

The Power of Credibility: How TikTok Influencers Drive Brand Recommendations and Purchase Intentions Among Young Adults

Greisa Chairunnisa¹, Meta Andriani²

¹ STIE Indonesia Banking School and greisa.20211111024@ibs.ac.id

² STIE Indonesia Banking School and meta@ibs.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of digital influencer credibility on brand recommendations and its subsequent effect on purchase intentions among university students aged 18–22 who are active TikTok users. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were gathered through an online survey administered to a purposive sample. The results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between influencer credibility and perceived influence, which subsequently enhances brand engagement and perceived brand value. These findings highlight the critical role of influencer trustworthiness in shaping consumer behavior, particularly among members of Generation Z. The study offers valuable insights for marketers aiming to develop effective digital strategies, emphasizing the importance of selecting credible influencers to optimize campaign outcomes on social media platforms.

Keywords: Digital Influencer, Brand Engagement, Purchase Intention, Generation Z, TikTok Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, social media has become an integral part of daily life and a transformative force in marketing communication. Platforms like TikTok are not only entertainment hubs but also highly influential channels for consumer engagement, particularly among Generation Z. With the rise of digital influencers, marketers now face both opportunities and challenges in leveraging personal trust and authenticity to influence purchasing behavior.

This study focuses on the effectiveness of digital influencer marketing on TikTok, especially how influencer credibility affects brand recommendation and ultimately impacts purchase intention. Recent trends, such as "influencer fatigue" and declining trust in mega influencers, underline the need to understand new dynamics in consumer trust and decision-making. The research addresses this gap by incorporating influencer credibility as a key variable, extending prior models that examine perceived influence, brand engagement, and brand expected value.

By targeting active university students aged 18–22 who engage with TikTok, this study aims to provide fresh insights into how digital influencer strategies can shape consumer perceptions and drive purchase behavior in highly dynamic social media environments.

This shifting terrain raises three central questions: (1) To what extent does an influencer's credibility shape followers' perceived influence on TikTok? (2) How do perceived influence, brand engagement, and expected brand value mediate the pathway from influencer recommendations to purchase intention? (3) Which of these mediators exerts the strongest effect on consumers' eventual decision to buy? Accordingly, this study aims to (1) measure the impact of influencer credibility on perceived influence (2) Examine how perceived influence drives brand engagement and expected brand value (3) Assess the direct and indirect effects of brand engagement and expected brand value on purchase intention.

Academically, this research extends existing influencer-marketing theories by incorporating credibility as a key antecedent. Practically, it offers brands evidence-based guidance for selecting and partnering with influencers (especially on TikTok) to maximize engagement and conversion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Influencer Credibility*

Influencer credibility is an important factor in digital marketing, as it can influence consumer perception and decisions about a product. The credibility of an influencer reflects the level of trust in the information they convey [60]. This credibility consists of three main dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness [5]. Influencers who have a good reputation, transparency in collaboration, and relevant experience will be more trusted by their followers and can influence their purchasing decisions.

2.2 *Perceived Influence*

Perceived influence refers to the extent to which a person feels influenced by information or recommendations provided by others. Consumers are more likely to receive information from influencers that they consider credible and relevant to their needs [35]. The trust factor and a strong emotional connection with influencers play a role in shaping this influence. In addition, social influence from friends or communities can also strengthen the effect of influencer recommendations on purchase intent [35].

2.3 *Digital Influencer*

Digital influencers are individuals who have the ability to influence consumer behavior and decisions through the content they create on digital platforms. A digital influencer is someone who has high credibility on social media and is able to shape public opinion of a brand or product [23]. In the context of marketing, influencers act as intermediaries between brands and consumers, thus building trust and increasing brand awareness. With the increasing use of social media, digital influencers are increasingly playing an important role in shaping consumer trends and preferences. Influencers not only convey information about a product, but also create an emotional connection with their followers through authentic and interactive content [19]. TikTok, as one of the fastest-growing platforms, allows influencers to reach a wider audience through creative and engaging short videos.

2.4 *Brand Engagement*

Brand engagement describes the level of emotional engagement and consumer interaction with a brand. Brand engagement consists of three main elements: cognitive, affective, and behavioral [73]. In the digital context, influencers can increase brand engagement by creating relevant and engaging content, thereby encouraging consumer interaction and loyalty to the brand being promoted [73].

2.5 *Brand Expected Value*

Brand expected value refers to consumers' expectations of the value they will get from a product or brand. These values can include functional, emotional, and social benefits [80]. Influencers who are able to provide detailed and honest reviews of a product can increase brand expected value, so consumers are more encouraged to consider purchasing.

2.6 Brand Recommendation

Brand recommendation is the process by which a person recommends a product or brand to others, either through reviews, testimonials, or digital content. Brand recommendations from trusted individuals can increase the credibility of a brand and influence consumer purchasing decisions [42]. In the context of digital marketing, influencers have an important role in providing brand recommendations to their followers. Recommendations from influencers are more trusted compared to traditional advertising, because they are considered more authentic and personal [39]. TikTok as a video-based platform allows influencers to convey brand recommendations in a more interesting and interactive format, making it easier for audiences to accept [62].

2.7 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the tendency of consumers to buy certain products based on the information they receive. Purchase intent is influenced by various factors, including the credibility of the source of information, brand engagement, and consumer experience and expectations of the product [42]. In this study, purchase intention was analyzed in the context of digital marketing on TikTok, where influencers have a role as opinion formers and product recommendations [59].

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Object

This study targets active undergraduate students aged between 18 and 22 years who are users of the TikTok social media platform and follow at least one influencer who promotes or recommends cosmetic products. The objective is to investigate how variables such as brand engagement and brand expected value, influenced by digital influencer credibility, affect students' purchase intention.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population in this study comprises active college students within the 18–22 age range residing in the JABODETABEK (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi) region. A population refers to a group of individuals or entities sharing specific characteristics, from which the researcher draws conclusions [64]. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that only respondents who met the predefined criteria—TikTok users following at least one cosmetic influencer—were included. The minimum required sample size was determined based on the rule of thumb, which suggests a ratio of 10 respondents per indicator leading to an endogenous construct [30]. With three key paths identified, a minimum of 30 respondents was deemed sufficient. However, to enhance statistical power and generalizability, data were collected from 200 respondents.

3.3 Research Design

This research applies a quantitative approach utilizing a survey method to examine the relationships among the variables. The research framework was adapted from the model proposed with the integration of influencer credibility as an additional construct influencing both perceived influence and purchase intention [39].

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were gathered through an online questionnaire, distributed via social media platforms to ensure broader reach and relevance. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections:

Demographic and behavioral information, including age, frequency of TikTok use, and exposure to social media influencers.

Measurement items for research variables, assessed using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), covering constructs such as influencer credibility, perceived influence, brand engagement, brand expected value, and purchase intention.

All items were adapted from validated scales in prior studies to ensure reliability and validity in measuring the conceptual model.

3.5 Research Variables and Operationalization

This study employs both independent and dependent variables, along with mediating variables, to investigate the impact of influencer credibility on purchase intention through perceived influence, brand engagement, and brand expected value.

1. Independent Variable (X)

Influencer Credibility (X1): Defined as the degree to which an influencer is perceived as **trustworthy**, **knowledgeable (expertise)**, and **attractive** [60]. This construct reflects consumers' perception of the influencer's overall credibility.

2. Mediating Variables (M)

Perceived Influence (M1): Refers to the extent to which consumers believe they are influenced by social media influencers in their decision-making process [39].

Brand Engagement (M2): Represents the level of emotional connection, cognitive processing, and behavioral engagement between the consumer and the brand, grounded in the framework proposed by Brodie et al. (2011).

Brand Expected Value (M3): Denotes the perceived value or benefit that consumers anticipate from using the brand or product endorsed by an influencer, based on the conceptualization by Zeithaml (1988).

3. Dependent Variable (Y)

Purchase Intention (Y1): Indicates the consumers' intention or likelihood to purchase products recommended by influencers, as defined by Kotler and Keller (2016). This construct serves as the key outcome variable in assessing the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

3.6 Data Analysis and Processing Techniques

Data analysis in this study is conducted using **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)**, facilitated by the **SmartPLS software**. The analytical procedure is structured into several key stages:

1. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model):

- a. **Construct Validity:** Assessed through convergent validity using **Average Variance Extracted (AVE)**.
- b. **Discriminant Validity:** Evaluated using **Fornell-Larcker criterion** and **cross-loading values**.
- c. **Reliability:** Measured using **Cronbach's Alpha** and **Composite Reliability (CR)**, with thresholds above 0.70 considered acceptable.

2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model):

- a. **R-Square (R^2):** To determine the proportion of variance explained by the independent and mediating variables for each endogenous variable.
- b. **Path Coefficients:** To evaluate the strength and direction of the relationships between constructs.

3. Hypothesis Testing: T-statistics and p-values are used to test the significance of the relationships between variables. A p-value < 0.05 indicates statistical significance at the

5% level. This analytical approach is chosen due to its robustness in handling complex models, small to medium sample sizes, and non-normal data distribution [32].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, all respondents involved were 63 people, all of whom were active students between the ages of 18 and 22 years. Each respondent also stated that they routinely use the TikTok application in their daily activities. Based on the results of the questionnaire distribution by the researcher, it shows that of the total 63 respondents, there were 52 respondents (82.5%) who were female and 11 respondents (17.5%) who were male. Meanwhile, in terms of age variation, it shows that the majority of respondents, namely 46% or 29 people, are at the age of 21. In terms of study programs/departments, it can be seen that the Management study program has the largest number of respondents, namely 22 people (around 35% of the total respondents).

The validity test in this study was carried out by collecting data from 63 respondents that were available. The results obtained from the Outer Model include Loading Factor and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which are then analyzed using the Structural Equation Model Partial Least Square (SEM PLS) method through SmartPLS software 4.0. Based on the validity test table after the data deletion process, all indicators from the five variables used and tested in this study showed an outer loading value above 0.70. Thus, the indicator is declared valid because it meets the rule of thumb criteria for loading factor, which is more than 0.70 [31]. Meanwhile, reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha (>0.6) and Composite Reliability (>0.7). The test results show that all indicators are valid and reliable, so they can be used in further analysis. The results of the correlation output between the indicators with their constructs and realities can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. Output Outer Loading, AVE, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite

Variabel	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Brand Engagement	BE1	0.878	0.751	0.889	0.923
	BE2	0.923			
	BE3	0.843			
	BE4	0.821			
Brand Expected Value	BV1	0.870	0.759	0.892	0.926
	BV2	0.913			
	BV3	0.782			
	BV4	0.912			
Influencer Credibility	IC1	0.879	0.695	0.852	0.901
	IC2	0.867			
	IC3	0.835			
	IC4	0.747			
Intention to Purchase	IP1	0.889	0.754	0.837	0.902
	IP2	0.922			
	IP3	0.789			
Perceived Influence	PI1	0.728	0.631	0.708	0.836
	PI2	0.837			
	PI3	0.813			

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Inner model testing aims to find out whether a hypothesis is acceptable or rejected. In this study, the significance limit used for P value is 0.05 (5%) and for t-statistic it must be more than 1.96. This model is evaluated using the R-Square value and the path coefficient.

Based on the results of the study, all the variables tested had a moderate or moderate level of influence on the related constructs, in the R-Square classification [40]. Perceived Influence (PI) contributes 54.3% to Brand Engagement (BE) and 65.2% to Brand Expected Value (BV). In addition, PI, BE, and BV together affect Intention to Purchase (IP) by 55.5%. Meanwhile, Influencer Credibility (IC) has an influence of 62.6% on PI. Thus, the relationship between variables shows a significant influence, but it is not quite strong.

The hypothesis test in this study comes from the output results obtained through the path coefficient. This path coefficient serves to show the magnitude of the influence or relationship between the variables in the model being studied. In other words, the path coefficient provides information about how much a change in one independent variable can affect the associated dependent variable.

Path coefficient analysis shows that the H6 and H4 hypotheses are not proven. In the H6 hypothesis, the P value is 0.522 (> 0.05) and the T-Statistics is 0.640 (< 1.96), which indicates that Brand Engagement (BE) does not have a significant influence on Intention to Purchase (IP). Similarly, the H4 hypothesis has a P value of 0.257 (> 0.05) and T-Statistics of 1.133 (< 1.96), so it can be concluded that Perceived Influence (PI) does not significantly affect Intention to Purchase (IP). On the contrary, the H5 and H7 hypotheses are proven, showing that Brand Engagement has a significant positive influence on Brand Expected Value (BV), and Brand Expected Value also has a positive impact on Intention to Purchase. In addition, the H1 hypothesis is proven by Influencer Credibility (IC) which has a significant effect on Perceived Influencers. Overall, the results of this analysis emphasize the importance of Perceived Influencer and Brand Engagement in increasing Brand Expected Value. However, not all relationships in this study showed significance, especially in relation to Intention to Purchase. Based on the results of the research, some suggestions can be given. For digital influencers and companies, the content created must be more relatable by companies, increasing Brand Expected Value should be a top priority, which can be done with a product differentiation strategy, building a strong brand image, and effective marketing communication. For influencers, their credibility is a key factor in building audience trust and increasing consumer engagement with brands. Therefore, transparency in providing product recommendations is very important so that the audience feels that the reviews provided are authentic and trustworthy. For digital marketers, these findings suggest that increasing consumer engagement alone is not enough to drive purchase intent, but rather a strategy that focuses more on improving brand value perception.

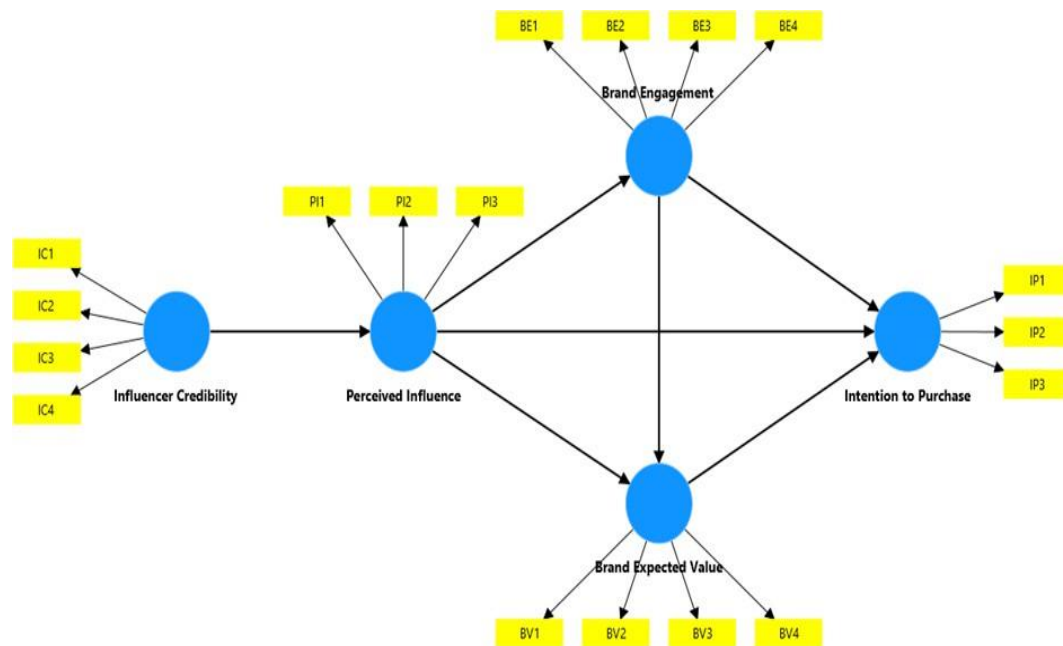


Figure 1. Research Result Model

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the influence of Influencer Credibility, Perceived Influence, Brand Engagement, and Brand Expected Value on the Intention to Purchase of products recommended by digital influencers. The results of the study show that Brand Expected Value has the strongest influence on consumer purchase intention. This indicates that the higher the consumer's perception of the value and quality of the brand, the more likely they are to make a purchase. On the other hand, Brand Engagement has no direct influence on Intention to Purchase, although it can increase consumer expectations of the product. In addition, Perceived Influence has been shown to affect Brand Engagement, but it does not directly increase purchase intent.

These findings have important implications for companies and digital influencers in developing digital marketing strategies. For companies, increasing Brand Expected Value should be a top priority, which can be done with a product differentiation strategy, building a strong brand image, and effective marketing communication. For influencers, their credibility is a key factor in building audience trust and increasing consumer engagement with brands. Therefore, transparency in providing product recommendations is very important so that the audience feels that the reviews provided are authentic and trustworthy. For digital marketers, these findings suggest that increasing consumer engagement alone is not enough to drive purchase intent, but rather a strategy that focuses more on improving brand value perception.

Based on the results of the research, some suggestions can be given. For digital influencers and companies, the content created must be more relatable by showing the use of the product in daily life. In addition, transparency in endorsements must always be maintained in order to build stronger trust with the audience. Companies are also advised to choose influencers who align with their values and brand image to make marketing strategies more effective. For further research, the coverage of respondents should be expanded by involving various age groups so that the results of the study are more representative. In addition, future research could examine the influence of influencers on various social media platforms other than TikTok, such as Instagram and YouTube, to understand the dynamics of broader interactions. Additional variables such as attitudes towards brands and engagement levels with recommended product categories can also be further explored to provide more comprehensive insights. However, this study has some limitations. The respondents studied only included students aged 18-22 years, so the results of the study could not be generalized

to other age groups. In addition, this study only focuses on the TikTok platform, so it does not reflect the dynamics of influencer marketing on other platforms. In addition, the sample used only reflects conditions in 2024, so future trend changes may affect the relevance of these findings. Therefore, more research is needed to overcome these limitations and enrich understanding of the role of digital influencers in influencing consumer purchasing decisions.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

	<p>Greisa Chairunnisa. She is STIE Indonesia Banking School student. Her research interest in marketing management study.</p> <p>Email : greisa.20211111024@ibs.ac.id or greisachairunnisa13@gmail.com</p>

	<p>Meta Andriani  She is a lecturer at STIE Indonesia Banking School. She completed her undergraduate education at Indonesia Banking School and Universitas Indonesia. Her area of expertise lies in Marketing Management, with a particular interest in consumer behavior, digital marketing, and the influence of social media on purchasing decisions. She is especially drawn to the evolving dynamics of online platforms and how they reshape marketing strategies and customer engagement.</p> <p>Email corresponding author: meta@ibs.ac.id</p>
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