors of low elaboration likelihood would be lack of focus in the content and inconsistency of postings. Not having a specific topic in which the SMI is good at causes the postings to have less pull factor and eventually it will fail to attract the followers to respond to them. Being inconsistent, such as a long hiatus from the social media pages results in SMI losing their followers to other influencers with strong online presence. Lastly, SMI need to be good in writing, using the right language register. Each sentence must be carefully written to avoid misunderstanding: unfamiliar terms or slang words which are understood by only a few are not welcomed in social media postings.

The conceptual framework as shown in Figure 2 consolidated findings by Teng (2014) who found ELM suitable to be used to understand the persuasion process in social media realm. Even though most researchers used ELM to trace influencer marketing (Saima & Khan, 2020; Phung & Qin, 2018; Wang & Lee, 2019), the results of these studies also listed similar factors such as credibility and information quality. These factors are crucial to ensure that persuasion is activated in the central route.

Malaysian SMI are growing in number, popularity and significance. They have become little ambassadors for the issue that they champion, the field that they belong to and the brands or services that they promote. To sustain their social media presence, SMI rely on factors that create high motivation among the followers to think, reflect and react to their postings. Persuasion among the followers must be activated in the central route for them to develop the right attitudes for the intended behavioral change. For instance, if an influencer posts about tips for healthy lifestyle and encourages

his followers to make significant changes such as choosing healthy food and exercising, these calls for attention must be able to make the followers reflect on such issue. They must be able to associate the call for a healthy living by associating the issue with cues such as fitness, clean diet and excellent health. If the postings on this are processed in the central route, the behavior change that takes place will likely be long lasting and the influencer continues to be relevant and influential to his followers.

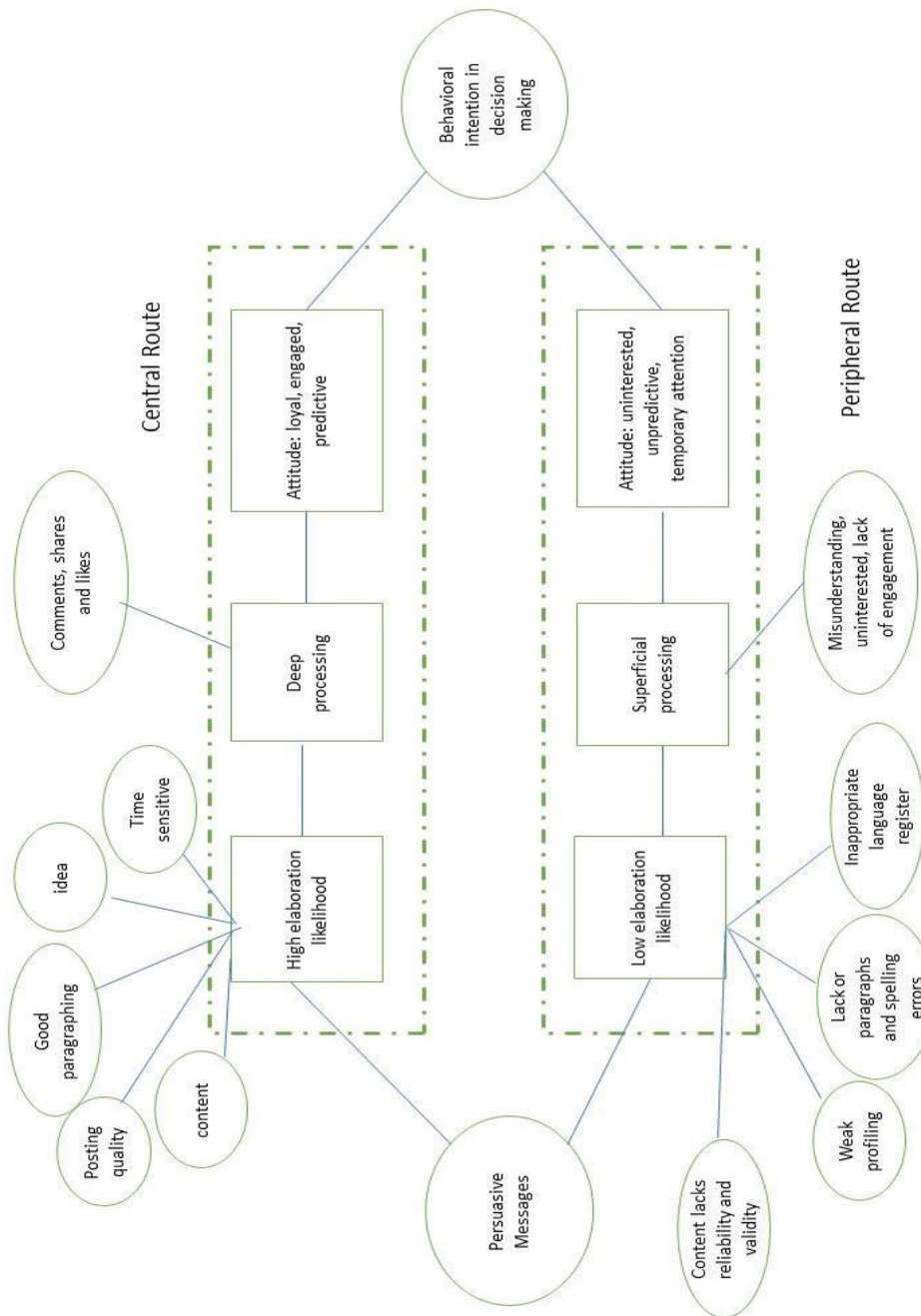


Figure 2. ELM in social media influencer perspective

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Malaysian SMI just like their counterparts all around the globe strive to continue to establish their persuasive powers among the social media users. In order to ensure their social media presence, remain strong and obtain more followers, SMI use several strategies which can be explained through the conceptual model based on ELM. Based on this theory of persuasion introduced by Petty and Cacioppo (1984), persuasion that is activated in central route will lead to the development of the right attitude to produce the behavior intended. Therefore, this study conceptualizes persuasive messages using ELM in the perspective of SMI. The researcher proposes a conceptual framework after the literature review of ELM and content analysis of an interview and information gathered in an e-book written by the subject of the case study, Kamarul Ariffin Nor Sadan. This framework depicts the associations among the constructs of ELM. However, there are limitations to this study. Due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the researchers could only get two local SMI to cooperate : one was used for pilot testing of the interview question, and the other was chosen as the subject for this case study. It is hoped that the use of ELM to explore the curation of persuasive messages and development of strong online media presence would stimulate more research on future ELM studies. Future studies can apply qualitative approaches to look at the linguistic aspects of persuasive communication online. Researchers can extend the scope of research in terms of culture and geography. In addition, theories like social media engagement theory can be further explored and studied in order to extend the current literature.

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