

# **The Effect of Social Media Influencer's Perceived Sincerity and Perceived Similarity on Consumers' Attitude and Purchase Intention**

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## **Abstract**

As long as influencer's marketing runs through the social media and get paid on it, it raises many questions about the phenomenon whether those brands which are represented by the influencers are making attitude toward brand hence forward appeal purchase intention. While past studies have focused on influencer's credibility attributes such as trustworthiness and attractiveness, this study examines whether perceived sincerity of the influencers would positively impact how consumers form their attitude toward the endorsed brand. Not only that, this study also examines how perceived similarity (between consumers and influencers) would influence consumers' attitude. Using SEM-PLS, this study gathered data from 915 active social media users by survey. Findings show that consumer's attitude toward a brand can be formed by predicting influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness, perceived sincerity and similarity. Further, attitude is found to be strong predictor of purchase intention.

*Keywords: Influencer, Attitude toward brand, Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, Perceived sincerity, Perceived similarity.*

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past few years, the role of influencers has been gaining importance in marketing activities. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines influencer as "a person who inspires or guides the actions of others". Another definition of influencers is the one presented by De Veirman et al. (2016): "Influencers are defined as "people who built a large network of followers, and are regarded as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches". Now the alternative form of celebrities is now consisting of ordinary individuals, who may have started providing tips and product reviews through their social media accounts with the ability to reach wide audiences. They are called social media influencers (SMI). Surprisingly, this new type of celebrities has been found to be perceived positively by consumers as consumers found more connectedness with them (Tran and Strutton, 2014) as well as seen as more authentic (Stefanone et al., 2010).

However, SMIs are also known to receive payments from brand owners in promoting and endorsing the brand. This has raised questions among the general public about the neutrality and sincerity of the messages. Past research on social media influencers have largely focused on influencer's credibility attributes, for instance the positive impact of trustworthiness and attractiveness (Gong and Li 2019; Lou and Yuan 2019). However, there is still not much about how perceived personality of the influencers as discerned from their social media profiles impact consumer's attitude toward brand (Bekk and Spörrle 2010). For instance, sincerity has become an important personality feature of an SMI in the virtual world of social media. According to Lee and Eastin (2020) when a product endorsed by a high-sincerity influencer, the attitude toward brand for the product will more positive than by a low-sincerity influencer. Martensen et al. (2018) and Ruef et al. (2003) found that similarity between two individuals will expose an individual to a greater interpersonal attraction. More specifically, this study examines how perceived sincerity and perceived similarity, on top of trust and attractiveness, would trigger consumers to express positive attitude that will drive purchase intention toward the brand.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **The Role of Social Media Influencer**

The use of social media influencer (SMI) services to promote a product or service has been immense in today's digital era. Ledbetter (2017) defines SMI as any individuals who try to influence other people to take certain actions, a dynamic ensues that can change the connection of their relationships. According to Munukka et al. (2016), an influencer could make internet enjoyer know a product and make them admiring the products, then encouraging them to purchase it. Positive attitude toward brand is believed to have a significant influence on conviction to purchase decisions. Swastha and Irawan (in Suradi et al., 2012) suggest that the buying interest which related to feelings and emotions is influenced by factors; if someone feels satisfied and pleased in their past purchase experience, it will strengthen interest in buying more in the future, while dissatisfaction would eliminate interest. Purchase intention becoming a marketing strategy that impact a great deal in this era. Consumers nowadays trust SMI to review a product or a service. Being SMI is building a relationship and connection with the product is the most important thing to lead customer to have buying interest.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trust is defined as an attitude shown by individuals when they have acknowledged or believed something to be true (Hohmann & Welter, 2005). Mowen and Minor (2011) define consumer trust as: "all knowledge possessed by consumers and conclusions made by consumers about an object, its attributes and benefits". The probability that supports communicating the claim he thinks is most true, which is reference the honesty, sincerity and truthfulness of the source, or the recipient's perception is a understanding of trust. It can influence trust, if the audience gets some advantage from the product or service recommendation (Munnukka, Uusitalo and Toivonen, 2016). Tanjung and Hudrasyah (2016) found that trustworthiness have a positive significant impact on the attitude toward brand. Based on the research findings above, we would like to propose the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Trustworthiness positively affects Attitude Toward Brand

### **Attractiveness**

Attractiveness is the characteristic perception of someone who is considered beautiful and pleasant (Slavianova, 2017). Either through personality attraction or physical attraction. Shimp (2003) states the basic attribute of an endorser or influencer is attractiveness. People with a good attractiveness can persuade other people to become a customer for a product that people reviewed or talked. According to previous studies that have been done by Steffi Tanjung and Herry Hudrasyah (2016),

based on the result, it can be concluded that attractiveness has a positive significant impact on the attitude toward brand. So, attractiveness is the key factor of a product. Based on the research findings above, we would like to propose the following hypothesis:

**H2:** Attractiveness positively affects Attitude Toward Brand

### **Perceived Similarity**

According to Newman (2006), the extent to which an individual sees similarity with a certain target person is a reference of perceived similarity (e.g. SMI). Graves and Elsess (2005) state that perceived similarity is a perception of an individual towards other target individuals that they share similar characteristics, such as demographic background, abilities, lifestyle, personality, and so on. If the attitude toward brand is higher, then the perceived similarity is higher too (Munnukka, Uusitalo and Toivonen, 2016). So, when an SMI talks about a certain product, consumers or audience who think they have similarities with the influencer, will build higher curiosity toward the product and may show an inclination toward the product as well. Based on the research findings above, we would like to propose the following hypothesis:

**H3:** Perceived Similarity positively affects Attitude Toward Brand

### **Perceived Sincerity**

Sincerity is the special value of influencers for selling product. Sincerity can be said as a passport for establishing a super-social relationship between influencers and followers (Tsai and Men 2017). Research has shown that kindness and kind-hearted media personality can arouse the audience's psychological intimacy (Knoll et al., 2015). Lee & Eastin (2020) found that perceived sincerity has a significant effect on attitude toward brand. When endorsed by a high-sincerity influencer, attitude toward brand for product will be more positive, as compared to a low-sincerity influencer. Based on the research findings above, we would like to propose the following hypothesis:

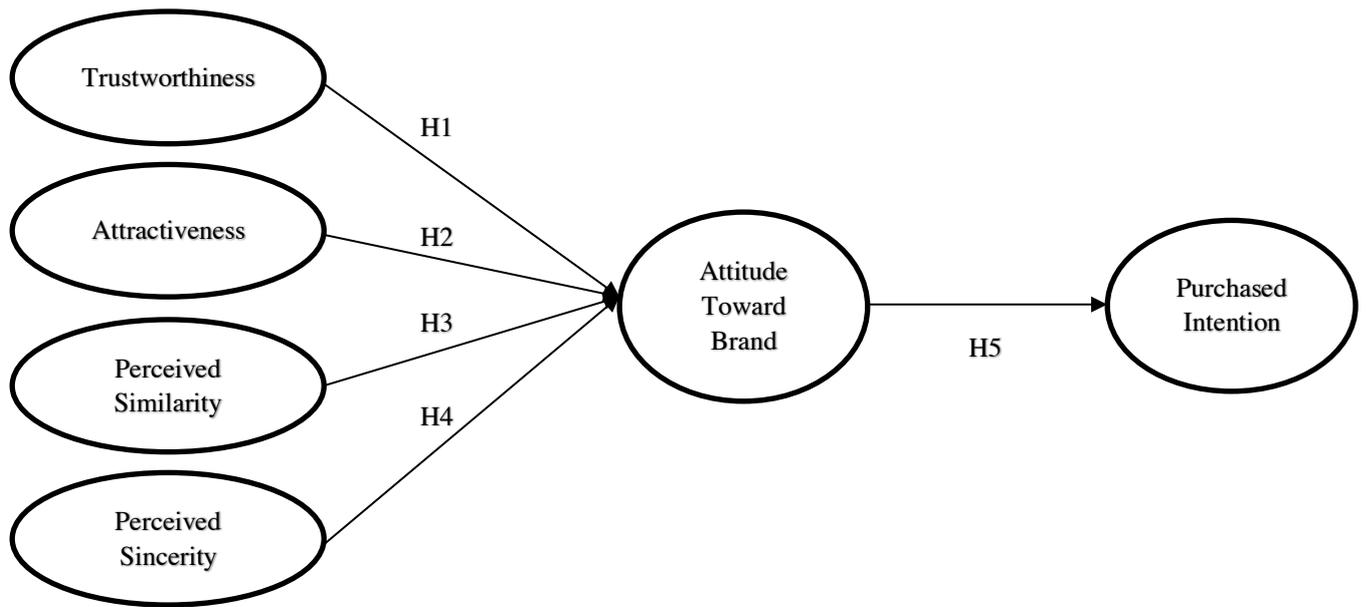
**H4:** Perceived Sincerity positively affects Attitude Toward Brand

### **Relationship between Attitude Toward Brand and Purchase Intention**

Consumer's purchase intention is greatly influenced by Attitude toward brand (Gresham & Shimp, 1985; Goldsmith et al., 2000). In a study conducted by Thwaites et al. (2012) and Chan et al. (2013), shows that there is a significant positive relationship between attitudes towards brands and consumers' purchase intentions. According to Pradhan et al., (2014) a favorable attitude toward the brand will emerge a purchase intention. Based on the research findings above, we would like to propose the following hypothesis:

**H5:** Attitude Toward Brand positively affects Purchase Intentions.

The following theoretical framework is used to reach the research objectives. This following theoretical framework is used to identify the relationship of trustworthiness, attractiveness, perceived similarity, perceived sincerity of an influencer mediated by attitude toward brand to purchase intention.



**Figure 1. Research Model**

**3. Methods**

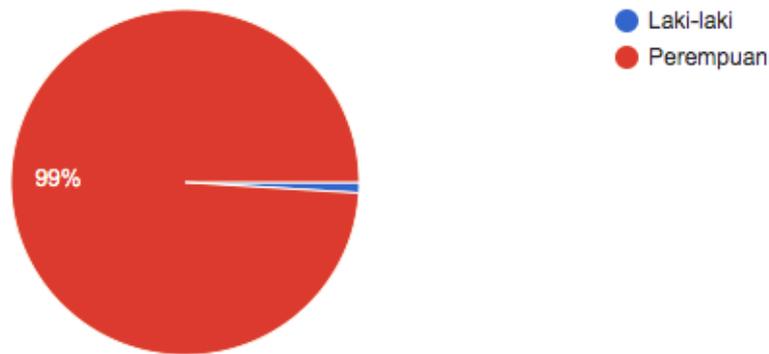
**Data and Sample**

In drawing sample of the study, we used a non-probability sample or purposive sampling. Sample of this study consists of Indonesian consumers who are actively engaged in social media activities, especially Instagram. Of the 915 respondents, 99 % female and 1 % male. Participants of the study was dominated by millennials with 78.3% of the participants was from the age bracket of less than 18<sup>th</sup> until more than 56<sup>th</sup>. The descriptive statistics of the respondents are depicted in the following table:

**Gender**

**Table 1. Respondent’s Gender (n = 915)**

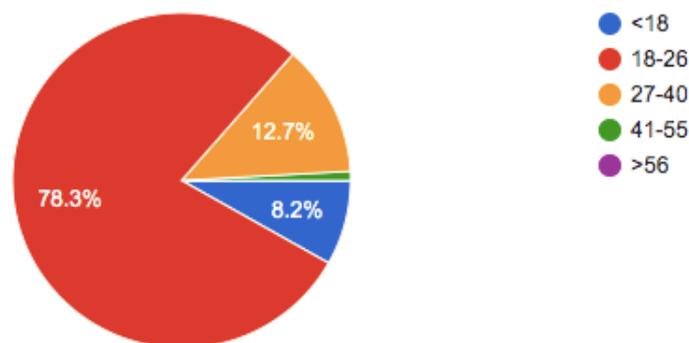
		GENDER			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	9	0.9	0.9	0.9
	Female	906	99.1	99.1	100
Total		915	100	100	



**Age**

**Table 2. Respondent’s Age (n = 915)**

AGE					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<18 years old	75	8.2	8.2	8.2
	18-26 years old	716	78.3	78.3	86.5
	27-40 years old	116	12.7	12.7	99.2
	41-55 years old	8	0.8	0.8	100
	Total	915	100	100	

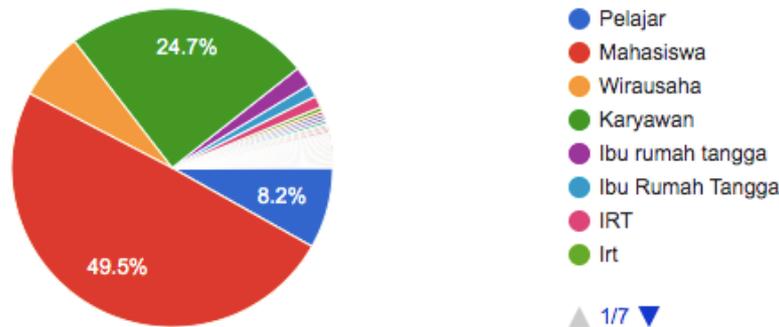


**Occupation**

**Table 3. Respondent’s Occupation (n = 915)**

Occupation					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Students	530	57.9	57.9	57.9

Employed	321	35.1	35.1	93
Unemployed	64	7	7	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>915</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	



**Measurement**

Measures used in this study were developed based on previous research. Trustworthiness was measured by asking respondents to respond to 4-items adapted from Ohanian (2013) with sample of statement such as “This Influencer can be trusted when reviewing the product” and used 5-points Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Attractiveness was measured using 4-items statements (e.g., “This Influencer are attractive in reviewing the product”). The measures were adapted from Feick *et al* (2017) and used 5-points Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Perceived Similarity was measured using 4-items statements (e.g. ” This Influencer are quite a bit like me.”) adapted from Feick *et al.*, (2017), used 5-points Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Perceived Sincerity was taken from Lunardo et al., (2015) using 4-items statements such as “This influencer is real when showing their life in social media” (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Attitude toward brand measured by asking respondents to respond to 4-items adapted from Spears and Singh (2014) with sample of statement such as “The brand that the influencer promotes is a good brand” and used 5-points Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Lastly, purchase intentions measures were adapted from Spears et al (2014), used 4-items, 5-points Likert scale (e.g., “I plan to buy product from the brand that is promoted by this influencer”) (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

**Procedures**

Participants were recruited online using through the network of some social media influencers in Indonesia. Link to the survey was posted in the Instagram story feature of the influencer’s account. The Instagram story feature is set to be open to public, therefore, the audience was not just limited to the followers of the social media influencers. The first part of the questionnaires consisted of filter questions to carefully select eligible participants. Only participants who follow at least one social media influencer were allowed to participate. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were thanked and debriefed.

**4. Result and Discussion**

**Measurement Validation**

This study used Smart PLS to analyse the measurement and structural models. This study utilizing twenty-nine measurement items and it were valid. The factor loading and average variance

extracted (AVE) has been assessed in this study, to ensure convergent validity. The good factor loading should be higher than 0.6 for an exploratory study and the good AVE score should be higher than 0.5 based on Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, (2011). In this study, range of factor loading is from 0.716 to 0.915 and range of the AVE scores is from 0.602 to 0.792. The criteria complied by discriminant validity in this study. This criteria is where the correlation between the constructs is below the square root of all AVE scores (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The composite reliability of the constructs was above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011), ranging from 0.858 to 0.938.

**Table 4. Convergent Validity and Composite Reliability**

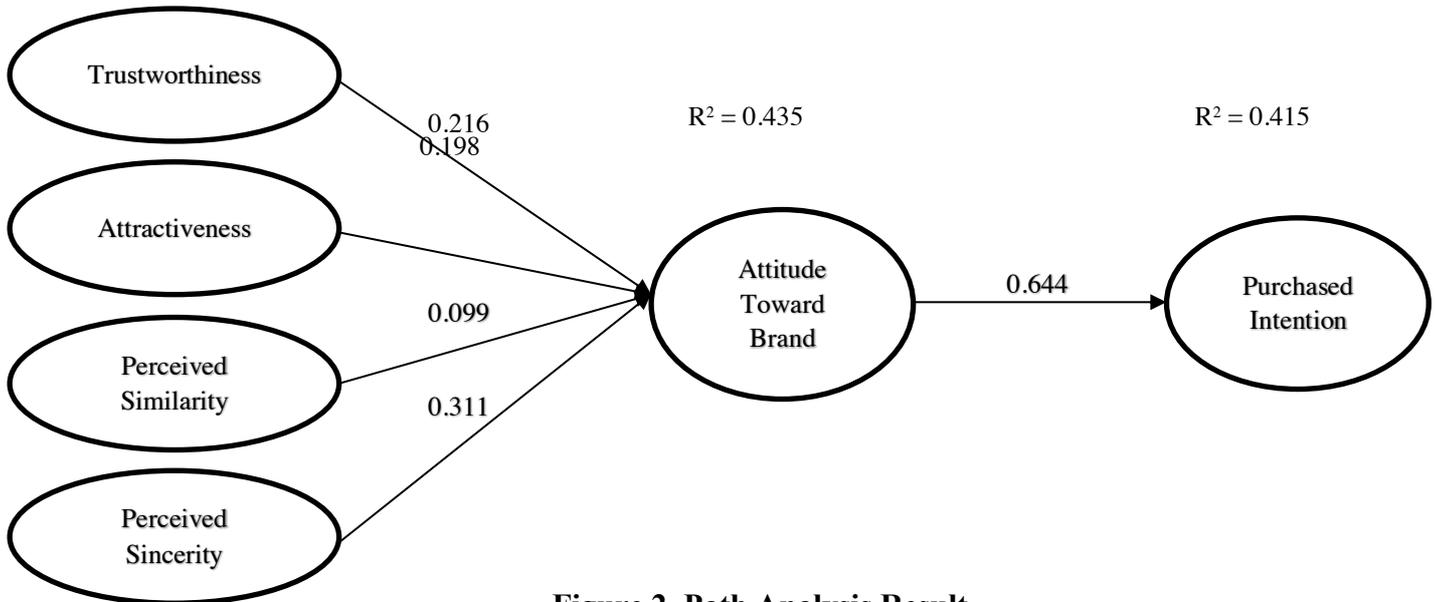
Construct	Items	Factor Loading	AVE	Composite Reliability
<b>Trustworthiness (TW)</b>	TW1	0.829	0.684	0.897
	TW2	0.843		
	TW3	0.820		
	TW4	0.817		
<b>Attractiveness (ATT)</b>	ATT1	0.724	0.602	0.858
	ATT2	0.757		
	ATT3	0.799		
	ATT4	0.820		
<b>Perceived Similarity (PSM)</b>	PSM1	0.716	0.607	0.915
	PSM2	0.784		
	PSM3	0.754		
	PSM4	0.818		
	PSM5	0.806		
	PSM6	0.798		
	PSM7	0.772		
<b>Perceived Sincerity (PSC)</b>	PSC2	0.717	0.613	0.927
	PSC3	0.772		
	PSC4	0.748		
	PSC5	0.804		
	PSC6	0.824		
	PSC7	0.804		
	PSC8	0.777		
	PSC9	0.812		
	<b>Attitude Towards the Brand (ATB)</b>	ATB1		
ATB2		0.896		
ATB3		0.886		
ATB4		0.906		
<b>Purchase Intention (PI)</b>	PI1	0.881	0.758	0.926
	PI2	0.854		
	PI3	0.915		
	PI4	0.831		

**Structural Model Testing**

The structural model testing results are shown in Table 4. All paths were significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Out of the five hypotheses, all of the hypotheses were supported ( $t$  statistics  $> 1.96$ ). Trustworthiness ( $b = .216, t > 1.96$ ), Attractiveness ( $b = .198, t > 1.96$ ), Perceived Similarity ( $b = .099, t > 1.96$ ), Perceived Sincerity ( $b = .331, t > 1.96$ ) were found to have a significant positive relationship with Attitude Towards Brand thus supporting H1, H2, H3 and H4. Attitude Towards Brand ( $b = .655, t > 1.96$ ), have significant positive relationships with Purchase Intention thus suggesting support for H5.

**Table 5. Hypothesis Test Results**

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Value	Conclusion
H1	TW → ATB	0.216	4.759	0.000	Supported
H2	ATT → ATB	0.198	5.122	0.000	Supported
H3	PSM → ATB	0.099	3.262	0.001	Supported
H4	PSC → ATB	0.311	7.232	0.000	Supported
H5	ATB → PI	0.644	27.845	0.000	Supported



**Figure 2. Path Analysis Result**

This research aims to examine the influencer marketing effects to purchase intention. In this research, trustworthiness, attractiveness, perceived similarity and perceived sincerity are an independent variables, while attitude towards brand be as a mediating variable and purchase intention is a dependent variable. SEM PLS was used to analyse the relationships. The more trustworthy the influencer is, the higher their attitude towards a brand. It is in line according to finding Tanjung and Hudrasyah (2016) which said trustworthiness have a positive significant impact on the attitude toward brand.

Attractiveness and perceived similarity also have a significant impact on attitude toward brand. One explanation is that influencer attractiveness is something their followers highlight most when reviewing a product or brand. It is the same with the perceived similarity, when consumers take an attitude towards the brand, followers pay attention to a similar condition, gender, hobbies and many more similarity they often see on their favourite influencers. This create a sense of feeling that we need the same product that the influencers used because we have the same interest or condition. This will increase attitude towards the brand. This result support previous studies that have been done by Steffi Tanjung and Herry Hudrasyah (2016), which concluded that attractiveness have a positive significant impact on the attitude toward brand.

Perceived sincerity also generated a positive relationship with attitude towards brand, means that the influencer's sincerity plays an important role in determining the attitude of his or her followers to a particular brand. Based on the findings, the followers apparently noticed the influencer's sincerity in reviewing a brand. This support Lee & Eastin (2020) finding that perceived sincerity has a significant effect on attitude toward brand.

Lastly, attitude towards brand is discovered having a positive relationship with purchase intention, which confirms that attitude towards brand is a driver for purchase intention in context of the influencer marketing. Starting from seeing influencer reviews, consumers finally determine their

attitude towards the brand, then after weighing what they think and feel about the brand, an intention arises to make a purchase.

So, the thing that can be considered for brands in choosing influencers to introduce their products to the public is to choose influencers who are attractive, have a good trust and similarity to their followers and sincere in reviewing a product, which usually leads to building trust in the influencer. Brands better find influencer who really uses their product, if an influencer really sincerely uses the products, then the influencer will gain the trust of the public. Therefore, if brands choose an influencer who never try their products before, better give the influencer some time to really try the products so the influencer can give their audience their real experience of the products. Also the influencer who has attractiveness when reviews a product honestly, tell the strength and weakness of the product, the influencer will gain trust of the followers.

## **5. Limitation and Future Research**

Certain limitations require further investigation, although the exploration of influencer's credibility and influencer's personality perceptions contributed by this study. Potential issue with self-selected influencers is the first limitation. Second, future research may investigate various components that affect attitude toward brand, such as cognitive components and authenticity of the influencer, although particular attention to perceived personality and credibility of influencer for attitude toward the brand already we gave. Finally, we conceptually uncovered whether these trustworthiness, attractiveness, perceived similarity, and perceived sincerity as an important role in the influencer. However, a detailed verification is needed to confirm the effect to the brand. Subsequent study may further investigates its affect particularly by applying the proposed model to spesific types of brands.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study was conducted to determine the positive relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable which is mediated by a variable. The independent variables is Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, Perceived sincerity, and Perceived similarity. The dependent variable is Purchase intention. Meanwhile, the mediating variable is Attitude toward the brand. Based on the analytical research and interpretation of the results, conclusions can be drawn as described below:

- a. Trustworthiness has a positive effect on Attitude towards brand. Thus hypothesis 1 is accepted. It turns out that the Trustworthiness in an influencer from social media users has a significant effect on Attitude toward the brand.
- b. Attractiveness has positive effect on Attitude towards brand. Thus hypothesis 2 is accepted. The approach taken predicts that the attractiveness of an influencer does attract social media users to the Attitude towards the brand which is promoted by the influencer.
- c. Perceived similarity has positive effect on attitude towards brand. Thus hypothesis 3 is accepted. So it can be interpreted that social media users does equate their conditions with the influencers they follow to be attracted to a brand.
- d. Perceived sincerity has a positive effect on Attitude towards brand. Thus hypothesis 4 is accepted. The more sincere the influencer is seen by their followers, the greater the attitude towards the brand that the influencer is promoting for his followers.
- e. Attitude towards brand has a positive effect on Purchase intention. Thus hypothesis 5 is accepted. It is believed that the attitude towards the brand will influence the decision to buy the brand.

From the conclusions obtained above, based on the findings of our research, in someone's purchase intention due to the influence of an influencer is because the attractiveness and trustworthiness of the influencer. On the other hand feel similar with the influencer and feel the influencer's sincerity in reviewing a brand is impress the follower to attitude towards brand. Influencer can be more paying attention to packaging, fully understanding the ingredients, showing the real

texture of the product and showing the before-after use, make people more confident about the influencer's reviews because at the end the follower will compare their life with the influencer and lead to attitude towards brand that reviewed by the influencer. With these recommendations, brands will have higher sales and a long-term customer relationship.

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