

The Role of Influencer Credibility in Shaping Generation Z Purchase Decisions: Evidence from Traditional Cosmetic Brand Repositioning

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has transformed marketing communication strategies, particularly in engaging Generation Z consumers. This study aims to examine the role of influencer credibility comprising trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness in shaping parasocial interaction and its impact on purchase decision within the context of traditional cosmetic brand repositioning. Specifically, this research focuses on the collaboration between Puteri Indonesia influencers and Mustika Ratu on Instagram. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method with purposive sampling, involving Generation Z respondents who actively use Instagram and have been exposed to influencer marketing content. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. The results reveal that all dimensions of influencer credibility have a positive and significant effect on both parasocial interaction and purchase decision. Furthermore, parasocial interaction demonstrates a strong influence on purchase decision and serves as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase decision. These findings highlight that influencer effectiveness is not solely determined by credibility in delivering information but also by the ability to build emotional connections with audiences. The study contributes to the literature by integrating source credibility and parasocial interaction theories in the context of digital marketing and provides practical insights for brands in selecting credible influencers and designing engagement-driven content strategies.

Keywords: Influencer Credibility, Parasocial Interaction, Purchase Decision, Generation Z, Instagram, Influencer Marketing.

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1. Introduction

The development of digital technology and social media has significantly changed marketing communication strategies, especially in reaching Generation Z. Platforms such as Instagram are becoming the main means for brands to build relationships with consumers that are more interactive and personal. Generation Z, as digital natives, tend to trust recommendations from influencers more than traditional advertising, as they perceive influencers as more authentic, relatable, and credible sources of information. Compared to conventional advertising, influencer-generated content is often seen as more persuasive due to its personal and interactive nature, which significantly shapes consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. This shift has led companies to increasingly adopt influencer marketing as a key strategy in enhancing consumer engagement and purchase interest [1] [2] [3]. In this context, influencer credibility is an important factor that affects the effectiveness of marketing messages, which generally consist of the dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness [4] [5].

In this context, traditional cosmetic brands such as Mustika Ratu take advantage of the role of Puteri Indonesia finalists as influencers to strengthen brand awareness and product credibility. With diverse backgrounds, including in the fields of health and beauty, Puteri Indonesia finalists have the ability to

convey credible information to the public, thereby strengthening the perception of trust in the products they promote. This is especially relevant for consumers who are increasingly concerned about the safety and quality aspects of cosmetic products, in line with the standards set by BPOM.

In addition to influencer credibility, the phenomenon of parasocial interaction is also an important aspect in understanding consumer behavior in the digital era. Parasocial interaction describes a pseudosocial relationship formed between an audience and an influencer, where the audience feels emotionally close even though there is no direct interaction. Recent research suggests that these relationships can strengthen audience engagement and increase trust in influencers [6]. Furthermore, parasocial interaction has been proven to have a direct influence on consumer attitudes and behaviors, including in forming beliefs and behavioral intentions [7].

A number of empirical studies in the last five years have also shown that influencer credibility and parasocial interaction have a significant relationship with purchase intention. Influencers who have a high level of credibility are able to build a stronger emotional connection with the audience, which ultimately drives purchase intent [4]. This is strengthened by research by [5] who found that influencer credibility on Instagram has a significant effect on Generation Z's purchase intentions, both directly and indirectly through parasocial interaction as

a mediating variable. These findings confirm the importance of the role of emotional connections between influencers and audiences in improving the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. However, there is still a research gap in examining the integration between influencer credibility and parasocial interaction, especially in the context of repositioning traditional brands to the Generation Z market. Therefore, this research is important to understand how the credibility of influencers with these backgrounds is able to form an emotional connection with the audience and encourage purchase intent.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the influence of influencer credibility on Generation Z's purchase intention, test the influence of influencer credibility on parasocial interaction, and analyze the influence of parasocial interaction on purchase intention. In addition, this study also aims to examine the role of parasocial interaction mediation in the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention. Thus, this research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of digital marketing strategies, especially in the use of high-credibility-based influencers such as Puteri Indonesia finalists.

2. Research Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design to test the influence of influencer credibility on purchase intention with parasocial interaction as a mediating variable. The research population is Generation Z who actively use Instagram and have been exposed to promotional content from Puteri Indonesia influencers. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with the criteria of respondents aged 17–26 years, had an active Instagram account, and had seen cosmetic product endorsement content from Puteri Indonesia influencers.

The determination of the number of samples in this study refers to the Structural Equation Modeling approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM). To improve the accuracy and generalization of results, [8] recommended a sample count of ≥ 150 –200 respondents for a research model of moderate complexity. Therefore, in this study, a minimum sample number of 200 respondents was set. The influencer credibility variable is measured using three main dimensions, namely trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness adapted from the scale developed by [9], which is a standard instrument and has been widely used in previous research [4] [5]. Parasocial interaction variables were measured using indicators adapted from the concepts of Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl that have been developed in contemporary research [5], including aspects of emotional closeness, feelings of knowing influencers, and psychological involvement. Meanwhile, the purchase decision variable is a process that begins with the recognition of needs, followed by the desire to try the product, evaluation until the formation of confidence in the product, and leads to repurchase behavior as a form of consumer satisfaction

[10] [11]. Next Research Model on Figure 1.

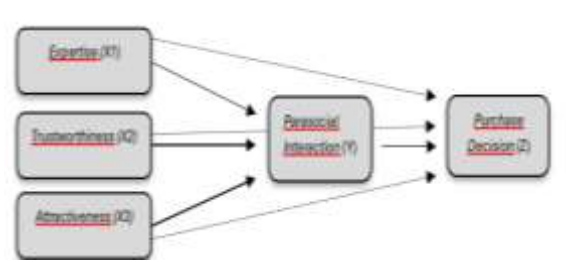


Figure 1. Research Model

The collected data was then analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique with the help of SmartPLS software. The analysis stages include an outer model test (validity and reliability) which includes convergent validity (loading factor ≥ 0.70 ; AVE ≥ 0.50), discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.90), and composite reliability (≥ 0.70). Furthermore, an internal model test was carried out to test the relationship between variables through the path coefficient value, R^2 value, and significance test using the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resampling. To test the role of mediation, an indirect effect approach was used by looking at the significance of the path between independent, mediator, and dependent variables. The entire analysis procedure follows the established methods in PLS-SEM studies [8], thus allowing replication by other researchers with a high degree of accuracy.

3. Result and Discussion

This study analyzed data collected from 298 Generation Z respondents in Indonesia who are active users of Instagram and have been exposed to endorsement content of Mustika Ratu products by Puteri Indonesia finalists. The data were processed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS 4.0. The analysis was conducted in two main stages, namely the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs, and the evaluation of the structural model (inner model) to examine the relationships among variables and test the proposed hypotheses. The following section presents the results of the data analysis, including the measurement model assessment, structural model evaluation, and hypothesis testing. Next Outer Model (PLS-Algorithm) on Figure 2.

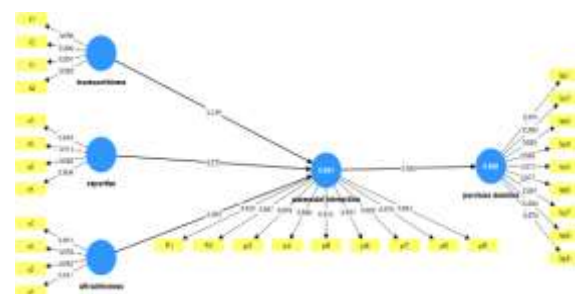


Figure 2. Outer Model (PLS-Algorithm)

Based on the results of the PLS-Algorithm test in figure 1, it shows that all indicators in each construct

show a high loading factor value and meet the criteria of convergent validity. The indicator on the trustworthiness variable has a loading factor ranging from 0.890–0.900, the expertise variable between 0.882–0.914, and attractiveness between 0.876–0.917. Meanwhile, the indicator for the parasocial interaction variable is in the range of 0.850–0.891, and the purchase decision indicator ranges from 0.859–0.891. All of these loading factor values are above the threshold of 0.70, so it can be concluded that each indicator has a good ability to reflect the measured construct. Thus, the measurement model in this study is stated to have good convergent validity and is feasible to proceed to the next stage of analysis. Next Validity and Reliability Test on Table 1.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
attractiveness	0.919	0.919	0.943	0.804
expertise	0.918	0.918	0.942	0.803
parasocial interaction	0.962	0.962	0.967	0.767
purchase decision	0.963	0.963	0.968	0.771
trustworthiness	0.917	0.917	0.941	0.801

Based on Table 1 above, the results of the validity and reliability test show that all constructs in this study have an excellent level of reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha values for all variables, namely attractiveness (0.919), expertise (0.918), parasocial interaction (0.962), purchase decision (0.963), and trustworthiness (0.917), were above the minimum limit of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency. This is also reinforced by the composite reliability values (rho_a and rho_c) which in total exceed 0.70, indicating that the construct has strong reliability. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for all variables is above 0.50, which means that each construct has met the convergent validity criteria. Thus, it can be concluded that this research instrument is valid and reliable to be used in further analysis.

Table 2. R-Square Adjusted

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
parasocial interaction	0.940	0.939	0.014	66.254	0.000
purchase decision	0.959	0.958	0.009	104.832	0.000

Based on Table 2, the R-square adjusted value shows that the research model has a very strong ability to explain dependent variables. The parasocial interaction variable has an R-square value of 0.940, which means that 94% of the variation in parasocial interaction can be explained by the variables of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness, while the remaining 6% is influenced by other factors outside the model. Furthermore, the purchase decision variable has an R-square value of 0.959, which indicates that 95.9% of the variation in purchase decisions can be explained by parasocial interaction. High T-statistical values (66,254 and 104,832) and p-values of 0.000 (<0.05) indicate that the model built has an excellent level of significance. Thus, it can be concluded that this research model has a very strong and significant

predictive power. Next Total Effects on Table 3.

Table 3. Total Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
attractiveness -> parasocial interaction	0.280	0.280	0.050	5.585	0.000
attractiveness -> purchase decision	0.274	0.274	0.049	5.584	0.000
expertise -> parasocial interaction	0.373	0.370	0.069	5.410	0.000
expertise -> purchase decision	0.365	0.362	0.067	5.427	0.000
parasocial interaction -> purchase decision	0.980	0.979	0.005	210.030	0.000
trustworthiness -> parasocial interaction	0.339	0.341	0.063	5.384	0.000
trustworthiness -> purchase decision	0.332	0.334	0.062	5.366	0.000

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing in the table above, all relationships between variables showed a T-statistical value of > 1.96 and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05), so it can be concluded that all hypotheses in this study are accepted. The variables of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness were proven to have a positive and significant effect on parasocial interaction with a coefficient of 0.280 each; 0,373; and 0.339. In addition, these three variables also have a positive and significant influence on purchase decisions, with a coefficient value of 0.274; 0,365; and 0.332. Meanwhile, parasocial interaction showed a very strong and significant influence on purchase decisions with a coefficient of 0.980. These results show that influencer credibility not only has a direct effect on purchase decisions, but also indirectly through increased parasocial interaction as a mediating variable. Next Indirect Effects on Table 4.

Table 4. Indirect Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values
attractiveness -> parasocial interaction -> purchase decision	0.274	0.274	0.049	5.584	0.000
expertise -> parasocial interaction -> purchase decision	0.365	0.362	0.067	5.427	0.000
trustworthiness -> parasocial interaction -> purchase decision	0.332	0.334	0.062	5.366	0.000

Based on the results of the indirect effects test in Table 4, all mediation pathways showed a T-statistic value of > 1.96 and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05), so it can be concluded that parasocial interaction significantly mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase decision. Specifically, the indirect effect of attractiveness on purchase decisions through parasocial interaction was 0.274, expertise was 0.365, and trustworthiness was 0.332, all of which were significant. These results show that the three dimensions of influencer credibility are not only directly influenced by purchasing decisions, but are also strengthened through the mechanism of the emotional connection formed between influencers and audiences. Thus, parasocial interaction plays an

important role as a mediating variable in explaining how influencer credibility can improve purchasing decisions, especially in the context of digital marketing that involves the emotional involvement of consumers. Next F-Square on Table 5.

Table 5. F-Square

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O-STDEV)/V)	P values
attractiveness -> parasocial interaction	0.135	0.141	0.051	2.648	0.008
expertise -> parasocial interaction	0.191	0.200	0.082	2.325	0.020
parasocial interaction -> purchase decision	23.806	24.175	5.118	4.652	0.000
trustworthiness -> parasocial interaction	0.199	0.215	0.093	2.144	0.032

The results of the effect size (f^2 -square) analysis at the structural level are interpreted based on the criteria of Cohen (1988) recommended by [12], namely the f^2 value of 0.02 is categorized as a small influence, 0.15 as an intermediate influence, and 0.35 as a major influence. Table 4 shows that the attractiveness variable ($f^2 = 0.135$) has little influence on parasocial interaction because it is below the limit of 0.15. Meanwhile, the variables expertise ($f^2 = 0.191$) and trustworthiness ($f^2 = 0.199$) were included in the intermediate influence category because the value was above 0.15 but still below 0.35. The parasocial interaction variable on purchase decision has an f^2 value of 23.806 which is classified as a very large influence, far beyond the limit of 0.35. Thus, it can be concluded that parasocial interaction has a very strong role in influencing purchase decisions, while attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness make a relatively small to medium contribution to the formation of parasocial interaction.

This study examines the role of influencer credibility consisting of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness in Puteri Indonesia finalist influencers on Instagram in shaping parasocial interaction and its implications for purchase decisions in the context of collaboration with Mustika Ratu. In general, all hypotheses are supported by the results of the three dimensions of credibility having a positive and significant effect on parasocial interaction and purchase decisions, and parasocial interaction is the strongest predictor as well as an important mediator.

Based on the results of data analysis, it was found that trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness increase parasocial interaction, confirming that Generation Z audiences not only respond to messages cognitively, but also build emotional closeness with figures who are considered credible. Puteri Indonesia, as a representation of elegance and a healthy lifestyle, conveys a strong sense of credibility among its followers. Individuals who consistently display positive personal values and authentic self-presentation are more likely to be perceived as credible endorsers, as credibility is constructed through perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. In the

context of influencer marketing, such characteristics enhance audience trust and persuasion effectiveness, particularly when the influencer's image aligns with the promoted product [13] [14].

This credibility is built through the way they deliver content naturally, not overdoing it, and relevant to their personal image. This credibility is important because it creates a sense of trust from the audience in the product information they convey. Collaborative content between Mustika Ratu and Puteri Indonesia on Instagram, which discusses the benefits of mustika jamu products. This content serves to attract audience interest and increase consumer knowledge about product efficacy.

Influencers who share tutorials, routines, and tangible results after using the product create a stronger connection with the audience. They not only promote, but also show that they are actually using the product. Research by [5] found that the influencer credibility dimension on Instagram significantly increases parasocial interaction in Generation Z. This is also supported by [6] who state that influencers with a high level of credibility tend to be more able to create psychological closeness with their followers. In this context, Puteri Indonesia finalists not only have visual appeal, but also social legitimacy and educational capacity that strengthen the perception of trustworthiness and expertise, making them more effective in building parasocial relationships with audiences.

The direct influence of influencer credibility on purchase decisions shows that the recommendations from Puteri Indonesia finalists have a high persuasive weight. In the cosmetics category, the purchase decision is very sensitive to safety and quality issues. Here, trustworthiness functions as a guarantee of honesty, expertise as a validation of competence (e.g. the ability to explain product content/safety), and attractiveness as a trigger for attention and image suitability with the product. For Generation Z, who are used to verifying information quickly, the combination of these three dimensions increases confidence to move from intention to purchase decision.

These findings are consistent with research by [15] which states that influencer credibility has a significant effect on purchase intent through increasing consumer trust. In addition, research by [16] shows that the combination of expertise and influencer appeal is able to increase the effectiveness of digital marketing communication. In the context of cosmetic products, the dimension of expertise is very important because it relates to product knowledge, while trustworthiness serves as a guarantee of honesty, and attractiveness increases the appeal of the message.

The strongest finding in this study is that parasocial interaction has a huge effect on purchase decisions, emphasizing emotional mechanisms as the main driver. When audiences feel close to influencers following their daily lives, values, and lifestyle, product

recommendations are perceived as suggestions from "people they know," not just advertisements. In collaboration with Mustika Ratu, this relationship strengthens the acceptance of messages about the advantages of natural ingredient-based products and safety standards, thereby accelerating the formation of preferences and purchasing decisions.

This is in line with research by [17] which showed that parasocial relationships can increase consumer engagement and significantly influence purchasing behavior. Additionally, research by [18] found that parasocial interaction plays an important role in building relationships between influencers and consumers, ultimately driving purchasing decisions. In the context of Generation Z, who are very active on social media, the emotional connection with influencers is a key factor in shaping preferences and consumption decisions. The results of the indirect effects test showed that parasocial interaction significantly mediated the relationship between influencer credibility (trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness) and purchase decision. These findings indicate that the influence of influencer credibility on purchase decisions does not only occur directly, but also through psychological mechanisms in the form of emotional closeness formed between the audience and the influencer.

In this context, parasocial interaction serves as an amplifier mechanism that transforms credibility into a purchase decision. When the audience not only trusts but also feels close to the influencer, the message conveyed is no longer perceived as a promotion, but as an authentic personal recommendation. This is especially important for cosmetic products such as Mustika Ratu, where the aspect of trust in safety and quality is the main consideration. Recent studies have shown that emotional connection with influencers significantly increases perceived authenticity and brand trust, which ultimately drives purchase behavior [19] [20].

These findings support previous research that emphasized the importance of psychological factors in bridging influencers influence on consumer behavior. [5] also found that parasocial interaction significantly mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention. Thus, it can be concluded that the influence of influencer credibility is not only direct, but is also strengthened through the formation of an emotional connection with the audience. The context of the collaboration with Puteri Indonesia provides a differentiating value compared to influencers in general. Puteri Indonesia finalists bring symbolic authority (achievements, public ethics), educational capabilities (cosmetic safety campaigns), and image consistency that are in line with Mustika Ratu's positioning as a brand that emphasizes quality and safety. This value congruence strengthens the perception of credibility while minimizing the audience's skepticism of the promotional message. Thus, the effectiveness of a campaign is not only

determined by reach, but by the match between the influencer's identity and brand value. Overall, the results of the study confirm that in the Puteri Indonesia and Mustika Ratu collaboration, influencer credibility and parasocial interaction are the key that mutually reinforces in driving Generation Z's purchasing decisions.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that influencer credibility consisting of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness has an important role in shaping parasocial interaction and significantly influences purchase decisions in Generation Z. The results of the study show that the three dimensions of influencer credibility not only have a direct effect on purchase decisions, but also indirectly through parasocial interaction as a proven mediation variable has a very strong influence. These findings confirm that in the context of digital marketing, especially in the collaboration between Puteri Indonesia influencers on Instagram and Mustika Ratu, the success of marketing strategies is not only determined by the rational credibility of influencers, but also by the ability to build an emotional connection with the audience. In addition, this research reinforces the importance of alignment between influencer characteristics and brand values in increasing the effectiveness of marketing communication. Thus, this research makes a theoretical contribution to the development of integration between the theory of source credibility and parasocial interaction, as well as a practical contribution for companies in designing more effective influencer marketing strategies oriented towards long-term relationships with consumers. Theoretically, these findings enrich the literature by showing that the integration of source credibility and parasocial interaction is relevant in the context of social legitimacy-based influencers such as Puteri Indonesia. Credibility does not stop at the immediate effect, but becomes an antecedent that activates the mechanism of emotional connection as the main path to a purchase decision. This broadens the understanding of how endorsements work on product categories that demand high trust, such as cosmetics. From a practical perspective, the findings of this study provide strategic implications for brands, especially Mustika Ratu, in designing influencer-based marketing campaigns on Instagram. First, influencer selection should not only be based on popularity level or number of followers, but rather emphasize credibility aspects that include trustworthiness and expertise, as these factors have proven to be more effective in building consumer trust. Second, content design needs to integrate educational elements such as information about product safety, content, and benefits with a personal approach that is able to create emotional closeness, so as to strengthen parasocial interaction between influencers and audiences. Third, it is important for companies to ensure value congruence between influencers and brands so that the message conveyed feels authentic and does not cause skepticism. Finally, optimizing

interactive features on Instagram, such as stories, live streaming, and Q&A sessions, can be leveraged to increase audience engagement and deepen psychological connections, ultimately contributing to improved purchasing decisions. However, this study has limitations: it focuses on Generation Z, one platform (Instagram), and one brand context. Therefore, further research is suggested to expand the research context by involving other platforms such as TikTok and adding other variables such as brand trust or electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) to enrich the research model. Overall, this study confirms that influencer credibility and parasocial interaction are key factors in influencing purchasing decisions in the digital marketing era.

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