

New Media and Social Influencer Engagement on Lifestyle and Political Content



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Abstract: *In this digital era, having the latest technology is no longer a sole measurement in deciding the success of the tool. The effectiveness is measured on how it can contribute to a better lifestyle, including able to minimise cost and generate revenue at the same time. A social influencer is a group of people who have taken advantages of technology, namely Social Network Sites (SNSs) to their benefit. With the right persona, social influencer can carry both opinions and actions to influencer their followers. The aim of this project paper is to: (1) Understand the acceptance towards lifestyle content and political content that are promoted by social influencers where analysis of agreement and disagreement occurred between two parties; and (2) Act as a future reference on how content direction can be developed better by social influencer regardless on the subject matter that they are championing. The review of literature is based on the current status of a marketing plan by a traditional medium as well as the emergence of digital marketing segment. The review also discussed the characteristics of social influencer that includes their background and track record in performance as a social influencer. In this research, it is revealed the important criteria needed by a social influencer in delivering both types of content involving lifestyle and political content with credibility as the most mentioned. The study concluded by suggesting proper content strategy and content placement, even on a traditional medium to compliment the role of new media and social influencer.*

Keywords: *New Media, Social Influencer, Social Media, Marketing, Credibility*

I. INTRODUCTION

Marketing and promotions are inter-related in promoting products and services. Marketing comprises of price, place, product and promotion. Marketing is one of important tools to promote products and services to the target market. Having said that, marketing may exist without promotion. However, promotion would need marketing action and plan for a promotion to be executed. In producing a product, it has to be able to be sold and consequently contribute revenue to the manufacturer or to the company who markets the product. For so many years, marketing elements have gone through various phases including the mechanism of it, medium that is being

used, the strategy set for every product and service, as well as implementation of guerilla marketing. Though most of the time, media, creative agencies or the platform itself, designs marketing elements surprisingly an individual influence can also play a big role in this area. This is also being translated from campaigns that are participated by the social influencer, with one it is proven during the Malaysia 14th General Election. With huge number of followers, social influencer is able to 'design' themselves to be a role model in many respective fields, example health, beauty, motivation, cooking, parenting, politic and other type of fields or segments Their role is to persuade their followers to buy goods and services as well as to comprehend and agree to the agenda that is being promoted by them. Social media followers may also be referred as netizen, who is a group of people who are active using Internet and social media.

In related to the function of social influencer in promoting product, it is said that 71% of internet users aged 16-24 years old purchased product via online, while 50% of them conducted online research on products that interest them. From the data shared, 23% from the age group refers to the recommended or endorsed products on social media as a purchasing driver (Global Web Index Social, 2017). This is also supported by Tom Ward who stated that 66% of marketers have been using social influencer as a part of their marketing strategy and it was projected back then that 50% of marketers spending will be focusing on social influencer marketing in 2017 (Ward, 2017). As for 2018, the trend is expected to grow. According to Rachel Levin who has 20 million of followers, it will be 'unwise' for companies not to strategise their marketing plan without the involvement of social influencer as even small companies are using new ways to market their business including the power of social media (Ward, 2017). In another aspect, the medium of SNSs (Social Network Sites) plays an important role as a medium in promoting political agenda either by social media influencer or by political party. According to John Wihbey (2012), social media allows self-expression that includes information gathering and the mobilisation of news via social media is considered as effective.

This paper will study the influence of social influencer in influencing public or netizen on marketing content and political content. This is also due to the Malaysia 14th General Election that was conducted on the 9th May 2018 where many political content travelled across SNSs driven by social media influencer as previous elections as indicated by Chinnasamy (2017).

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This has showcased the medium and social influencer as one of the main drivers in reaching out to the first-time and young voters, where these groups of people were also exposed to news on rallies which they tend to participate. As we are now embracing digital world, new media is definitely one of the important tools in communication, providing various elements for people to 'catch up' with one and another either between two people or in a group. With the emergence of technology and also acceptance of people using it as a medium, Panos declared that human mankind is now in the era of Social Network Sites (SNSs) (Panos, 2014). Although the penetration of digital world went through various phases, it has proven that the digital world has now become a part of our daily lives, not only for communication, but also for promotional tool, to generate income, to 'stalk' other people's activities including celebrities, resource of information and to enjoy interactive features that allow both adult and children to play games. In related to digital marketing and promotional medium, companies firstly introduced certain segments of their website page as spaces for clients or advertisers to advertise, namely banner ad, display ad, pop-ups and pop-under, floating ad, expanding ad and others. Computer programmers have later revolutionised Internet and digital media. Mobile applications or also known as mobile as well as smart phone apps started during the first 'time-waster' games era (Clark). A novelty handset manufacturer, Nokia was known as a company who incorporated video game such as Snake in their earliest phone while the rest followed suit by including other type of games in their phones, such as Tetris and Tic-Tac-Toe. It was the start on how consumer no longer sees handset or mobile as a communication tool, but also for other type of activities. Eventually, applications or apps is also developed as a way to ease users to access to content in the most convenient way.

For the past years, many people has taken advantages of social media, including the 'establishment' of a group of people who are very active on social media by portraying the best of their life style. The main aspects that they always take into consideration before posting any post are to ensure that the pictures taken are nice images with strong caption, aiming to inspire people and consequently to increase their followers. With huge number of followers, they are considered as social influencer who will always be engaged by product owners or clients to review their products. Lisa Rashotte explained that social influence is ability for a person to change another person's view, action and acceptance towards any area of discussion based on their social interaction (Rashotte, 2007). Since social influencer's community is at its rise, many scholars and also media observers have made a research on this topic, namely Krasniak (2016) stated that social influencer is no longer amongst the celebrities like how it used to be, but anyone who has huge number of followers and achieved to convert their followers to be a loyalist. This is proven as there are quite a number of social influencer who are specialise in their own forte, such as travel, fashion, gaming, technology, beauty, food, kids and even pets.

Role is considered as a 'character' of a social influencer, connected to role model. As most of the social influencer is among successful personality, they are also looked up as a role model. This is considered important as well as being a

positive role model could be one of the important elements that netizen admire towards social influencer. It could be a great motivation and also inspiration for people to follow through their positive and successful path. For teenager and young adult, it is essential to ensure the main reasoning on why a person is chosen as a role model in our lives. Constructive elements should be the main reference for a netizen to choose a role model, example hard working, creative and to have positive moral value (Thomas, n.d.). Besides that, a role model should be someone who has significant skills and assets that another person can learn and follow to leverage as a guide in life. According to Hester Lacey (2008), in compilation of people's thought of how they see the function of role, it is crucial for people to see themselves in the people who decides on certain matter.

In another aspect, role model at times will not be a person who has similar personality and traits to another person, but someone who can inspire someone else including from different gender. Role is an important element to be evaluated to understand weather an objective is able to be met or not. It is so significance and for certain community, there are certain criteria that they have listed to ensure the role has all the complete requirements as explained by Adam Kciec (2013). It may as simple as a role of a person hosting an event where as a host, it is important for him or her to entertain the guests. On top of it, it is crucial for the event to be conducted successfully, where it will also be an evaluation towards the host in hosting the event.

In supporting the host, the voyeur is the supporting role in lending a hand to the host. They will be the one who will show up and make an impact to the event with their presence and participation in the event. Although they might not be in a large group of people, it is always pleasant to have them joining the crowd as a small number of them can be 'translated' into many people based on their hype during an event. Another element as a host is when a person is considered as a facilitator. The role as a facilitator involves a task to moderate a discussion or a situation. This is to ensure the discussion is done in the most harmony manner. This will also allow all participants participate in the discussion. Besides facilitator, in contrary, the instigator's role involves stirring the discussion with provocation questions and statement. It may create controversy, and for that, the role can be treated as an entertainment or define as finding the truth. Adam Kciec (2013) also shared that there is a popular role in a community. This role is the closest define to the object of this study which is social influencer. Although the popular role is all about him or herself, some people really look up at them. The popular role is also able to get people be at where they go. Adam Kciec consider this group of people as pseudo-friend to the popular role.

Influence is an ability to encourage people to believe in what you are believing in. It is an area that will involve the way you think and act, the way you conclude your decision and the way you perceive certain matter on people and also the subject of interest.

Influence may come from anyone, including your parents, other family members, mentors, your nearest companion and unknown people that you may have certain degree of respect towards the person's success and emotional stories. Influence may come in a positive manner and vice versa. It is how a person receive and also act upon the influence that may encourage them to be a better person or may also lead them to negative path.

Influence may be characterised in three (3) segments: (i) It is approach others as equal where there is difference in power and authority; (ii) Segment would be influence to quickly find or identify similarity with one and another. Then is to ensure we share the same interest, agenda and also objective; and (iii) One would be well liked in general. This would need a higher degree of professional interactions for both parties to keep up with the information exchange. Most of the time, this is a likeable group of people that you may rely should you need any help in the future (The Benefits of Being Able to Influence Others, 2012). In related to this project paper, influence may be studied on the influence criteria of how social influencer plays his or her role in engaging their followers to the products that are promoted by them. Most of the followers are not directly communicating and engaging with the social influencer, thus, it will be very interesting to study the elements that influence the followers to follow, like and 'fall' into social influencers persuasion and influence.

II. EMERGING NEW MEDIA

The context of new media changes every now and then. It depends of what emerge at that particular time that benefited the society covering many aspects, example smoothening communication and interaction, upskilling society's expertise in certain field and a contribution to a smoother processes between community and industries. New media used to link to the emergence of computer as an alternative to the traditional medium, example as a replacement to typewriter. New media also is related to medium or platform that offers interactivity. According to Techopedia, new media encompassed of online social platforms, online communities, online video/audio streams and much more that are related to multimedia and digital form. It can be presented in both; desktop and other digital devices, example tablets and smart phone (New Media). New media is not only an avenue for content to be consumed but also an opportunity for the users to interact with one and another based on the features offered.

According to Brian Neese (2016), new media can be seen as one of the contributions to societal transformation and highlighted five areas of new media involving blog though there is a demand of journalist to remain gatekeepers even at the need of fast produced content environment. Virtual reality (VR) is also considered as a new media where it involved the user's physical presence and sensory experience. Virtual reality is also known as a computer stimulated reality where technology replicates an environment and simulates a user's physical presence that allows the user to interact with it. Another type of new media is social media. Social media is a platform no longer to share posting, picture and also video, but also an avenue to interact beyond that, an example to form a social group, to private messaging, forum exercise and also content or news platform. Among the popular social media are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, Weibo and

many more. In Malaysia, the penetration of social media usage on mobile has reached 69% of the total population with 11 million of Instagram users and 24 million of Facebook users on monthly basis as of January 2018 (Kemp, 2018). Nowadays, social media is being used widely for so many reasons, amongst others is to promote product and services by almost type of industries (Shanmugam et al. 2019a). It is also considered as a branding exercise especially when the objective is to increase followers of the social media, thus to also increase follower's loyalty on the brand and product. Social media is also active in improving offerings to the market. Facebook, for example, is no longer focusing on video streaming but on a Spaces where it allows the user to connect with one and another in VR mode. With its ownership on Oculus, a virtual reality hardware and software company, it is an opportunity for Facebook to move ahead with the new offering.

The next medium that is considered as new media is an online newspaper where most of the news by publishing companies are now being published on social media. The main reason for publishing it on social media is to ensure for the news to travel fast and to all platform where internet users are at. There is also a comments section where readers may comment on the news piece and this shows how it allows further interaction rather than one-way communication. According to Pew Research Centre, publishing companies in United States has went through an estimation of 31 million of newspaper circulation for weekday and 34 million for Sunday circulated in 2017 which is a decrease of 11% and 10% in comparison to the previous year thus affecting the traditional advertising revenue from with a decrease of 10% from 2016 (*More Fact Sheets*, 2018).

Digital games are also a part of new media and have also influenced the way of life of internet users. It also created its own culture where the community of digital games interacts with one and another actively. The increase in gamers among digital games has shown an increase in other aspects example the increase of e-games competition and also high winning money to be won during the competition. Most of the Internet users who are actively playing digital games are now known as professional gamers, thus they take this role seriously as a profession. With 2.1 billion gamers worldwide, it is expected that the mobile gaming industry will garner 72 billion USD by 2020 (Media Kix Team, 2018). As digital revolution evolved into a new era which is Fourth Revolution, many new trends are being introduced, example the Internet of Things (IoT), robotics, virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) that are changing our way of life. There is also an advancement of social media, for example, Insta Stories and Instagram TV or IGTV introduced by Instagram. Both features allow an immediate story to be posted both in a very short period and also in a long-form. IGTV is a space where followers may use it to publish content at a standard of TV content. While the platform is very important as a medium, a social influencer is also seen as one of the key components on the success of the medium. Most of the brands engage social influencer continuously for their marketing campaign especially to target their target market that has been ignoring traditional medium (Patel, 2017).

It is also important to study how new media messaging platforms; Messenger, WhatsApp has solidified its platform in the digital world. There are 2.1 billion phone messaging app used worldwide in 2018 and expected to grow to 2.48 billion users in 2021 (Statista, 2018). The users would also be expecting advancements on the messaging app with the incorporation artificial intelligence, voice assistants and chatbots that will enable brands to offer personalised engagement. Live streaming is also considered a new way of advancement where many types of content can be streamed Live as an immediate update on the campaign that is conducted by clients. It is no longer a need to air it live on a traditional medium as social media can offer the same mechanism.

III. MARKETING AND PROMOTION TOOLS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA EMERGENCE

Executing the right 4Ps in marketing is crucial to ensure a business can meet its objective, which is to generate revenue. The 4Ps are related to price, product, place and promotion. According to The 4P's of Marketing – The Marketing Mix Strategies, it is crucial to introduce customisation of a marketing plan to address the 4Ps, in hope that it can provide significance result for both existing and new product (Kar, 2011). The product must be a palpable product and a service that offers a solution to the target market. It will be pointless to produce a product and offer a service that is unable to generate profit to the company. This can be related to political party strategy during the execution of campaigns. Identifying basic elements are crucial to ensure everything is in order. According to John Sides, Daron Shaw, Matt Grossman and Keena Lipsitz (2011), the basis of an excellent campaign must involve the awareness of which campaign need to run with a set of goal which is to win the election. This will later dictate how a campaign should be and how it should be organised.

One of the fundamentals in generating revenue for products and services is also via advertising. Although many may think promotion and advertising fall under the same meaning, Ward has distinctively differentiated both by highlighting that advertising is considered as an act to support the product or service. As for promotion, it is referred to as a specific activity to promote the product or service (Ward, 2017). Based on the traditional methods, promotions or marketing tools have always been via advertising involving television, radio, newspaper, magazine, outdoor (billboard), and distribution of pamphlets/posters or even through word of mouth. As the digital world is now the key in promoting the product and communicating information, a social influencer is taking advantage of using social media and digital medium as a part of their tool. According to Jade (n.d.), social influencer marketing strategy by clients uses individuals that include personalities, bloggers and opinionated people to influence other people's buying habit or to understand and accept certain agenda.

Traditional marketing involved various types of media, such as television, radio, newspaper, pamphlet, poster, sandwich board, signage and other advertising methods. The traditional marketing method is still one of the demanding ways for clients to promote their product. Most of the decision-making in advertising in this medium are based on the statistic of viewers, listenership, readership, circulation of

print materials and the number of eye view on advertising on a billboard. The statistics are considered as reaffirmed numbers of people who will come across their advertisement, which is key for clients to ensure that they get a certain number of reach or exposure. However, there are now many speculations on the 'survival' of traditional marketing. Is traditional marketing at its dead end? Due to the diversion of people's choice which is now towards digital for content reference, some of the traditional media, especially print publication, has now reduced their advertising rate (Lavinsky, 2013). This has resulted in poor revenue return to them. Contradict to this opinion, Dodd (2015) emphasized that based on the Deloitte Digital Democracy Survey that was done in 2014 among 2,100 U.S. citizens, the main six top-ranked of advertising methods are based on traditional medium which are recommendations from a friend/family/known acquaintance, television ads, theater advertising, magazine ads, product placement and newspaper ads. Dodd also relates this situation to mere exposure effect where humans easily and instantly can adapt, accept and familiarise with things that they are used to be exposed. Added to that will be repetitious of messaging delivered to the target market will also easily influence them in decision-making.

Social media has emerged full of significance. It is a part of Web 2.0 where it allows two ways interactions between the sender and receiver. It is considered as user-generated where various types of content are used as a part of the messages example comments in the form of text, videos and photos (Shanmugam et al. 2019b). The effectiveness of the medium has turned the medium as a tool that is considered as a need, instead of a want. According to American Journalism Review (Fischer, 2014), a group of Los Angeles Times editors has started not only to use social media to distribute news but also as a tool to measure (by using Simply Measure) to evaluate the effectiveness of social media as news distribution and engagement. On top of the initiative, they also focused on assigning all of their writers to use Twitter as well as Google+. This is one of the ways for journalists and print industry practitioners to evolve in the digital world as well as to keep the relevancy of their product to their target market. It was also said that half of the networks social media users used Facebook and Twitter to discover news. On top of it, based on Pre-Research Centre's Journalism Project, there was a jump of 62% of Reddit users applying the same method to meet the same objective, which is as a way to discover news (Fischer, 2014). Although it is a new approach, it is undeniable that some of the journalists are not into social media world, where at one particular time (in 2014), Dean Baquet who was the editor of New York Times did not tweet anything in comparison to BuzzFeed Editor in Chief, Ben Smith, who had tweeted more than 81,000 times with 178,000 followers (Fischer, 2014). In an establishment of social media between two parties, it has also eventually created extreme bonding between the platform and the user. Based on the Effects of Social Media Use on Relationship Satisfaction article, the world is more linked with one and another with the establishment of social media and it is obvious that world residents are counting on social media through social media brings both benefits and unfavorable elements to the users (Porter, Mitchell, Grace, Shinosky & Gordon, 2012).

This includes allowing people to have more bonding with one another, although via virtual, but at the same time it can also cause conflict among society. All these are due to the measurement made to study the engagement between users and social media. This includes on how long they used social media, how frequent they log in, the amount of communication and updates by the users, the type of social media, the type of content that they post and other various details. This engagement study can also detect how far does a person is addicted to social media (Porter, Mitchell, Grace, Shinosky & Gordon, 2012).

IV. SOCIAL INFLUENCER AND CHARACTERISTICS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social influencer or influencer marketing is referred to those who have the influence towards their followers and able to execute marketing activation around their universe (Who Is An Influencer?, 2014). Although the term of social influencer emerged recently, a similar function has been touched base by Lazerfeld and Katz via a study, titled "The People's Choice" (Lamb, 2013). The study concluded that masses might be influenced by the secondhand information that was given by the opinion leader. In terms of influencers, not only celebrities are categorised in this list, but also journalists, academicians, industry analysts, and professional advisors and individual who is a brand advocate. Since an editor can also be defined as an influencer, the definition of influencer must be differentiated based on marketing strategy and also an individual who is suitable to carry out the strategy. Lyle Stevens (2017) broke down the influencer into a mega-influencer, macro-influencer and micro-influencer. Mega-influencer refers to celebrities who take advantage as a social influencer to earn a secondary income. A macro-influencer is related to a group of people who is expert in a certain subject and earns from the role as a social influencer. This includes bloggers and professionals who have a background from various industries example fashion stylist/designer, investor, fitness instructors and others. A micro-influencer is a normal person who has relevant knowledge as well as an influence but does not inspire to become a macro-influencer (Stevens, 2017). As to ensure the function of social influencer is up to mark, evaluation on the success of their role is very important. The positive elements will also be a guide to the marketers to decide on the right angle that they wish their social influencer to promote in related to their product. According to Brian Solis (n.d.), marketers identify authentic storytelling by social influencers as a crucial part of getting the buy-in from their target market. The engagement rate can be as high as 71% reach. Brian Solis also shared the importance to measure the engagement rate resulted from the participation of the social influencer in the campaign. These include engagements that cover comments on a blog post, likes, shares, brand awareness, sales, traffic, reach and other elements. The evaluation is also to study whether certain campaign works well that contributes to the other important digital data to see how far the lifestyle marketing content travels and engage with the target market.

A. Recognition and Track Record

As social influencer is the main subject here, it would be a great study to know how much revenue does a social influencer able to generate. In a recent article by Forbes, titled

"Forbes Top Influencers: Meet The 30 Power Players Making A Fortune On Social Media" (O'Connor, 2017), has listed down top influencers who have generated high income and also followers from the role as a social influencer. The metrics used in identifying the social influencer was based on Captiv8 where all influencers were evaluated based on their followers and also associations that they are attached to, example sponsorship, deals with clients and also another type of revenue generated exercise that they earned offline. This particular evaluation is only done within those who built their fan base and fame from the start with the 'usage' of the internet platform. Having said that, famous celebrities who have existing followers and fans, as an example the Kardashian's family members, are not being included in this exercise. From the findings, Forbes has discovered that some of the social influencers have millions of followers and able to gather as high as 250 million of followers, while some can generate \$300,000 for a YouTube video that they produced and published.

Since there are many social influencers emerged from various fields, these group of people has also be evaluated based on their forte or their field of interest. The categories that were touched base were beauty, fitness and home. As English is considered as a language that is used world widely, posting that was posted in English was one of the main criteria in this exercise and the candidates later were short-listed to 30 candidates with 24 women as the final candidates. As expected, most of them were among the millennial. Some of the names in the fitness field that have made to top five (5) were Kayla Itsines, Jennifer Selter, Emily Skyle, Michelle Lewin and Joe Wicks. In overall statistics, the overall top 10 social influencers in the fitness field have achieved to gather almost 40,000,000 Instagram followers, 3,000,000 Twitter followers, 52,000,000 Facebook likes, almost 5,000,000 YouTube subscribers with 106,000,000 reach.

B. As a Marketing Tool

A question on why people are easily being influenced is crucial to understand. Various types of influence may occur and can be in positive and negative ways. This includes the influence that comes from any type of individual, regardless of a celebrity or non-celebrity. This issue was a discussion among the psychologists who have tried to find answers on how being obedient and accepting social influence became a part of someone's life. One of the theories is the association to the events of World War II and the Holocaust, that involved soldiers' willingness to obey to the authority and sacrificing their values and morals in favour of other's people instruction (Social Influence).

However, it is undeniable that the influence of social media is crucial in marketing and promoting both product and content to the target market. Engaging social influencer to promote a brand, as well as contents campaign, is considered as a new way in promoting brand and campaign. Surprisingly, a social influencer is no longer among celebrity like how it used to be. Nowadays, a normal person who is very active on social media, namely Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat and has many followers can be considered as a social influencer.

As a social influencer, not only they would need to have many followers, but they should be at the capacity of able to influence and persuade their followers to like, agree and participate in any agenda championed or lead by them. Based on The Influencer Marketing Manifesto, written by TapInfluence and Altimeter Group in July 2016, 71.2% from 1,753 influences stated that their followers remained engaged to them due to their authenticity (Kraniak, 2016). All these elements are key for them to be identified as a successful social influencer who will attract advertisers to engage them as their product talent or for them to lead a campaign.

Based on the article by Michelle Kraniak, quoted from 2016 Influencer Marketing Report, it was stated that 66% from 200 marketing professionals were using social influencers in their marketing campaign in 2016. 80% out of them strategised to attract new audience and 70% of them decided to use a social influencer to reach to the niche audience. Another factor that has made these advertisers turned to a social influencer is due to the high percentage of an internet user who used ad blocking and ad avoidance to avoid internet advertising appears on their screen. Messages and content delivered by a social influencer are considered as authentic, genuine and personalize (Kraniak, 2016).

By having ready-made followers, it is considered as a quick win and an advantage for a social influencer. This is considered as a strength where their market is in their universe and easy to engage. Advertisers would take this opportunity to tap into the market that will ease their marketing strategy (Kraniak, 2016). However, not all aspect of social influencer comes as easy everyone thought. Identifying the right social influencer can be an issue where some marketers do not see the number of followers as the sole indicator of a successful social influencer. Having said that, in February 2016, eMarketer.com survey has discovered that influencer's engagement number is a better way of evaluating a success of a social influencer (Influencer Marketing Is Rapidly Gaining Popularity Among Brand Marketers, 2016).

C. Challenges and Barriers

As a social influencer, persuasion via digital is key. It is a task that is not done in person, face to face or physically in a group. A social influencer is in need to depend on tools or medium that may assist them in convincing netizen to believe, agree and also able to 'execute' any action persuaded by them, for an example in liking and sharing their status, including buying a product suggested and promoted by them. Due to that, the social influencer needs to understand their market profiling and behaviour. The importance in understanding the elements fall under psychology, sociology and marketing (Hall, 2013). This would round-up on how all criteria are taken into consideration in understanding consumer's habit where digital comes in as a delivery tool to the action by the social influencer. Most importantly, the ROI (Return of Investment) value would need to be a higher return to the client, including success to a campaign lead by the social influencer. To ensure persuasion is done consistently, there are main factors that need to be taken into consideration. One of it is reciprocity where mutuality is created with another party to exchange information, agenda and also strategies. This is to benefit one and another and to use each other's strengths. Although it creates a relationship, it can also be considered as no strings attached as it is a win-win situation. By leveraging with one and other, more followers may be increased (Sexton, 2010).

On top of it, as a social influencer, it is also very important in keeping the commitment to the world of digital. This includes in replying comments, retweeting, providing videos consistently and even posting a picture in ensuring their 'existence' in the digital world. The content provided must be relevant content to the target market. According to Sexton (2010), it is the time where the concentration should be on building social proof that is within the target market. Other elements that need to be taken into consideration are to focus on creating value by observing data or insights that represent a social influencer's market. This includes taking charge and to take notice on comments posted by netizen, subscription and friendship element that has been built via digital. The engagement is also no longer with the netizen, but also with the social media or tool that is being used by a social influencer. Not forgetting being honest is also important as a part of persuasion effort from a social influencer. In playing the role as a social influencer, many challenges need to be faced not only by the social influencer but also by clients and agencies. In the context from clients, any elements that may jeopardise the brands is considered as a major crisis to the brand. Having a social influencer with a big profile may also come with risk especially when the social influencer involves in an issue or scandal, thus it will automatically become a liability to the brand (Stevens, 2017).

Managing a fake account is also a risk in the social influencer world. A social media account can be registered by anyone by using any name and profile, including creating a celebrity fake account. This obviously can be detected when multiple accounts are using the same name. In managing the account, the social influencer must be willing to manage criticism and negative feedback by netizen. For that, the social influencer would need to have a plan to handle any crisis management that might occur and jeopardise the brand of the social influencer or the brand of the product (Stevens, 2017). Keeping true to own personality is also a challenge for the social influencer to maintain its status. Being authentic all the time includes educating followers with the right info. With that, the social influencer will be able to establish product knowledge and share an authentic experience with their followers. This should not be in the short term but a long term commitment. Creating a strategy is important, but as years go by, having the right messaging and content are more important. The social influencer would need to think creatively on the content that they would want to deliver. It has to be supported with an objective and angle that will lead to an engagement. This includes the type of social media that they would want to use to deliver their messages. Since there is already an investment (time and creativity), the content would need to be the right fit for the eyeballs who are watching or reading the content (Bohan, 2016).

V. PROBLEM STATEMENT

A social influencer is one of the marketing tools used in the contemporary business or promotion module. The power of social influencer may give great positive and negative influence to the public where the public can easily 'engage' to the product reviewed or content published by social influencer without considering its actual features and facts.

As the followers are considered as a loyalist, they tend to get or buy product 'recommended' or agreeing to the content by social influencer without considering other important elements, which include the quality and safety of the product as well as an influence to maintain a certain standard of lifestyle beyond their needs. On the other hand, some context that is being included in the content by social influencer may impact certain degree of thinking and behaviour of the followers, including content that is related to current and sensitive issue, namely political content.

Among the symptoms is some so many individuals have now become a social influencer, basing solely on their number of followers on social media. Their main objective is to generate income out of the product review and other types of engagement as a social influencer marketing. To meet their objective, they are willing to review and promote any type and any kind of product without considering the quality of the product that they are promoting to the public. Should the issue continues, the public will be at risk of getting the wrong information related to the product. A social influencer, on the other hand, will be at the winning side where they will continuously generate revenue from their role. It can also cause a social problem as even a primary school student may become a social influencer and conduct product revenue to generate own income. This will expose these children to cyber-crime where they will be 'watched' and 'observed' by many strangers in the digital world.

On the other hand, social media has its influence in persuading their followers to what they believe in, in the sense of their interest, paradigm and what they champion when it comes to their perspective. In this study, the area that will be looked at is how social influencer influences their followers to what they believe in related to political understanding or the engagement towards the political content shared by the social influencer. This research will conduct a study on how social media users engaged with their social influencer in the sense of lifestyle content that involves promoting products and services as well as their engagement with social influence who promotes their political agenda via social media. A comparison of acceptance of how netizen accepting two types of content may be a guide to understand how far does social influencers influence netizen from a 'casual' type of content to a serious type of content, in this case, political content.

The weakness of this research is related to how the content or data will be based on one side of understanding, which is from the follower's point of view. There is no direct contact with the social influencer in understanding their intention whether or not they planned or intended to influence their followers to understand and accept their political ideology. There is also no follow-up to understand on why social influencer chooses social media to promote their content and why certain content is published in certain ways to their followers, either in a form of text, video, reposting of content or even icons used in their posting. It is hoped that social influencer can be seen as a professional group of people or to be considered as a professional career. This is because despite most of them are being engaged by clients, most of the social influencers also conduct their strategy, marketing and execution to meet both; client's objective and personal agenda. With this research, it is expected that there will be quite a several key learning and take away that can be learned and applied on the engagement level with social influencer

not only for lifestyle marketing effort and political/campaign agenda but also for other types of industries.

Throughout the years of media industry and digital development, there are various marketing and promotions methods that are used by clients, media agencies and organisations, not only in introducing their product or campaign but also in establishing their product or campaign to the next level with an ultimate goal, which is to increase their revenue and to get buy-in on their campaign and agenda. Not only that, but the emergence of social media has also shown creative ways on how social media is being used to promote a various type of philosophy and agenda with a hope to disseminate information and influence netizen's mindset.

Along the way, technology has also emerged tremendously both; in technical aspects and offerings. Companies themselves have many choices to use to market their product including offerings involving branded viral videos, banners, advertorials, sponsored websites, branded chat rooms and so much more (Sugget, 2017). One of the offerings involved a connection between people via social media, namely Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Interesting enough, these social media are not only used by Gen Y and Z, but also among the baby boomers too, as nowadays gadgets, especially smartphones are well equipped with various features and applications. This includes on how social media is also seen as one of the ways to promote the politic campaign. The use of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have intensely given an impact on how campaigns ran in America (Murse, 2016). This can also be seen in Malaysia's latest General Election that happened recently where social media was used to disseminate info and also to increase the profiling of the candidates. With the significant change and development, society dynamic, especially in the digital world, has changed as well. Without denial, the rise of social influencer's community is happening tremendously and has become a new phenomenon among the digital society. Who are these people and how do we define them as a social influencer? What is the significance of this group of social influencer? What is their role in the marketing industry and campaign strategy? According to Greg Santos Busch (2016), a social influencer can be an individual or even small organisations that are from various industries that who have credibility among their followers. Although it is undeniable that reach is key, influence is considered more vital in message delivery between the social influencer and their followers.

VI. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

RO1: To identify the key success of social influencer who are actively as a marketing tool and also as a political campaign tool.

RO2: To understand the engagement between social influencer and netizens as marketing tool and also as a political campaign tool.

VII. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative study focuses on the engagement between social media users and social influencer based on the lifestyle content and political content delivery by the social influencer in Klang Valley using focus group discussion.

Focus group discussion (FGD) is a session to discuss issues and concerns based on themes listed by the researcher. According to Escalada and Heong (2014), this research method was meant to be an extension to quantitative research where the focus group was used to understand the issue better. It is considered as an efficient tool in identifying the target audience as well as the opportunity to assess the information immediately. In conducting a focus group discussion, it is very crucial for the setting to be at a neutral venue to avoid any biases towards the respondents. As the discussion is free to flow, where respondents may answer at any time and even have the right not to answer the questions, a researcher must be able to transcript every feedback shared by respondents to ensure no information are left behind. Respondents may answer the questions not by sequence and may elaborate further at any time.

The target respondents for this project are eight (8) individuals who are 30-years-old and below as well as very active on social media. They are social media users who have multiple social media accounts such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other types of social media accounts where they used it for networking and information sourcing. The selection of these respondents is due to the exposure that they have on digital from a very young age. Having said that, they could understand the function of the social media applications, recognise digital jargon and expert in posting status, pictures, video and other features on their social media. The participating respondents can identify social influencers as they are also followers of certain social influencers and have a certain degree of engagement with social influencers whom they follow. As this research touch base on lifestyle content and political content, respondents are also among the voters of Malaysia 14th General Election who consume political content either during pre, during or post 14th GE. The chosen respondents were among media practitioners with different job scope. The rationale of choosing these respondents was to understand the engagement that they have on lifestyle content and political content that was delivered by the social influencer whom they follow. With the different background in the sense of designation and social media consumption, various kind of feedback can be gathered to enrich information for this research.

During the information gathering, the researcher applied a purposive sampling method, which in non-probability where respondents were identified by the researcher based on the criteria required to answer research objectives and research questions. The purposive sampling is a practical and useful way if only it is used wisely and may be more effective than random sampling (Tangco, 2007). The data collected were based on transcription from the feedback given and was recorded via video. The observation was also conducted to understand the body language of respondents when answering. This is to ensure that data gathered are all based on the input shared by respondents, regardless of any type of content shared.

Also been used for secondary data analysis. It is an analysis of data that can be a variation of data collection by other researchers or other medium example journals, magazine to support primary purpose. The application of the existing data would ease the researcher in the sense of time and resources (Johnsto, 2014). For this particular research, secondary data was gathered from journals, articles and analysis of social media content. Additional content ease researcher to further

understand the issue especially on the news related to the latest Malaysia 14th General Election. However, in another aspect, since the data is available for a long period, the researcher would need to be very precise in selecting secondary data as some of the data may become obsolete.

Due to that, secondary data needs to be supported with primary data which is a focus group. Thematic analysis was used to develop themes and its description of a phenomenon study based on the research questions. Through the recurring situation, the researcher can understand the relevancy of the current issue to develop a relatable theme. This will also assist the researcher to understand the information delivered by respondents. It will also ease the interpretation process by the researcher in delivering the information in the findings section. Collected data will go through NVIVO software.

VIII. FINDINGS

Throughout the focus group, eight (8) respondents with a breakdown of four (4) males and four (4) females were chosen to share their experiences in engaging social influencers through social media for marketing and political content. The selected respondents were from the media industry with different job scope and have been in the industry between a year to six years. The participants were a mix of different races (Malay, Chinese and Indian) intending to gather different type of answers and perspective on the issue discussed. Engaging social influencers on social media is not by one or two races only, but by almost all races who are active on social media. The feedbacks are being analysed critically based on the justifications shared by respondents. The participating respondents were a group of media practitioners of Media Prima Radio Networks and each respondent originally came from various type of background and hometown. This can be seen as one of the side (if not main) factor in understanding their feedback to the discussion. The group of the respondents holds a different type of titles which are from a manager to an executive from different departments in the organisation.

ROI: To study the key success of social influencer who are active as a marketing tool and also as a political campaign tool.

The level of key success of social influencers

This section is to understand the chosen social media preferred by respondents in engaging with their social influencers. This is to study how long do they spent their time on social media to consume on the digital content presented on social media.

a. The chosen Social Network Sites (SNSs) and Time Spent

From the focus group discussion, there were mixtures of social network sites (SNSs) or social media platform used actively by the respondents. However, some respondents are also actively engaged with one social media platform. The time spent on social media platform also varies from one respondent to another, but in general respondents in using social media platform used more than an hour. R1 shared that although he has more than one social media platforms, he is more active on Instagram with a duration of four (4) hours spent on a social media platform.

This was also seconded by R2 who shared that he used only Instagram with two (2) hours spent on it. Instagram seemed to be the choice of R7 as well who also shared that she focused on Instagram for her social media activities with duration of three (3) hours spent on Instagram. As for R5, Twitter seems to be chosen, which differs from the preference of other respondents when it comes to choosing one main social media platform. The duration of an hour also exceeded with three (3) hours spent by R5 on Twitter.

“I’m more on Instagram and spend more or less 4 hours on social media.” (R1)

“For me, it’s Instagram and I spend about 2 hours.” (R2)

“Instagram and about 3 hours.” (R7)

“I will spend 3 hours in Twitter!” (R5)

Some respondents spent on numerous social media platforms and spent quite the same number of time. R3 shared that she can access and use Instagram, Twitter and Facebook daily. The duration spent seemed to be quite the same period as respondents who focused on one social media platform. The time spent by R3 on all three (3) social media platforms – Instagram, Twitter and Facebook are between three (3) to four (4) hours daily.

“I’m active on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook and I will spend 3 to 4 hours.” (R3)

The selection of social media platforms does not necessarily due to personal interest. This is because social media platform can be used for multiple reasons that include for promotional purposes, for education and to meet job requirements. This was highlighted by R4 who spoke that due to her role as a Social Media Executive, she is needed to use Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. This is partly due to the job scope that required her to post on the social media platform, though without denial, it was also for her postings. To meet her job requirement, she spent long hours on social media without mentioning an exact time.

“It’s Instagram, Twitter and Facebook for me. Partly because of my work and of course for my personal posting too. I spend long hours on social media because of my work.” (R4)

The advantage of having full access to the Internet especially in the office may encourage staff to go online at any time, regardless of desktop or on the smartphone. This was shared by R6 who stated that she will access to Instagram as her main choice of a social media platform and will take the opportunity to go online in between her working hours.

“For me, it’s Instagram and I will access in between work time.” (R6)

Having more than one social media platforms is normal as new social network sites (SNSs) or social media platforms emerged from time to time. These generations were exposed to multiple social media platforms when they were even in their teenage years. Each of the social media platforms offers different features in attracting new users to their platforms. This, however, does not guarantee consistency from the respondents to be active on all social media platforms as maintaining activities on social media platforms consistently can be tiring. R8 described as him being in this position where he is only able to be active on Twitter and Instagram, in comparison to Facebook. He even included WhatsApp as one of his social media platform that he is using actively. His emphasizing on time spent on social media platforms were mostly during his travelling time to work or during his time.

“I’m an active user of WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram. Still have Facebook account but rarely use it compared the other 3 platforms. I would say on weekdays, I spent minimum of 4 hours in a day as I am working. So, the time spent on social media would be during my journey from home to work and another way round as well as before sleep. But the time spent could be more than 4 hours on the weekend as I would have more leisure time.” (R8)

In general, the time spent on social media platforms is more than one hour, regardless of how many social media platforms a respondent engaged to. Instagram is the most mentioned as social media platforms used by the respondents daily while Facebook was the least mentioned. A respondent also considered a communication platform which is WhatsApp as a part of social media platforms. Interesting, social media platforms are also being accessed for various reasons and not only for personal communication use but also includes the need for meeting job performance. This showcases that in this digital era, social media platforms are no longer meant to be personal use solely, but for profession purpose and due to that, access to it at any time is considered as a norm, even during the office hours, including for personal use.

Relating to the preferred social influencers

As discussed in the research objective, understanding the key success of social influencers among those who are championing marketing content and political content is important in this project paper. Although many social influencers fall under different categories of social influencer, marketing content has been the main content championed by most social influencers. This is because by doing marketing content, they can make money from the payment done by a client who assigned them to market a product or service. On top of that, due to the hype of the Malaysia 14th General Election recently, there were many ‘talk ability’ about Malaysia politic scene on the digital world, including on social media platforms. To naming social influencers that the respondents engaged with, based on certain reasoning which includes social influencers who are relateable to their lifestyle as shared by R1.

“It has to suit to my lifestyle, fitness, entrepreneur and entertainment. So, it’s the people like Roland Sien, Jordan Yeoh, Dennis Yin. They have both fitness and entrepreneur.” (R1)

Thus, the need for meeting job requirements is crucial for someone responsible for the company’s social media content. To ensure she keep herself updated, her preferred social influencers will be those who are under celebrity categories and maybe from other countries too. R4 describe this statement based on the details that she shared.

“More of the local and Singaporean You Tubers. The rest, let’s say Chinese influencer, I stalk them and see what they do. This is for my work because to see what is the new trend.” (R4)

During the discussion, a variety of social influencer’s names appeared including those who are from the entertainment scene, entrepreneurs and politicians. R5 emphasized that he follows a politician but mainly on Twitter. As for entertainment base, a celebrity who has produced viral content, Faiz Dickie, as his choice to follow on social media.

“In Twitter, I used to follow Nurul Izzah and Syed Saddiq. I followed those in politics. In media sector, I used to followed Faiz Dickie due to viral impact” (R5)

A mixture of social influencers was also a choice for R2, R6 and R7. R2's selection is social influencers who are involved in fashion, entrepreneurs, politic and admitting that although he follows the said social influencer, his engagement with the social influencers is not as frequent as it should be. As for R6, a mixture of social influencers was from the entertainment industry, while for R7, a mixture of female social influencers were listed with two of the social influencers Neelofa and Vivi Yusof are actively in the fashion industry and Nurul Izzah representing a social influencer from the politic scene.

“For Twitter, the influencer that I used to follow are Omar Bahrain and Ezra Said. On Instagram, I followed them but not religiously.” (R2)

“Faiz Dickie, Ann Jaafar, Mina Rosli.” (R6)

“Yes, I am following Neelofa, Nurul Izzah, Vivi Yusof.” (R7)

The reasons for following social influencers are also related to the intention of how social influencers can contribute to our benefit. In this aspect, R3 shared that she has a variety of choice in selecting her social influencer based on their performance on social media. This does not only relate to an individual but also professionals of media organizations that contribute strong facts to her knowledge. R3 highlighted that amongst the social influencers whom she follows are SoImJen and Harvinth who are well known in producing own content. The mention of reporters was also shared as one of the ways for her to get verified news through Twitter. It is also very important to be aware of the verified badge rewarded by Twitter to the media organisation represented by the journalists. Adding to that, the efficiency on how the news was delivered on social media.

“For Instagram, it's SoImJen, Harvinth. On Twitter, I follow a lot of reporters, some announcers from other stations. This is for verified news and most of the news reporters has gotten verified badge on Twitter. You know their news are faster than the news outlet because they are on ground. There are also music people that I follow as some of them are curators of playlist and they talk about the new music.” (R3)

In related to choosing social influencers that have credibility and key success rate, R8 shared that the track record of a social influencer is very important. His choice on Neelofa is due to Neelofa's success in entrepreneur field that inspires him, thus, triggered him to follow Neelofa on social medium to know about her life, business and entertainment. The mention of Joe who is also known as KlubkidKL is also related to his credibility in his field, which are entertainment, and beyond that. His continuous statement gave an impact to R8 who defined it as making sense and contribute a different perspective from the rest. There were mentions of politicians by R8 who were Nurul Izzah and Khairy Jamaluddin who attracted R8 to follow them due to the ideology and spirit shown by both politicians. The success rate of these two politicians who used social media platform to communicate with their followers is highly valued by R8 who identified this effort as ways for him to know ore insights on current issues.

“Yes, I follow quite a number of social influencers on SM for various reasons. Neelofa – Young successful entrepreneur that inspired a lot of people including me.

Reason why I follow her on Social Media is to know her updates about life, business, and entertainment.

Joe (KlubkidKL) – Joe is a well-known figure in the entertainment industry (PR if im not mistaken). Thus, most of the things that he shared on twitter about gossips and update about the industry but not just that, there's more info. He also very vocal about his thoughts about politics, environment and more. Interestingly, everything that he shares make sense and his standpoints can be somewhat different from others.

Nurul Izzah and Khairy Jamaludin – Politicians that I look up to. Though they are both from different political parties/coalitions, but the spirit of fighting for the people is what I admired the most. They both use SM platforms to reach/listen to the people. By following both of them also allows me to have more insight about certain issues that happen in the country as they both have different opinions.” (R8)

Thus, there is a mixture of social influencers who are being followed by the respondents. The names that were mentioned were among the politicians, sensational celebrities, fashion's icon, entrepreneurs and fitness expert. The main reason for following these social influencers are due to their forte in their respective field. Respondents looked up at them as a way that may contribute to their lifestyle and also a way for them to seek for information based on the social influencer's forte. There are also social influencer's who are very vocal in what they believe and respondents took the opinion seriously as a way to understand another person's point of view. Interestingly, this does not only related to information revolving politic or current issues but also content that is developed by entertainment celebrities who put effort on their content.

RO2 : How far does netizens engaged with social influencer as a marketing tool and also as a political campaign tool?

The level of engagement between respondents and social influencers

Referring to the research question, the researcher would like to study the engagement level between respondents and social influencers. This is important to understand the reasoning on why respondents prefer to follow certain group of social influencers. Social influencers can be categorised in many categories based on their forte, thus, understanding the preferred social influencers by the respondents can assist in meeting the objective of this project paper. Social influencers may also come from people who are not professionally certified and who always promote products and agenda without any endorsement from the authority or regulators. This eventually may create social conflict as social influencers may instill a negative impact to the society.

a. The influence of marketing content by social influencers

The findings from the discussion found that each of the respondents has different reasoning on why they buy-in or against the marketing content from a social influencer.

For R7, she will be depending on who is the social influencer as most of the social influencer does pay review for a product, thus, it is all back to how credible a social influencer is. As for R1, he would only get the product within his means as he is also shared that most of the social influencers only promote a product based on the commitment to the client. It is very important to him for the social influencers to showcase their involvement by using the product without denying that he had consumed a product based on the recommendation by social influencers.

“Depends on who are the social influencer. There are social influencer who does paid review. That showcase that you do not have any credibility. If it’s Neelofa, she reviews Swarovski product and also other products. She describes products as beautiful and nice. I do buy products because of the influence from social influencer like fashion stuff, example product from FashionValet.” (R7)

“Affordability is very important. If there are products that are beyond my pay grade, even though it is good, I know I can’t afford it. I know most of the social influencers does reviews for so many product, so it loses their credibility. I need to see that the social influencers get endorse and use the product. But I have to say that I use to adopt what they have promoted, example health product though I am unable to pin-point the brand.” (R1)

As for R5, he needs to research a product or service promoted by social influencer before deciding to buy it. Reference is made by googling other website and via another social medium, which includes a facial product for male. Respondent also shared that at times he would go to the shop to check out the items before deciding to purchase the item or not.

“I will read all the comments from the Twitter first, especially for a facial product even I am a guy. Then, I will search for more information on the Internet by googling about the product. I will also go to the shop to look for the product.” (R5)

The credibility of social influencer is also being stressed by R3 who have shared that it is crucial for a social influencer to ‘walk the talk’. This means the social influencer must practice the element of lifestyle that they are promoting. The example given was about a social influencer who has to apply the appropriate lifestyle if she is promoting fitness as a part of her lifestyle. As for her, most of the social influencers whom she follows promote healthy skincare and for that the follow their journey although the respondent herself does not apply skincare treatment. The same concern was shared by R4 who strongly claimed that most of the social influencer tend to promote product due to the commitment to clients. Reference with other users is key for her to cross-check on a certain product before deciding on the next step.

“It is depending on who is the person. If the person champion fitness, it has to be from someone who apply that kind or lifestyle. Most of the social influencers that I follow champion or promote services example they go and get facial treatment, then I tend to follow their journey although I don’t really apply that. Sometimes, they share beauty tip.” (R3)

“I don’t really trust what the social influencer promote because I know they are doing it because of the clients. So if I see their video and posting are interesting, I will still search for more reviews from the other users.”(R4)

During the discussion, R8 emphasized that social influencer does not influence his lifestyle and purchasing power. This is related to the trust issue that he has towards social influencer as he believed social influencer has a certain agenda in meeting their objective. R8, however, has put a reasonable comment stating that he is also learning whatever he can from this group of a social influencer.

“I wouldn’t say that the influencers really influence my lifestyle and purchasing power because I don’t really trust them. I don’t put my 100% trust on them because some influencers have their personal agenda when delivering the content and it would give them benefit but not for me. The existence of these influencers could be eye opener for certain things in my life. I would still do my own research and make comparison before deciding on something.” (R8)

As for R2, the answer given was very straight forward with him stating that convenience is key when it comes to decision-making. He will never allow an influence from a social influencer to dictate his choice in buying a product.

“I never buy a product just because of the influence from the social influencer.” (R2)

Overall, respondents seemed to be very sensitive in accepting every recommendation done by the social influencers. The main aspect that the social influencers will always refer to is the credibility portrayed by the social influencers on what they are promoting. Although there are reasons on why they follow each of the social influencers, credibility plays an important role especially on how far does the social influencers they used the product that they are promoting or apply the serviced that they promote. Respondents are aware that most of the social influencers are being paid to review or promote products and services, thus at times, there are questions on how genuine a social influence is in promoting a product and service. Although social influencer can reach to the followers first hand through their digital content, respondents on the other hand also refer to other elements as a reference before them deciding in buying a product. The reference could be referenced by other people via online or by going to the shop to check out the product physically.

b. The political content consumed by social influencers

In this section, questions were asked to the respondents to achieve RO2. In comparison to the R01, this section requires respondents to give their opinion in related to what they experience when it comes to political content by the social influencers. In this section, the researcher is also able to gather information on the respondents' perception towards social influencer among the politician and how far it has influenced them when it comes to understanding and accepting content input from the politician. To ensure respondents chosen are voters, all respondents shared the area that they attended to vote during the Malaysia 14th General Election.

Digital media is now considered as an important tool in delivering messages. The politician who are engaged with social media is seen as taking full advantage of the media. R1 shared his amusement of the performance of Tony Pua who have produced engaging content in promoting his agenda. The video content that was produced before the winning of the Pakatan Harapan seemed to contribute to his major winning as a Member of Parliament of Damansara.

Due to that, R1 also shared that he has permanently followed Tony Pua on social media for about five to six month before the election

“Tony Pua! I love his video, even prior to the Pakatan winning the election. He was the first from the opposition side who really use the digital platform and maximise it, hence, it was the landslide of him winning. I started to follow him about six to seven months ago.” (R1)

More touch base of politician names, namely Datuk Seri Najib and activist Marina Mahathir were shared by R3. She has shared on why following politician and media platform are important to her when it comes to the current issue. The fact that there are many things to know and to be followed up, the dependency on social influencer assist in understanding the issue better. There were also mention of R3 following journalist as a news source for issue and topic that she would need to know about example issue on 1MDB. As this issue is considered as a national issue, having journalists presenting it a layman term does help respondents in understanding the issue better. R3 will also compare notes and also perspective from both sides. The verification given by the social media platform which is news base is crucial for R3. The feature of social media which is Twitter allowing for content is shared and travelled are much appreciated by R3.

“Many spoke about 1MDB. I will follow the reporters but I believe reading both sides of the stories. I do follow politician like Najib and I read his comments. I read what people say. I follow WanObifren too where he will talk about anything. Let say there is five of us quote an article from NST, we will be able to see what the comments are” (R3)

Thus, credibility plays an important role in agreeing to what a social influencer has to say on a certain matter in related to the politic, as shared by R4. However, this does not stop R4 to still enjoy video content produced by YouTubers who were promoting Malaysian to go out and vote during the Election Day. Even when Pakatan Harapan won, a shout out was done and it was done tastefully without criticising the previous government.

“I don’t really follow or see social influencer talking about politic content but maybe recently because of the election. Some of the YouTubers posted videos asking people to vote or after the result, they will post about Tun M. They are quite open talking about it but mostly what they are talking about is positive and no bashing to BN.” (R4)

As for R5, his experiences in the political scene during his time in university does give him an angle to evaluate news value. The experiences shared were additional info to this research finding. Overall, R5 sees media component as an influencer in getting news. The example given was the importance of following reporters who work at Awani Astro. It is because the news delivered is considered fast. This was compared to the TV3 that was said as slow in proving news, this R5 is comfortable to follow Astro Awani instead.

“I concern about political. I active in politic-campus as I involved directly. I also know the ‘games’ in the politic in the campus. That is why I follow on Twitter. In university I competed for Aspirasi which is considered as siding the previous government. I won in representing my faculty. After the GE-14, I observe the different opinion happening now on Twitter, about (previous) government and opposition.” (R5)

Not all respondents agreed that social influencer can be relied on when it comes to political content. The mention of having credibility was emphasized by R7 in trusting social influencers. It has to be someone who has a political background with the mention of Tony Pua, Marina Mahathir and Nurul Izzah as the politician that she trusts when it comes to digital content. People who are behind the scene can be considered to be trusted but has to be of those who have a professional background.

“It has to be someone who is credible enough to talk about it especially Tony Pua, Marina Mahathir, YB Nurul Izzah, and I will follow them. (R7)

As for R8, he does get his political content from social influencers and social media. This is due to the speed of news that he can receive from the social influencers that he follows. However, cross-checking is important to him in ensuring that the news he consumed is true. The online newspaper is one of his choices in verifying the news that he has gathered from the social influencer.

“I always refer to credible sources such as online newspaper account on social media platform to verify and ensure that the content that I consumed is legit. For recent GE, many social influencers were paid to spread the manifesto and videos of the party that were competing. Surprisingly those who didn’t do the paid job were not scared to share their opinion and critics every single thing that would bring this nation down by considering many factors as well as getting opinion from the experts.” (R8)

In the sense of consuming political content from the social influencers, there were many opinions related to the content that they consumed. One of the respondents enjoyed the video content that was shared by Pakatan Harapan (PH) candidate, Tony Pua, where the respondent considered as a good move and creative in promoting his political agenda. On top of it, content that was provided by the social influencers on social media is considered as a learning curve in understanding a certain issue better. One of the respondents also observes the political scene based on the digital content that he consumed and realised the similarity of political content that is portrayed by certain parties at various level in reaching to their voters.

In another aspect, the reference on social influencer was not only made to the politician but also the media practitioners, news presenter in particular. This is due to the speed of news delivery that they do that attracted social influencer to follow them as well. Professional practitioners in certain fields, example social influencers who have financial and legal background are also referred to if they discuss political content. As content travels easily in the form of digital, further reference is also made on other digital platforms and not on political content delivered by social influencer solely. Digital publication is one of the main references by respondents in double-checking the info to ensure the info is legit.

c. Influence of social influencers in voting

With many types of political content that are delivered online by the social influencers, respondent shared their feedback on how far does social influencers influence their decision-making in voting. This is due to the agenda that is delivered by social influencers that might or might not influence respondents.

Most of the respondents (R1 to R7) admitted that with the extensive content delivered to them, it has some sort affecting their decision-making in voting. This showcase how there is a great influence of social influencers even though the content shared can be considered as a serious topic which is a politic content. However, there was a deliberation by R8 stated he would not easily put his trust on social influencer in deciding on who to vote and such. Seeking various type of content is crucial for him to ensure he has covered as much angle as possible.

“Showing support for a political party is a big thing. Social influencers can’t influence people on this topic because we are in 21 century and everyone knows how social influencers work. I seek for information from the social media platform that shows the reality of each party as well as the content instead of putting 100% trust.” (R8)

Majority of the respondents agreed that some of the political content does influence them in decision making during the election. However, there is also feedback shared by a respondent that no matter what, he will stand firm with his decision and will always refer to other types of online content for a further reference.

d. Identifying other social influencers with positive vibes

In discussing the current issue, there is a need to study other social influencers that might be an influence on Gen Y at the moment. The social influencers can come from various industries and for championing different type of cause. There were mentions of another group of social influencers who championed the good cause for the society. As for R3, following a social influencer who is Davina Goh, has helped her to understand the environmental issue, thus, encouraging her to apply a better lifestyle. It also affects not only to R3 but her friends around her.

“Davina Goh was formally on Astro. I only followed her during an event where she talks about environment and sustainability like not using the straw, bring your own plastic bag and stuff. She shared a lot of tips on how to do your part. Deborah Henry has a foundation for the refugees. She speaks a lot about education. Like Davina, I respect on what she is doing, example on why we shouldn’t use straw and I can see the movement has influence.” (R3)

The mention of social influencers in answering this question is related to them who conduct a campaign that can be benefited by the masses. The good cause can be as simple as not to have a straw as it is made from plastic and it needs years to diminish. Another positive initiative by social influencer was the mention of helping refugees to still have access to education. Free spirit whereby to feel good about own selves that is champion by social influencer seems achieved in making respondents feel good or to support someone’s situation or planning in life. A true story from a social influencer also impacted the life of respondents, knowing the struggle that the social influencer has to go through.

“I watched her video on Facebook, Aida Hazlin. She is a Singaporean and he got married to a Russian. She always talk about positive stuff, example turning negativity to positivity. It gives me different perspectives.” (R7)

Thus, only two respondents responded well to the question related to the other social influencers who give positive vibes to them. Both respondents shared that the other social influencers who have given them positive vibes are those who have thought them a different aspect of life especially in introducing new ways of looking at things. The struggle that

these social influencers came across in their life was also an eye-opening to the respondents especially on how to look at the negative issue more lightly and positively.

e. Acceptance towards Azwan Ali as a candidate

Azwan Ali is a well-known celebrity who was involved in the entertainment industry for more than 15 years. He is an active celebrity in hosting entertainment show and also known as Azmin Ali’s brother, a politician representing Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) party. With Azwan Ali participating in the 14th General Election, competing at Bukit Antarabangsa area, it is interesting to discover the acceptance among respondents towards Azwan Ali as a candidate. For those who have not known him in person or even as a celebrity, the perception might differ with one and another

“I think a lot of people are taking politic stuff more seriously, hence he doesn’t represent that kind of image.” (R1)

“I am not familiar with him. It depends on what he wants for the people with no personal agenda.” (R2)

The continuation of unable to accept Azwan Ali as a candidate seemed to be the same answer for R4. It was not only for her but also among her family members, especially during the announcement of the result.

“I think it’s a joke because I remember when my parents and I were waiting for the result, they showed the result of him and we all laugh and thinking why the hell he is there.” (R4)

For a respondent who has had experience in the political scene during the university years, a different angle is shared based on his knowledge. R5 shared his feedback on what he understood on the need of Azwan Ali competing at the same area of his brother where it was meant to create a competitive scene between Azwan and his brother, Azmin.

“Personally it is quite sensitive. Azwan Ali, he is more to the government. That is why he contested at the Bukit Anarabangsa.” (R5)

There was also a comment where the respondent would prefer if Azwan Ali could prepare himself better in competing for the 14th General Election. It was commented by R6 which quite open of having Azwan Ali being a candidate but a proper preparation would be much appreciated as what has been presented by Azwan Ali seemed does not make sense.

“It is up to him. The way he deal does not make sense.” (R6)

For R7, it is considered as a joke of having Azwan Ali competing for the 14th General Election. She stated that it was merely an attempt to test his market and even to an extent a gimmick to promote his *rendang* dish to the voters.

“It is a joke. I don’t want to take it seriously because I read a lot. He wants to test and promote his rendang dishes.” (R7)

Despite the negative feedback, there was a positive mention from R3 who knows Azwan Ali personally have said that Azwan Ali could have done a better campaign if only he has the right team to assist him. Azwan Ali has a track record as a law graduate and had professionally submitted all document during the registration day in comparison of some politician who failed to submit completed paper works.

“He has the right background, he is a law graduate and that is why a lot of media outlets has been sued by him. He is an intelligent person to talk to but I heard about him getting paid to split the votes in Bukit Antarabangsa.”

So there is the other side of him that other people can't see and I don't know if he wants to show a mockery out of this entire thing because it is a joke, but actually if he has the right people around him, he could actually have had a better campaign." (R3)

Most of the respondents merely labeled Azwan Ali's attempt in competing for the 14th Malaysia General Election as a joke. This is because many Malaysians are taking the political issue seriously, thus he seemed not to be a fit candidate for this kind of national campaign. There were too many theories on Azwan Ali competing in the election based on respondents reading. The news of him being paid to ensure there will be a split vote was one of the argument among respondents in questioning his main reason for participating in GE14. There was an assumption that it was a promotion gimmick for his *rendang*. Feedback was also given to Azwan Ali in ensuring every aspect of campaigns are done professionally as this is a national cause. The respondents are well exposed to social media and also with the social influencers whom they have been following. Respondents have high expectation on the content that they consumed and demand for it to be a worth content for them to view and to believe.

On top of that, the content has to be closed to their heart and lifestyle for them to find it relevant and engage with the content. The content that they consumed may also be an 'amusement' for the respondents, though it might not be the intention of the social influencer. Therefore, a social influencer will have to take note of the other references that the respondents choose to do to verify the news and content that they consumed from the social influencer. It could be a competitive threat as some of the respondents do not have full trust in the social influencer's content delivery.

IX. CONCLUSION

As 14th General Election was the big event for Malaysians, understanding the acceptance of political content by social influencers was very interesting to study. This is to study the type of social influencers whom they follow and talk about the subject matter. Based on the experiences of some of the respondents, many angles can be discovered to understand how respondents see certain matters. This includes the respondents that have tried to compete in an election, even though it was only for his university's council. The experiences were made as a content comparison to show the political content is served to the public during the 14th General Election.

The essential of credibility is one of the keywords that was mentioned by the respondents. It is an important phrase that all respondents relied on to ensure each of the social influencers they follow has a certain degree of credibility in what they are championing. Realising that each of the social influencers has their forte, respondents were expected for each of the social influencers to be involved with what they are promoting. This includes how far does the social influencer buy the product and use it on their own and how far does the product affect their life. The effect has to be in a positive manner to ensure that it will also give benefit to the respondents.

Relying on credibility in a social influencer is not only to trust a product and a service but also for all types of information including on current issue. The previous current issues on Malaysia general election have showcased high

interest from the public on a political issue including the IMDB issue, young candidates competing, manifesto championed by the parties, territory issue in Malaysia (among others). In discussing this kind of topics, the politician is considered as one of the main references in understanding the current issues discussed. Besides the politician, other social influencers who have professional background are considered as a person who has a certain degree of credibility among the respondents.

On top of the politician and professional people, journalist and the media organisation are considered as an influence in disseminating information to the respondents. Although credibility is considered as an important element needed by respondents in trusting the social influencer whom they follow, surprisingly the need of having another reference seems to be very important as well. Most of the respondents mentioned that there is a need to refer to other elements to ensure the info that they have gotten from the social influencer is legit and can be trusted. The type of references is made with other content that is presented either on a digital platform or a traditional medium. In related to the product, some of the respondents took the effort to go to the store to check on the product physically before confirming either to buy or use the service promoted by the social influencer.

Based on the details shared, there is still a grey area in trusting social influencer. Even though most of the marketers are investing in social influencer on a new way of implementing marketing, sadly to say that not all followers have fully trust on the social influencer's recommendation. Further references are great ways for marketers to understand the flow of acceptance by their target market on the product or services that they are offering.

The role of social influencer has its strengths and weakness. Although many might relate social influencer with popularity, but unexpectedly not all social influencer can be functioned as a marketing tool. Besides popularity, many other aspects need to be taken into consideration. As the maturity level of a social influencer in Malaysia is considered at a moderate rate, the function of social influencer must be supported with other elements, which will be discussed under recommendation to ensure the profession of social influencer is taken seriously. This is also to ensure that the role of a social influencer in Malaysia is well-taken care and will be able to compete at an international level. Meeting follower's expectation is crucial as the follower's lifestyle might change now and then. Even at this current juncture, some of the followers might be from a pool of active followers, but there are also from a pool of passive followers. Both followers (active and passive followers) can be the social influencer's best and worst critics. This is due to the type of interactions that mostly occur through 'virtual', which is through digital with less and minimal face to face interactions that allows both; positive and negative.

However, interestingly, a social influencer can also be a reference and a comparison tool for a person to understand the issue better, as long as the issue discussed is similar, though it is at a different level. The researcher discovered that anyone can be categorised as a social influencer. It does not have to be among the celebrities as businessman, politician, environment activist,

fashion icon could be labelled as social influencer too, as long as there is a reason on why public follow them intensely on social media. Intensely refers to the ability of each of these social influencer gathers a huge amount of followers on their social media platform as a recognition that they have strong followers who follow their content. Intensely also may refer to the capability of the social influencer provides the right, creative and engaging content to their followers, including using different ways of content delivery, which includes video content that can travel extensively to a point it goes viral.

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