

The Influence of Social Media Marketing towards Online Purchase Intention of Fashion Apparel during Pandemic

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According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the percentage of households having access to Internet has increased to 91.7% in 2020 from 90.1% in 2019 and is projected to grow each year. As of January 2021, about 86% of the Malaysian population were active social media users, in which there was an increase of 24% compared to 2016 (Muller, 2021). In response to the coronavirus disease outbreak demonstrated how technology transformed the way we carry out business which led to the unplanned and rapid move to online-based consumption such as online businesses and social media marketing. Among the current research interest associated with technology during COVID-19 is those research areas related to e-commerce and social media (Yaacob and Gan, 2021). However, due to the global COVID-19 crisis and people losing jobs, fashion apparel might not be the main concern for the consumer, therefore, it has impacted the fashion industry tremendously (Brydges and Hanlon, 2020). In order to overcome these challenges, businesses need to come up with different marketing strategies such as the adoption to social media marketing. This calls for us to map and understand the influence of 'Social Media Advertisement', 'Influencer Endorsement' and 'Online Customer Review' towards online purchase intention of fashion apparel during pandemic. In order to examine the relationships between these variables, the current study used quantitative methods through a self-administered questionnaire (i.e., web-based survey), in which the scale items were derived from existing literature. A total of 160 completed questionnaires were received from local and international University students in Malaysia. The findings from this study indicates that 'Social Media Advertisement', 'Influencer Endorsement' and 'Online Customer Review' have a positive and significant correlation with online purchase intention of fashion apparel during pandemic ($r = .35$; $r = .47$; $r = .27$, respectively). The research implications include addressing the literature gap in understanding online purchase intention of fashion apparel during pandemic and highlighting the importance of social media marketing for businesses to survive in the 21st century online-based consumption.

Keywords: *Fashion Industry, Influencer Endorsement, Online Customer Review, Online Purchase Intention, Social Media Advertisement*