The Impact of Social Media and Key Opinion Leader on the Purchasing Behaviour in the Food and Beverage Industry in Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

ABSTRACT

In order to survive in the food and beverage (F&B) industry in this modern era, one of the most strategic ways is to expose the brand through social media and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs). This research paper aims to investigate the impact of social media and KOLs on purchasing behaviour in the Malaysian food and beverage industry. The quantitative research method was applied and a survey questionnaire via Google Forms was distributed to samples consist of 120 consumers in Malaysia. The findings showed that social media and KOLs significantly affect the consumers' purchasing behaviour in Malaysia's F&B industry. However, KOLs are more influential than social media in stimulating purchasing behaviour in the F&B industry among Malaysian. Accordingly, F&B businesses is strongly suggested to develop their brand existences in social media, including creating engaging and informative content, responding promptly to customer feedback, and building a loyal following of brand advocates. By leveraging social media analytics, businesses in the food and beverage industry can gain more insights related to customer behaviour and preferences to enhance their marketing strategies and product offerings.

Keywords: Food and Beverage Industry, Key Opinion Leader (KOL), Purchasing Behaviour, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Information technology (IT) has undergone significant growth and advancement in the last five decades. It has become indispensable in conceptualizing and organizing all types of projects, businesses, and endeavors (Berisha-Shaqiri & Berisha-Namani, 2015). Globally, a vast network exists known as the Internet, comprising billions of interconnected computers and electronic devices. This interconnected network enables many capabilities, such as accessing a wide range of information and connecting with individuals worldwide. Statista Research Department (2023) proves that there are 33.47 million users connected to the Internet in Malaysia, and it probably will increase to 33.98 million in 2024. The world is primarily consumed by innovative technology and creative minds. Marketers constantly devise new strategies for delivering messages and persuading customers to purchase goods and services (Kumar, Konar, & Balasubramanian, 2020).

Social media platforms are web-based systems that enable users to actively participate and present themselves to audiences who appreciate user-generated content and the perception of social engagement (Carr & Hayes, 2014). Some examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc. According to Data Reportal (2023), Facebook has the most users globally, which achieved 2.989 billion monthly active users in April 2023. It was followed by YouTube, which potential advertising reach is 2.527 billion. These social media platforms derive their significance primarily from user-generated content, fostering perceptions of user engagement (Carr & Hayes, 2014). In other words, social media platforms are online systems that allow individuals to participate in spontaneous interactions and showcase themselves to a wide range of audiences, including specialized groups, who appreciate user-generated content and feel socially connected.

Key Opinion Leader (KOL) is often defined as a small group of individuals with significant influence in a specific field. In reality, people may concurrently fulfil the duties of KOL, live streamer, and celebrity endorser. Expertise, dependability, and beauty can be used to categorize KOL traits. Expertise refers to the product-related knowledge, experience, and skill that a KOL shares during live-streaming sessions, while trustworthiness encompasses traits like honesty and personal integrity. The KOL's stunning beauty, sculpted form, and endearing voice are alluring. According to social influence theory, people's opinions, attitudes, actions, and choices are impacted by others. As a result, during in-person social interactions with customers, KOL qualities will influence customers' purchase decisions. In conclusion, KOL was defined as the minority of people who have a considerable influence on consumers' decision-making, attitude, and behaviour (He & Jin, 2022).

To survive in the food and beverage (F&B) industry, businessmen rely on every approach that helps increase their revenue and brand reputation. In this case, the most efficient way is to expose the brand through social media and KOLs. Therefore, one of today's most popular themes is the connection between technology and customers' purchasing habits. Marketers and customers may be impacted by this connection (Kumar, Konar, & Balasubramanian, 2020). For instance, while consumers receive daily updates on products or services, marketers may build a personal connection with them. Thus, this research investigates the relationship between consumers' awareness of food and beverage-related information on social media, their purchasing behaviour, and the influence of KOLs on consumer decision-making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Usage and Advertisement

One of the most significantly influencing marketing tools which is able to elevate business performance is social media (Nair et al., 2022). The use of social media has spread widely nowadays. Businesses must use this instrument to keep surviving among competitors and achieve their strategic objectives in this modern era. Companies are realizing that they need to change how they handle Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and create new marketing capabilities that help with customer happiness (Wang & Kim, 2022). To increase brand exposure among customers, most firms turn to internet marketing techniques including blogger endorsements, social media advertising, and user-generated content management (Jamil et al., 2022).

The growth and development of new kinds of social contact is one of the most noteworthy effects of new media. People engage in communication-related activities online for more than a quarter of their time. Collaborations, conversations, and sharing of material are made possible through social media. Social media is being used increasingly for communication by social networkers, businesses, and political institutions. Besides that, social media is also used by businesses and governmental entities for marketing and promotion. Social media usage and advertisement brings lot of benefits to companies as well as consumers. The primary benefit of social media marketing is financial. Comparatively speaking, social media marketing has relatively minimal cost hurdles. Most social networking platforms offer free access, profile creation, and information posting. Based on the latest trend, social media is the most effective way to engage the product advertisements. Social media engagement is such a vital indicator to measure the powerfulness of the message or content delivered by a brand via social media (Kusumasondjaja, 2021).

The study of the impact of social media on purchasing behaviour may include several factors, including social media usage, advertisement, and accessibility of information. Utilising social media positively affects how risk is perceived (Li, 2023). The consumer may use the social media platform for different kinds of purposes. However, most consumers will also have the same aim, which is to research the product before paying for the goods or services, including, of course, food and beverages. Consumers will often follow the status of their favourite restaurants to grab any news or promotions. Simultaneously, most businesses are now likely to adopt social media as the platform to focus on for promoting their products or services. This action has raised accessible information about an organisation on a larger platform and spread it to people. Consumers can receive the latest information shared on social media and thus influence their decision-making for purchasing such products or services. The various accessibility information disclosed by an organisation immediately contributes to the effect of consumers' pre-purchase opinions (Kumar, Konar, & Balasubramanian, 2020). The purchasing behaviour of consumers may be influenced by Word-of-Mouth (WoM) on social media (Yuan & Peluso, 2021). On the other hand, KOLs who publish quality content on their social media platforms substantially contribute to the effect on consumers' purchasing behaviour (Li, 2023). The content of the status publicised is a crucial aspect that may directly impact the attraction of the message delivered to the readers. The user engagement in social media posts increased with the degree of match between the image and content (Li & Xie, 2019). The clever marketing team will create engaging content to publish on social media. The study also found that social media advertisements and online ordering systems significantly determined consumers' purchasing behaviour (Kumar, Konar, & Balasubramanian, 2020).

Accessibility of Information

Organisations are benefiting from numerous informational benefits as a result of the development of various information technologies. The increased accessibility of information is one of the most significant effects of social media use; businesses may learn more about their potential clients from the conversations taking place on these platforms. Similar to that, they may quickly and simply use social media to learn about their rivals and the market. Social media is defined as a variety of websites that allow users to share information online, such social networking sites. Social media does boost information accessibility. However, there are relatively few research that look into this link. As a result, this study aims to investigate the connection between social media use and how it affects the availability of information.

In the context of marketing and advertising, social media is crucial for influencing customers' purchase decisions (Kumar, Konar, & Balasubramanian, 2020). Social media has altered the course of human history. Information is now more readily available than ever because to the emergence of various social communication platforms and channels. As a result, buyers and sellers have stronger relationships since customers are more knowledgeable about the items they may choose from and more connected to the sellers (Jiuan, 2019).

Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

The process of making decisions and engaging in physical action in order to acquire, evaluate, utilise, and dispose of products and services is known as consumer behaviour (Shamri, Suhaimi, & Alwi, 2021). Consumer behaviour is influenced by several variables, including psychological, cultural, economic, and individual aspects. Due to changes in societal norms, country industrialization, and globalisation that influence consumer product selections, consumer purchasing behaviour may also alter over time. Even after recognising all the elements influencing customer behaviour, it remains extremely difficult to completely comprehend. According to Auf, Meddour, Saoula, & Majid (2018), because there are so many alternatives accessible, it can be challenging to decide what to buy in the marketing setting. Customers' ultimate decisions are influenced by a number of background elements that are important. Therefore, it is vital for the marketing team to comprehend the aspects that affect consumers' decision-making and purchase processes.

Online Ordering System

Nowadays, many consumers intend to buy a product online rather than visit the physical store. This is due to the convenience of online ordering system. According to Jiuan (2019), the restaurant business has also begun to use the internet to draw in more clients. To enable consumers to place orders, several restaurants have started to adopt online ordering systems. When clients place an order online, the data and information are sent to the restaurant's database. The restaurant's screen will also show the orders of the patrons.

From the customers point of view, they find that online ordering procedure is convenient. Through the internet, clients may select the restaurant of their choice, place their order, and examine the restaurant's menu. They have the choice of either having their food delivered or picked up. If the consumer selects delivery, the restaurant's delivery person will bring the food to their home. In contrast, if a customer chooses to pick up, they can go to the restaurant to pick up their food. Customer can pay for the food with cash, a credit card, or PayPal.

The integration of an online ordering system in the food and beverage industry has revolutionized the way consumers interact with restaurants and make their purchasing decisions. This digital transformation has significantly impacted consumer behaviour,

making it imperative for businesses to adapt and thrive in a rapidly evolving market landscape. Since digital consumption is growing and traditional media consumption is declining due to gift generation, businesses must adapt their methods of operation and implement online business strategies by setting up firms and providing Made-to-Order (MTO) food without a physical store or PayPal (Satya, Teja, & Shrivastava, 2022). The shift towards online ordering systems has been driven by several factors that have reshaped the food and beverage industry. One of the key driving forces is the growing preference for convenience among consumers. In today's fast-paced world, individuals are seeking efficient and time-saving methods to fulfill their needs, and online ordering provides a seamless solution. Jiuan (2019) highlights that this trend has not only impacted traditional retail sectors, but has also found its way into the restaurant business. As more consumers turn to the internet for their everyday needs, restaurants have seized the opportunity to attract a larger client base by implementing user-friendly online ordering systems.

The core functionality of the online ordering system lies in its ability to streamline the ordering process for consumers. Through this system, patrons are empowered to browse through an extensive digital menu at their own pace. This approach enhances the overall customer experience, allowing them to make informed decisions based on the available choices. Moreover, the digital menu format offers a visually engaging platform where customers can explore various dishes and offerings in a more interactive manner compared to traditional paper menus. Upon selecting their desired items, the convenience of the online ordering system becomes even more apparent. Customers are presented with flexible options for receiving their orders, which align with their individual preferences and schedules. They have option for home delivery, benefiting from the ease of having restaurant-quality food brought directly to their doorstep. This is particularly appealing to those seeking a hassle-free dining experience in the comfort of their own homes. Conversely, for individuals who may prefer to personally collect their orders or are located in close proximity to the restaurant, the pickup option offers added flexibility. This not only caters to different customer preferences but also provides an opportunity for the restaurant to engage with its local clientele more effectively.

Prestige and Belief of Key Opinion Leader (KOL)
Opinion leaders are the influencers of opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour (Zou & Peng, 2019). Due to specific positions within the network, certain individuals or organisations that play formal or informal roles as opinion leaders can also influence the perceptions and perspectives of other network participants. Additionally, compared to their followers, opinion leaders have access to or interaction with more external information sources, particularly in the mass media. The role of KOLs in shaping opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours has gained significant attention in the context of consumer behaviour and marketing strategies. Zou and Peng's observations (2019) provide valuable insights into the dynamics of how these influencers wield their influence within social networks, thereby affecting not only individual perceptions but also the broader collective understanding within these networks. KOLs are individuals or entities that hold a distinct position of influence within their respective communities, often due to their expertise, credibility, or charismatic presence. This influence extends beyond mere popularity, as KOLs are recognized for their ability to sway the opinions and decisions of their followers. Their opinions carry weight and are seen as authoritative, making them pivotal in shaping the thoughts and actions of those who look up to them.

One of the noteworthy aspects of KOLs is their positioning within the network. They occupy strategic positions that grant them enhanced visibility and reach, allowing them to effectively disseminate information, ideas, and perspectives. This positioning can be both formal, such as recognized industry experts or thought leaders, and informal, where individuals organically emerge as influential figures within their communities. The

influence of KOLs often goes beyond direct interactions and extends to the indirect effect of shaping the perceptions of others within the network. When these opinion leaders express their views or endorse certain products or ideas, their followers and peers tend to listen and take note. This ripple effect magnifies the impact of KOLs, as their opinions cascade through the network, contributing to the formation of collective beliefs and attitudes.

Furthermore, the access that opinion leaders have to a diverse range of information sources is a critical factor in their influence. In particular, their interaction with mass media amplifies their exposure to external information. This exposure equips them with a broader perspective on various subjects, enabling them to offer insights and opinions that are informed by a wealth of knowledge. Consequently, their recommendations and endorsements carry an air of credibility, as they are perceived to be well-informed and up-to-date with the latest trends and developments.

In addition, the influences of KOLs on purchasing behaviour consist of numerous issues, such as the role and characteristics of KOLs. Belief in KOLs was found to have a significant impact on purchasing behaviour. Consumers who trust and believe in the opinions and recommendations of KOLs are more likely to be influenced by their endorsements of food and beverage products. A study conducted by Xiong, Cho, Law, and Lam (2021) demonstrated that consumers who have a higher level of trust in KOLs are more likely to engage in purchase behaviours recommended by them. Between social network emotional marketing and consumers' purchasing behaviour, trust and attachment serve as mediators (Bin, 2023). KOLs use the convenience of the social media platform to enlarge their advantages while increasing their audience size based on their trustworthiness and specialities in certain regions. The development of KOLs in their expertise and the attractiveness of their content can upsurge their followers, which may indirectly add value to their credibility in public. The trustworthiness may devote business value to the recent marketing context. Consumer psychology holds that people make irrational decisions and are frequently swayed by a variety of external circumstances (Butt, Khan, & Hameed, 2022). Customers trust their favourite online KOLs. As a result, purchase decisions are made more quickly when they stream live.

In the context of the food and beverage industry in Malaysia, KOLs can play a pivotal role in shaping purchasing behaviour. Their endorsements of specific restaurants, dishes, or culinary experiences can spark interest and enthusiasm among their followers. When a KOL positively reviews a particular food establishment or highlights the unique aspects of a dish, it can trigger a domino effect, inspiring others to explore and engage with the offerings. The prestige and belief associated with Key Opinion Leaders extend far beyond their individual personas. They hold the power to influence not only the opinions and decisions of their immediate followers but also to impact the broader network through a ripple effect. Their strategic positioning, access to diverse information sources, and credibility contribute to their role as opinion shapers. Recognizing and understanding the dynamics of KOL influence is crucial for businesses in the food and beverage industry, as it opens avenues for effective marketing strategies, collaborations, and engagement tactics that can harness the persuasive power of these influential figures to drive purchasing behaviour and enhance brand reputation.

Expertise of Key Opinion Leader (KOL)
By referring to Zou and Peng (2019), social blogging has recently offered a successful platform for WoM marketing for advertising both goods and services. The bloggers have gained enormous popularity. Opinion leaders in the WoM marketing, who often have stronger social connections and higher social positions, may provide product information, make personal recommendations, and enhance professional expertise. Because they are believed to be experts in their industry, KOLs with more expertise and original ideas

tend to be followed by others. Opinion leaders have more power over information dissemination than other traditional mass media because their messages are more trustworthy than commercial ones and because their impact is mostly based on subject-matter competence (Wang, Liu, Liu, & Wang, 2020).

The expertise of KOLs holds a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours, particularly within the realm of WoM marketing. The observations of Zou and Peng (2019) shed light on the significant impact that KOLs with a higher level of expertise can have on influencing audiences, making them a central focus in modern advertising and consumer engagement strategies. Social blogging, as highlighted by Zou and Peng, has emerged as a potent platform for WoM marketing, allowing KOLs to leverage their knowledge and authority to disseminate information about products and services. The popularity of bloggers in various domains, including the food and beverage industry, has grown substantially, transforming them into influential figures capable of shaping opinions and driving consumer decisions.

A distinctive characteristic of KOLs lies in their ability to offer not only personal recommendations but also insights grounded in professional expertise. This expertise is a crucial factor that sets them apart from casual reviewers or ordinary consumers. KOLs are often perceived as experts within their respective industries, possessing in-depth knowledge, experience, and a nuanced understanding of the products and services they endorse. Consumers tend to gravitate toward KOLs who showcase a high level of expertise and originality. This resonance is attributed to the credibility associated with subject-matter competence. When KOLs exhibit a deep understanding of their field, their opinions and recommendations carry an air of authenticity and reliability. In turn, it establishes a sense of trust between the KOL and their followers, fostering a more receptive audience that is inclined to consider and act upon the information provided. The impact of KOLs' expertise on information dissemination is noteworthy. Unlike traditional mass media, KOLs wield a unique power due to the inherent trustworthiness of their messages. Commercial advertising often raises skepticism, as audiences are aware of the underlying intent to promote products. In contrast, KOLs are perceived as genuine advocates who genuinely believe in the value of what they endorse. This perception is bolstered by their subject-matter competence, reinforcing the idea that their recommendations are well-informed and unbiased.

In the context of the food and beverage industry in Malaysia, KOLs with culinary expertise can wield significant influence. Their detailed insights into different cuisines, cooking techniques, and flavour profiles contribute to a richer and more informed dialogue about dining experiences. When a KOL with culinary prowess reviews a restaurant or praises a particular dish, it resonates with audiences who value expert opinions, potentially driving them to explore the highlighted offerings. The expertise of KOL has elevated them to a prominent position within contemporary marketing strategies, particularly in the domain of WoM marketing. Their ability to provide product information, personalized recommendations, and industry insights stems from their subject-matter competence, establishing them as trustworthy and authoritative figures. This expertise not only distinguishes them in a crowded digital landscape but also empowers them to wield significant influence over consumer perceptions and behaviours. Acknowledging and harnessing the expertise of KOLs is essential for businesses seeking to effectively engage with audiences, cultivate brand loyalty, and leverage the power of authentic, informed endorsements to drive purchasing behaviour and elevate their market presence.
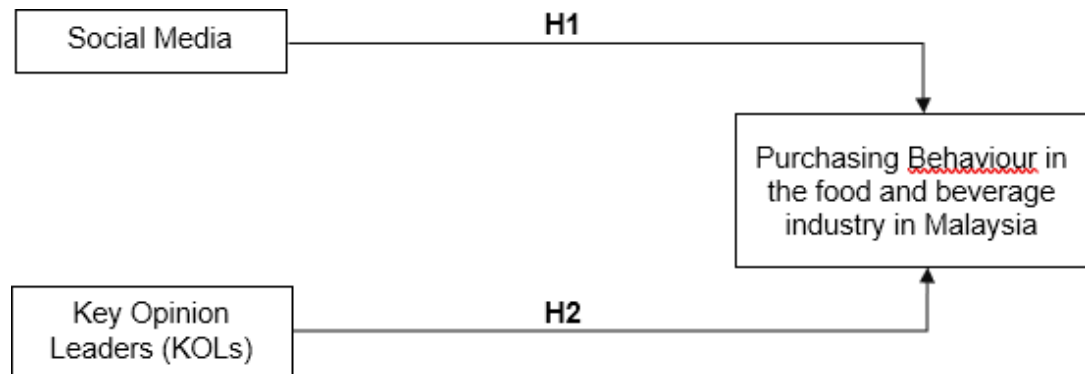
Figure 1. Research Framework

Figure 1 illustrates research framework of this study. A total of two (2) hypotheses were formulated by the researchers:

H1: Social media is positively associated with purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia.
H2: Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) is positively associated with purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Procedure

This study focused on investigating the impact of social media and KOLs on purchasing behaviour in Malaysia's food and beverage industry. The study aimed to gather respondents' information on their use of social media, exposure to Key Opinion Leaders' content, and food and beverage product purchase habits. The objective was to learn how Malaysia's food and beverage sector influences customer purchase choices via social media and key opinion leaders.

Both primary and secondary data were employed in this investigation to ensure that the research goal will be achieved. A Google Forms online survey with a sample size goal of 120 respondents served as the primary data-gathering method. This survey examines the relationship between social media, KOLs, and various aspects influencing purchasing behaviour within Malaysia's food and beverage industry. The survey's questions were thoughtfully designed to elicit respondents' opinions and experiences concerning these factors.

Research participants were chosen through a mix of convenience sampling and focused recruiting strategies to guarantee that the sample is both varied and representative. The selected participants included Malaysian customers who actively utilized social media and had made purchases of food and beverage. Participants were chosen from various age groups, genders, and geographical places to ensure the sample represented multiple opinions.

In addition, a mix of single-statement questions and a five-point Likert scale was used in the survey, which allowed respondents to express their attitudes and opinions. The five-point Likert scale allowed participants to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with statements related to social media, KOLs, and purchasing behaviour on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with one denoting strongly disagree, two disagree, three neutral, four agree, and five strongly agree.

Furthermore, this study also utilized secondary data from reliable sources, including journals, papers, and the Internet. Secondary data was incorporated to broaden the study's theoretical framework, support the conclusions of the primary data, and complement them.

This study is intended to acquire a thorough knowledge of the influence of social media and KOLs on purchase behaviour in Malaysia's food and beverage sector by combining primary data collection via an online survey with secondary data from various sources. A more thorough analysis and interpretation of the study results were possible because primary and secondary data sources were utilized.

Measures
The measure used in this study was a Google form-based online survey divided into four sections which are (A) demography information; (B) social media; (C) key opinion leaders (KOLs); and (D) purchasing behaviour. Each section focused on different aspects related to the impact of social media and KOLs on purchasing behaviour in Malaysia's food and beverage industry. The survey instrument used a mix of single-statement questions and 5-Point Likert Scales to collect thorough information on the numerous elements influencing customer behaviour.

Section (A) consisted of single-statement items to collect demographic information from the respondents, such as age, gender, highest educational level, employment status, and annual income. Section (B) was presented with single-statement items and 5-Point Likert Scales to gauge participants' perceptions of social media. The survey asked them to provide information about their social media usage patterns, explored respondents' experiences and attitudes toward social media advertisements related to the food and beverage industry, understood the respondents' views on the accuracy of the information on social media, and measured respondents' opinions on factors that influence the effectiveness of an online ordering system.

Section (C) used a mix of single-statement questions and 5-Point Likert Scales to assess how KOLs impact consumer behaviour in the food and beverage industry. The survey included statements to evaluate participants' perceptions of the prestige and attractiveness of KOLs, measure participants' beliefs in the opinions and recommendations of KOLs and examine the impact of KOLs' expertise in the food and beverage industry on consumer behaviour. Section (D) focused on participants' purchasing behaviour within the food and beverage industry. A 5-Point Likert Scale was used to assess factors such as the influence of social media and KOLs on purchase decisions.

RESULTS

Table 1. Overview of the Respondents' Demographic Data (N=120)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	74	61.7
Male	46	38.3
Age		
18 — 24	115	95.8
25 — 34	2	1.7
35 — 44	1	0.8
45 — 54	2	1.7
Highest Education Level		
Bachelor's degree	113	94.2

High school diploma or equivalent	7	5.8
Employment Status		
Employed full-time	6	5.0
Employed part-time	5	4.2
Self-employed	2	1.7
Unemployed	107	89.2
Annual Income		
Less than RM25,000	116	96.7
RM25,000 - RM50,000	3	2.5
RM50,001 - RM100,000	1	.8

Table 1 presents an overview of the respondents' demographic data. A total of 120 participants were included in the study, with females comprising the majority (N=74, 61.7%), while the remaining participants were male (N=46, 38.3%). The largest age group among the respondents was 18-24 years old, accounting for most participants (N=115, 95.8%). In contrast, only one respondent (0.8%) fell into the 35-44 age bracket. Regarding educational qualifications, a significant proportion of the respondents possessed a bachelor's degree (N=113, 94.2%). In terms of employment status, approximately one-third of the respondents were unemployed (N=107, 89.2%). Furthermore, for most participants (N=116, 96.7%) reported an annual income below RM 25,000, while only one respondent (0.8%) reported earning between RM 50,001 and RM 100,000 annually.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, and Zero-order Correlations for All the Variables

	Variable	1	2	3
1	Social Media	0.818		
2	Key Opinion Leader	0.765**	0.794	
3	Purchasing Behaviour in the food and beverage in Malaysia	0.828**	0.936**	0.857
	Number of Items	14	15	8
	Mean	4.6877	4.5658	4.6521
	Standard Deviation	0.39476	0.50462	0.50162

Note: N = 120; *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p <. 001$. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's coefficients alpha.

As presented in Table 2, it illustrates the descriptive statistics, information on dependability, and zero-order correlations for all the variables examined in the study. Purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia is the dependent variable, while social media and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) will be the independent variable. The hypothesis developed were assessed using regression analysis. The variables show strong reliability, with Cronbach's Coefficients Alpha ranging from 0.79 to 0.86, indicating high internal consistency for most variables which encompass Social Media (0.818), Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) (0.794) and, Purchasing Behaviour in the food and beverage in Malaysia (0.857).

Table 3. Regression Analysis

	Variables	Purchasing Behaviour in the food and beverage in Malaysia
1	Social Media	0.269***
2	Key Opinion Leader	0.731***
R^2		0.907
F Value		568.355
Durbin-Watson Statistic		2.392

Note: N = 120; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p <. 001. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's coefficients alpha.

The regression analysis shown in Table 3 is to examine the relationship between purchasing behaviour in food and beverage in Malaysia and independent variables, which are social media and KOLs. The findings are consistent with hypotheses H1 and H2, which state that there is a positive correlation between relationship purchasing behaviour in food and beverage in Malaysia as a dependent variable and social media as well as KOLs as the independent variables. The R^2 value of 0.907 indicates that social media and KOLs can each account for 91.0% of the variance in purchasing behaviour in food and beverage in Malaysia. The KOLs are the most significant impact on the purchasing behaviour in food and beverage in Malaysia since KOLs have the highest beta value of 0.731 compared to social media with a beta value of 0.269.
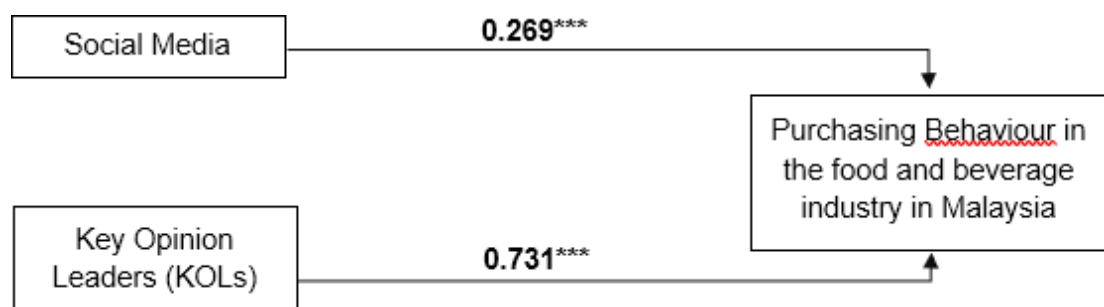
Figure 2. Research Model

Figure 2 illustrates research model of this study. The obtained value of two formulated hypotheses indicates that KOLs are the most impactful aspect in influencing consumer's purchasing behaviour compared to social media in food and beverage industry.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the impact of social media and KOLs on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. The two independent variables, social media, and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) are the subjects that will be discussed. There are two hypotheses carried out in the study to help us clarify the influence of social media and KOLs on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. Hypotheses 1 focuses on the impact of social media on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia, while Hypotheses 2 presents the impact of KOLs on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. The findings shed light on the relative influence of these two variables and provide insights into their implications for marketing strategies.

The results show that both variables, social media and KOLs have a significant impact on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. Even though both variables show a significant impact on purchasing behaviour, Key Opinion Leaders (0.731***) play a stronger role in the impact on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia than social media (0.269***). This is consistent with the findings of earlier research (Sanjaya, Furinto, Hamsal, & Kartono, 2022), which predicted that KOLs and social media would affect consumer behaviour. Social media platforms provide users with tools and features that enable them to create, share, and interact with content and information within virtual communities and networks. Meanwhile, KOLs refer to people who possess expertise, credibility, or influence in a particular field or industry and are able to develop a personal connection with their followers. KOLs often involve

themselves in the context of social media and digital marketing, including in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia.

Compare the impact of both variables, social media and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia, there is a query about the reason why KOLs are more influential than social media in this study. Thus, some reasons and factors may explain these results. Social media provides people with a platform to communicate and exchange information. KOLs, as the users of social media, optimise the assets of their social media to dominate other users. Social media in business can increase brand awareness, promote content, keep in touch with customers, etc. Hence, KOLs in business may drive traffic to a product, provide a more relatable voice than a brand spokesperson, establish the brand's personality, etc. Generally, social media can build up a common image through social media management. People typically catch up with the basic information that comes to mind. Meanwhile, KOLs usually provide their own viewpoint to the brands based on their expertise and experience from the perspective of consumers instead of the spokesperson. This will greatly increase the consumers' belief in the products or services promoted by the well-known KOLs. The reality of the commendations given by KOLs is more attractive than the information shared on social media. The attractiveness of KOLs was identified as another important factor influencing purchasing behaviour. Consumers are more likely to be influenced by KOLs who possess desirable physical appearances and relatable lifestyles. Research by Shan, Chen, and Lin (2020) suggests that attractive KOLs create a positive image for endorsed products and generate higher purchase intentions among consumers. The expertise of KOLs was found to have a significant impact on purchasing behaviour. Consumers tend to value the knowledge, experience, and expertise demonstrated by KOLs. A study by He and Jin (2022) indicated that consumers perceive KOLs with expertise in the food and beverage industry as more credible and trustworthy, leading to higher purchase intentions.

In short, the food and beverage industry should make an effort to engage with KOLs while managing their social media. By partnering with KOLs, businesses in the food and beverage industry can raise the level of their brand loyalty to a higher proportion of the market share in the industry. Brand loyalty could encourage consumers to change their eating behaviours (Guèvremont, 2020). From a brand standpoint, the impact of customers' emotional attachment on social media-based consumer brand equity. These previous studies acknowledged the importance of brand attachment in emotional marketing, but they did not fully examine attachment and consumer social network buying behaviour (Dwivedi, Johnson, Wilkie, & De Araujo-Gil, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussions that have been carried out regarding the impact of social media and KOLs on purchasing behaviour in Malaysia's food and beverage industry, the findings shed light on the importance of adopting social media platforms and collaborating with KOLs to expand their brand in Malaysia. Both variables of social media and KOLs significantly impact purchasing behaviour in Malaysia's food and beverage industry. However, KOLs are more influential than social media in stimulating purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry among Malaysian.

These findings have practical implications for the food and beverage industry to emphasize collaboration with KOLs instead of social media. Besides, by leveraging the power of social media and collaborating with influential KOLs, the food and beverage industry can positively contribute to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) (United Nations, n.d.). These activities foster economic growth and employment opportunities

through social media and KOLs collaboration with enhanced access to nutritious food for citizens of Malaysia and promote sustainable production practices in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the impact of social media and KOLs on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. The findings support the importance of collaboration with KOLs, while also recognizing the need for cautious generalization and considering the dynamic nature of consumer behaviour in future research.

LIMITATION
This research paper contributed to the existing studies on the impact of social media and key opinion leaders (KOLs) on purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. The first limitation of the findings in this study may not be fully applicable to other countries or regions outside of Malaysia. Cultural, social, and economic factors specific to Malaysia may influence purchasing behaviour differently compared to other countries. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to other contexts.

The second limitation is the findings of the study are based on data collected within a specific timeframe, and consumer behaviours, social media platforms, and key opinion leaders' influence may change over time. By focusing on a specific timeframe, the study's findings may not fully capture the current state of purchasing behaviour in the food and beverage industry in Malaysia. Shifts in social media usage and the movement of KOLs can significantly impact purchasing behaviour from time to time. Therefore, it is important to interpret the findings with caution and acknowledge that the dynamics of purchasing behaviour may have evolved beyond the study's timeframe. The study may need to capture the current state of purchasing behaviour fully. The future research might consider different cultural settings and account for the dynamic nature of consumer behaviour.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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