CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

Social media influencers have become today's opinion leaders and act as brand ambassadors on social networks (Schouten et al., 2020). It has been shown that collaborating with influencers in promotional actions is more effective than collaborating with traditional celebrities (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Social media's influence on our personal and professional lives is increasing. Companies and businesses engage with their customers daily through social media platforms(Lim et al., 2017). The role of social media is very suitable for a brand's marketing strategy. Influencer marketing is the art or knowledge of associating people who influence online platforms to share knowledge with followers about sponsoring brands (Gajanova et al., 2020). This makes it possible for brands to collaborate using influencers to promote and introduce their brands to audiences and distribute by creating collaborations to make influencers a way to build interaction with audiences. Many have used social media as a marketing strategy, and brands have made social media a platform that contributes significantly to communicating and interacting with the audience (Chetioui et al., 2020).

Social media influencers, or SMIs, are becoming increasingly popular digitally. SMIs are crucial in connecting brands and customers across several online platforms. According to (L. Wang & Lee, 2021), social media refers to various digital platforms and tools that enable content creation, sharing, and user interaction. By bridging time and distance gaps, these platforms allow individuals and organizations to electronically connect and converse (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Social media is becoming a necessary component of contemporary communication and significantly

impacts many different areas of society, such as activism, news distribution, commercial marketing, and interpersonal relationships. Brands use influencers as part of an influencer marketing plan to introduce and convince consumers (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Figure 1.1 shows the chart of the most used media platforms in Indonesia.
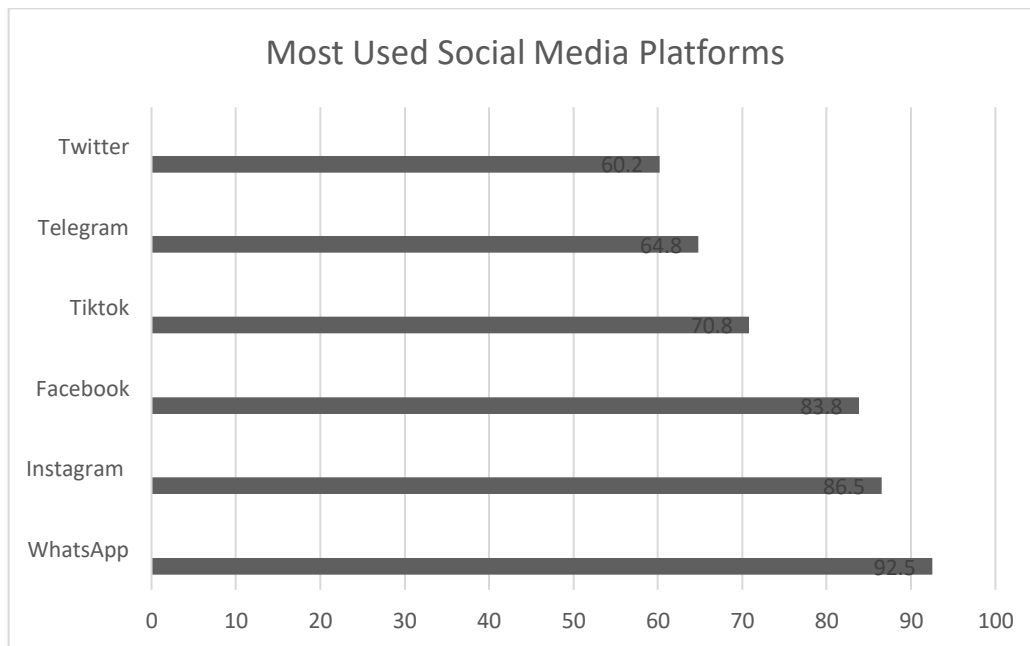
Figure 1. 1 Internet users in Indonesia

Source: social media user data (tekno, kompas, 2023)

Based on Figure 1,1 a UK media company released a report claiming the most used social media platforms. We Are Social, which works with Hootsuite, reported that the duration of Indonesians' surfing the Internet in 2023 was 55 minutes shorter, or 10.6 percent less than last year. This means that in January 2022, the perfect time for Indonesian netizens to access the internet was 8 hours 37 minutes. The data above explains that Instagram has the highest social media ranking and is most used after WhatsApp. Social media influencers' SMI is a component of people who create digital content that is decided by their online following, their characteristics, and a good relationship with commercial sponsors. Instagram is the fastest-growing social platform globally (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

Instagram and YouTube are the two platforms with the most significant impact on influencer marketing since individuals spend more time on Instagram than on similar sites (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). The increasing relationship of social media platforms has contributed a lot more to social media communication, especially in influencer marketing related to the growth of brands (Han & Chen, 2022). Influencer marketing is a prevalent practice that unites many brands using strategies to influence reactions in consumer decisions. This, as many possible interactions with exciting content, can elicit a positive attitude from the audience toward the influence exerted by the influencer (Argyris et al., 2021).

This study discusses how consumer behavior in response to influencer promotions affects the influencers' credibility and followers' reactions. Influencers play a vital role in the dynamics between brands, themselves, and their followers(Stubb & Colliander, 2019). Successful influencers rely on their credibility and brand, emphasizing the importance of maintaining strong relationships with their brands and followers to achieve positive outcomes (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Followers will likely respond positively to influencers if the shared content resonates with their feelings and interests (Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

Previous research from (Belanche et al., 2021) showed that perceived influencer-product congruence positively affects followers' perceptions of the credibility of and attitude toward influencers and negatively affects perceptions of paid communication. Where the factors above can show how influencers' promotional actions affect their credibility and followers' attitude, in this study, we will discuss the effect of attitude and behavioral responses of influencers' followers towards behavior intentions and the influence of the relationship between influencer credibility and behavioral intention. This study aims to explain the gap from this research by discussing how influencer credibility can influence behavioral choice.

A social media influencer (SMI) is "someone who has a significant and active following on social media platforms, which one would not know unless one follows them. Influencers publish material in a specific niche, such as food, travel, fitness, or fashion, on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram (Nafees et al., 2021). People or customers interested in a specific sector can follow and communicate with influencers to stay current on the newest trends. People can build a fan base and gain popularity by uploading original tales and content, leading to social media influencers' emergence (Ao et al., 2023).

Social media influencers have drawn much interest from academics and business professionals because of their potential as an instrument for brand marketing (Lim et al., 2017). Social media influencers' SMIs play a significant role in influencing audiences by interacting on social media, and several brands use influencers to communicate and start relationships with their users (Agostino et al., 2019). Interpret SMI as a person who creates content and is an expert in the field he is good at by having many followers (Han & Chen, 2022).

Influencer Trustworthiness refers to being reliable, honest, and deserving of confidence. It is a fundamental characteristic that influences how individuals perceive and interact with people, organizations, products, and information (Yang et al., 2021). Trust is essential in personal relationships, business transactions, and various aspects of life, as it forms the foundation for cooperation and positive interactions. Trustworthiness is a relational quality that develops over time through repeated contact (Sembada & Koay, 2021). People can predict and evaluate future exchange values based on trust in their partner.

In the digital era, building trust in influencers leads followers to believe they will benefit from their relationship. As a result, customers seek to engage with influencers and intend to purchase endorsed products (Ao et al., 2023). SMI trustworthiness and expertise are more

important in influencing brand attitude than SMI goodwill. This may be because perceived benevolence is more challenging to capture through survey data than the other two components (Nafees et al., 2021).

Product Influencer Congruence refers to the alignment or compatibility between a product or brand and the influencer endorsing or promoting it (Janssen et al., 2022). In marketing and advertising, influencer marketing has become a popular strategy for brands to reach their target audience through individuals who have a significant online following and can sway their followers' opinions and behaviors (Blanche et al., 2021). Product congruence Influencers need high levels of expertise and trustworthiness to build strong perceptions of their credibility in their social media audience (Schouten et al., 2020). Congruence describes the similarity or consistency between the celebrity and the product; the transfer of meaning is facilitated and affected by the influencer and brand or product's congruence (Ao et al., 2023).

An influencer credibility is a consideration customers make when purchasing a product. Perceived credibility is related to advertising value, and users perceive advertising from peers on social media to influence a product's assessment (Shareef et al. 2019). In particular, the characteristics of influencer credibility are the most powerful for influencing consumer behavior. The credibility of experts provides consumers with helpful information, increasing the effectiveness of business promotion (Asyraff et al., 2022). It is essential to underline that celebrity credibility helps businesses exceed customer expectations. Customers respond positively to the campaign because of celebrity credibility. The study shows that customers are intent on following the advice of influencers with high credibility ratings (Ao et al., 2023).

Attitude toward the influencer encompasses an individual's overall evaluation, feelings, and opinions about a specific social media influencer (Lim et al., 2017). It includes the person's perceptions, beliefs, and emotional responses about the influencer's content, personality, values, behavior, and how they interact with their audience (Blanche et al., 2021). In influencer marketing and online media, attitude toward influencers can significantly impact how their followers engage with their content and the products or brands they endorse (Nafees et al., 2021).

Behavioral intentions are a person's conscious and subjective likelihood of performing a particular behavior or action in the future (Sembada & Koay, 2021). It is a concept commonly used in psychology and marketing to predict and understand human behavior (Sembada & Koay, 2021). Behavior intentions are a crucial predictor of actual behavior, although they don't always translate directly into action. Behavioral intentions are indicators of individuals' willingness to perform particular behaviors (Ajzen, 1985). On Instagram, behavioral intentions are closely linked to actual behaviors (Casaloˊ et al., 2017).

The influencer that will be investigated is Fira Assegaf, also known as Sashfir. Sashfir is an influencer in the fashion sector. Sashfir is an influencer and photographer. She is of Arab descent and is quite active on social media. Sashfir began to be known for her passion for fashion, and she also has a business called Lafiye. Lafiye is a minimalist fashion brand that adapts Malaysian style with flowy hijabs and various abayas (primary id, 2021). Lafiye has received much recognition from many customers because its products always meet expectations and maximize all of its products. Many people have purchased this product, which is of extraordinary variety in the market. The following is proof of one of the sales of Lafiye products sold at e-commerce:
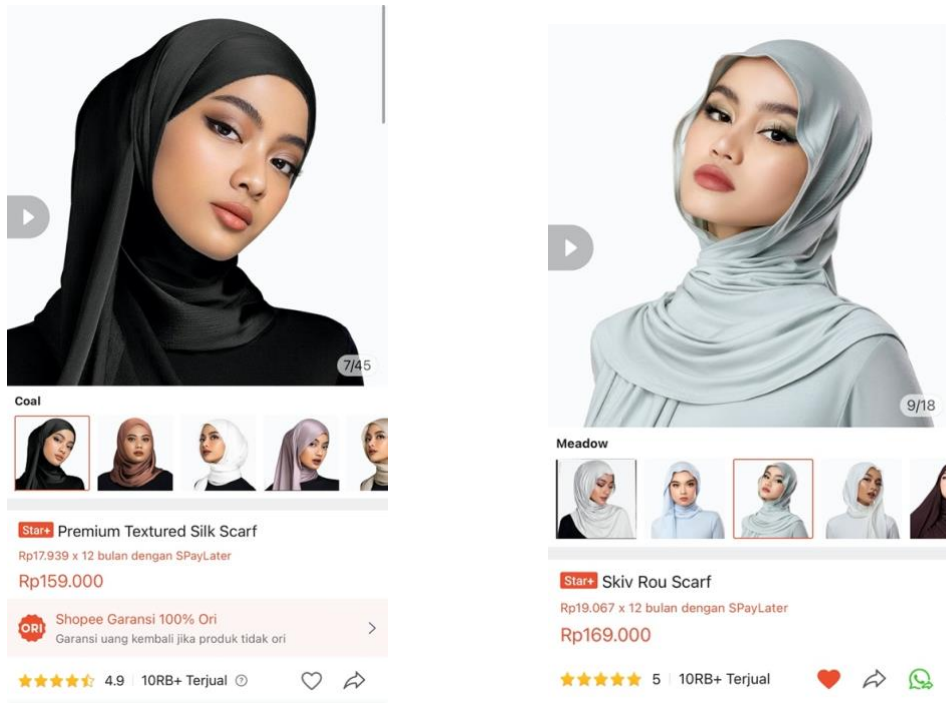
Figure 1. 2 Lafiye Shopee Account Page

The author chose Sashfir as the research setting in this study because Sashfir is credible. It provides awareness to its audience, which can impact customer behavioral intentions, and it provides awareness that the products it sells have different materials and models. She actively shares and promotes her products through her social media. The following is Sashfir's profile and its brand profile, Lafiye :
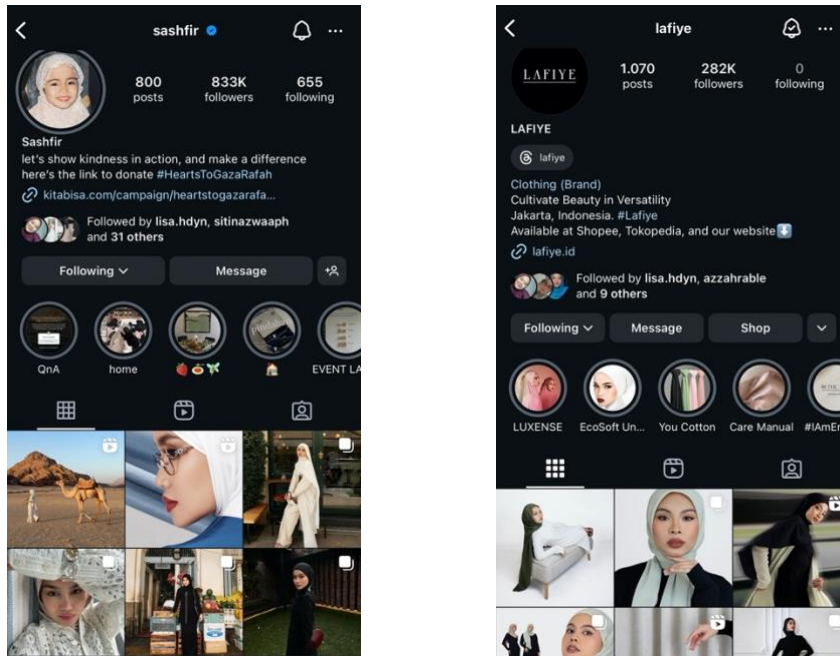
Figure 1. 3 Sashfir Instagram Account Page

This study aims to determine the correlation between the credibility of influencer recommendations in the digital environment, especially in social networks, and the changes that these recommendations might bring about in consumer perceptions of brands and influencers from these influences on behavioral intentions. This research is a modified replication study (Blanche et al., 2021). This study, replicating and adding social media influencers variables, influencer trustworthiness, and behavioral intention, investigates the role of social media influencers on the Instagram platform and researches influencers. Sasfhir, as an object of study, discusses how promotional behavior carried out by influencers will affect their credibility, how followers' responses to influencers impact the products they promote, and how attitude towards influencers and behavioral intentions will affect behavior intentions. This study is located throughout Indonesia and has followed influencers Sashfir.

B. Research Questions

Based on the previous discussion, this study has the following research questions:

1. Does perceived social media influencer influence affect product influencer congruence?

2. Does social media influencer affect influencer trustworthiness?

3. Does product influencer congruence affect an influencer's credibility?

4. Does product influencer congruence affect attitude toward the influencer?

5. Does influencer trustworthiness affect an influencer's credibility?

6. Does influencer trustworthiness affect attitude toward the influencer?

7. Does the influencer's credibility affect attitude toward the influencer?

8. Does influencer credibility affect behavioral intention?

9. Does attitude toward the influencer affect behavioral intention?

C.   Research Objective

1. Based on the research question, the objective of this study is as follows:

2. To Analyze the effect of social media influencers on product influencer congruence

3. To Analyze the impact of social media influencers on influencer trustworthiness

4. To Analyze the effect of product influencer congruence on an influencer's credibility

5. To Analyze the implications of product influencer congruence on attitude toward the influencer

6. To Analyze the effect of influencer trustworthiness on an influencer's credibility

7. To Analyze the impact of influencer trustworthiness on attitude toward the influencer

8. To Analyze the effect of influencer credibility on attitude toward the influencer

9. To Analyze the impact of influencer credibility on behavioral intention

10. To Analyze the effect of attitude toward the influencer on the behavioral intention.

D. Research Benefit

This research is expected to provide the following benefits:

1. This research can be used as a reference for future research

2. This research can be used to gain insight into the attitude/responses of followers towards influencers.

3. This research provides insight into the influence of followers' attitude on influencer credibility.