

In Influencers We Trust: How TikTok Content Shapes Gen Z's Brand Awareness and Buying Intention

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Abstrak

Pertumbuhan pesat influencer marketing di media sosial telah menjadikannya sebagai strategi pemasaran digital yang penting, khususnya di TikTok. Namun, bukti empiris mengenai peran kredibilitas influencer dalam membentuk perilaku pembelian Generasi Z di Indonesia masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh kredibilitas influencer terhadap kesadaran merek, kepercayaan merek, dan niat beli pada pengguna TikTok Generasi Z di Indonesia, serta menguji peran moderasi gender. Metode survei kuantitatif digunakan dengan teknik purposive sampling, dan kuesioner daring didistribusikan kepada 138 pengguna TikTok Generasi Z di Indonesia. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan PLS-SEM. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kredibilitas influencer berpengaruh positif terhadap kesadaran merek, kepercayaan merek, dan niat beli, dengan kesadaran merek berperan sebagai mediator yang efektif antara kredibilitas influencer dan niat beli, sedangkan kepercayaan merek tidak, yang mengindikasikan bahwa familiaritas kognitif melalui kesadaran merek lebih berpengaruh dibandingkan kepercayaan emosional dalam mendorong niat beli Generasi Z di TikTok. Perbedaan gender tidak memoderasi hubungan antara kepercayaan merek dan niat beli, yang menunjukkan kecenderungan perilaku yang serupa antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan empiris baru mengenai perilaku pembelian Generasi Z di TikTok serta implikasi praktis bagi pemasar dalam mengembangkan strategi influencer yang menekankan kesadaran merek untuk menstimulasi niat beli.

Kata Kunci: Kredibilitas Influencer; Kesadaran Merek; Kepercayaan Merek; Niat Beli; Generasi Z.

Abstract

The rapid growth of influencer marketing on social media has made it an important digital marketing strategy, especially on TikTok. However, empirical evidence regarding the role of influencer credibility in shaping Generation Z's buying behaviour in Indonesia remains limited. This study aimed to analyze the effect of influencer credibility on brand awareness, brand trust, and buying intention among Indonesian Generation Z TikTok users, as well as to examine the moderating role of gender. A quantitative survey method was employed using purposive sampling, and an online questionnaire was distributed to 138 Indonesian Generation Z TikTok users. The collected data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The results showed that influencer credibility positively influenced brand awareness, brand trust, and buying intention, with brand awareness serving as an effective mediator between influencer credibility and buying intention, while brand trust did not, indicating that cognitive familiarity through brand awareness is more influential than emotional trust in driving Generation Z's buying intentions on TikTok. Gender differences did not moderate the relationship between brand trust and buying intention, indicating similar behavioral tendencies across males and females. The findings offer new empirical insights into Generation Z's buying behavior on TikTok and practical implications for marketers in developing influencer strategies that emphasize brand awareness to stimulate buying intentions.

Keyword: Influencer Credibility; Brand Awareness; Brand Trust; Buying Intention; Generation Z.

1. Introduction

The level of social media use and society in social media has increased significantly over time. Social media today has played an essential role for every generation in supporting interactions, building networks, and sharing information among users, fundamentally transforming social behaviour and communication patterns in the digital era (Yang *et al.*, 2025). According to a February 2025 report, almost 143 million Indonesians, or 50.2% of the nation's total population, use social media (We Are Social, 2025), proving the social media potential as an effective digital marketing and communication tool. TikTok had about 108 million active users in Indonesia in January 2025, making it one of the largest markets globally (DataReportal, 2025). This situation compels companies, brands, and advertising agencies to seek innovative ways to maintain relevance and effectiveness in communicating with their audiences (Kabir *et al.*, 2025). Currently, 93% of marketers use social media influencers as a strategy to connect with online consumers (Tarabieh *et al.*, 2024). Influencers not only serve as promotional channels on social media but also as social relationship assets that companies can leverage to establish partnerships and achieve marketing objectives (Siqi & Foong Yee, 2021). Moreover, social media influencers with strong persuasive abilities have been demonstrated to greatly increase brand awareness and brand trust, which ultimately shapes buying intentions (Cheng *et al.*, 2022; Çelik, 2022). To retain customers and survive in a highly competitive market, companies must be responsive to changes in consumer behaviour and continuously evolving marketing trends. Considering the strategic role of influencers in shaping buying intention, this study is crucial to comprehending how influencer credibility on TikTok affects trust and awareness in a brand and buying intention in the current digital marketing context.

This study focuses on how Generation Z users of TikTok respond to influencer credibility in digital marketing. According to GoodStats (2024), the majority of Generation Z in Indonesia spend more than one hour per session on TikTok, with 47% of users in this group reporting that they watch or interact with content on the platform for a relatively long duration. People of Gen Z, who were born between the middle of 1990s and the beginning of the 2010s, are frequently referred to as digital natives, tendency to form buying intentions after being exposed to social media content, especially delivered by a reliable influencer (Angelique *et al.*, 2025). Globally, spending on influencer marketing surpassed USD 21 billion in 2023, with Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, showing rapid growth, where the influencer advertising market in Indonesia is estimated to reach USD 248.68 million in 2025 (Statista, 2024). This growth underscores brands' increasing reliance on credible influencers to enhance trust to intentional buying, especially for Gen Z as TikTok users. This research builds on established theories in consumer behaviour and digital marketing psychology to explain the relationship between influencer credibility, brand awareness, brand trust, and buying intention. Relationships between these variables are highly influenced by how marketing messages are delivered through social media, particularly by influencers with high credibility and emotional closeness to their audiences (Muljana and Jayanegara, 2022). Influencers act as intermediaries who transform brand messages into more authentic and persuasive communications, making them strategic partners for companies in building a strong brand image (Bansah *et al.*, 2024). Al-Mu'ani *et al.* (2023) categorized the credibility of influencers into three attributes: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise, which can significantly enhance consumer buying intention. Additionally, linguistic authenticity, personal narratives, and emotional persuasive power reflected in content are critical elements that strengthen audience engagement and foster brand trust and brand awareness (Effendy and Keitaro, 2022; Rahman *et al.*, 2022). Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), the digital marketing effectiveness communication depends on how messages are processed by audiences through central and peripheral routes. In the context of influencer marketing, TikTok content is the stimulus cue that triggers consumers' cognitive and emotionally elaboration of brand messages (Hsiao and Lin, 2025). Content that is linguistically, emotionally, and visually appealing can enhance cognitive engagement and strengthen positive brand perceptions and buying intentions (Lee and Eastin, 2021). Based on previous studies, this research model examines gender as a moderator between influencer credibility and TikTok content in influencing brand awareness, brand trust, and buying intention among Generation Z.

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In consumer behaviour contexts, gender is often considered an important variable that may moderate between psychological factors and intention to buy (Hariningsih *et al.*, 2022; Irawan, 2025). Prior research has shown that males and females differ in preferences, motivations, and responses to marketing stimuli and shopping emotions, with females generally being more sensitive to marketing content and more likely to form high buying intentions (Ni Made Putri *et al.*, 2025). Thus, considering gender allows this study to gain an understanding differential effects of influencer credibility on perceptions and buying intentions among Gen Z consumers and to tailor digital marketing strategies according to demographic characteristics. Previous research has revealed gaps in understanding the characteristics across influencer credibility, brand trust, brand awareness, and intention to buy on social media, particularly in digital marketing content contexts. Most studies still focus on global contexts and have not specifically highlighted the behaviour of Generation Z in Indonesia, who have unique characteristics as digital natives with high engagement on interactive platforms like TikTok. This generation is more easily influenced by influencer credibility and communication styles and is more prone to forming rapid buying intentions through exposure to engaging and authentic content (Estrada and Zavala, 2025). Although previous research has highlighted various factors affecting consumer buying intentions through influencers, including general influencer credibility, visual attractiveness, and social interaction (Al-Mu'ani *et al.*, 2023; Lee and Eastin, 2021), most studies focus on the direct influence of influencer credibility and buying intention without thoroughly considering mediation mechanisms that explain how this influence occurs. The role of mediator is brand trust and brand awareness, which can enhance the influencer credibility on buying intention has been underexplored, despite being key elements in building consumer trust and awareness (Çelik, 2022; Cheng *et al.*, 2022).

A study by Sesar *et al.* (2022) highlights the importance of brand awareness as a mediator between influencer communication and buying intention, but most of these studies focus on global markets and do not adequately represent Indonesian digital consumers, who have different preferences, cultures, and social media interaction dynamics. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by exploring how influencer credibility through TikTok content affects brand trust and brand awareness, which in turn mediate the formation of buying intention among Indonesian Generation Z (Patmawati & Miswanto, 2022). In conclusion, although influencer credibility has received considerable attention in digital marketing contexts, studies that discuss brand trust and awareness as a mediator in this relationship are still very limited. To fill this research gap, this research aligns influencer credibility into a model that considers cognitive and affective pathways in consumer buying intention-making and adds gender, possibly affecting how strongly these variables are related to one another. This study is interesting since it focusses on the dual mediation roles of brand awareness and trust, especially among Indonesian Gen Z, with possible gender-based disparities in establishing buying intentions. These findings are expected to give insights for marketers and brand owners for more effective influencer communication strategies, considering gender perception differences to enhance brand engagement, strengthen consumer trust, and encourage more positive buying intention. Therefore, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how influencer credibility shapes the buying intention of Indonesian digital consumers, considering psychological dimensions and gender differences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) Theory

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) is a conceptual framework that explains the process of individual persuasion through two main routes, the central and peripheral routes. These routes reflect the level of cognitive effort an individual exerts in processing a message. The central route focuses on deep processing of arguments that have relevance in the message, whereas the peripheral route relies more on non-verbal cues or heuristics, such as source attractiveness, communicator credibility, or emotional elements of the message (Schumann *et al.*, 2012). In the context of digital marketing, like TikTok, the ELM framework is highly relevant for explaining how Generation Z

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responds to marketing messages delivered by influencers. When audiences, such as Generation Z, are highly engaged with relevant and appealing content on platforms, likely to process messages via the central route, carefully evaluating the expertise, honesty, and attractiveness of the influencer (Haugtvedt and Petty, 1989). Conversely, when motivation is low, or messages are viewed only superficially, persuasion occurs predominantly through the peripheral route, where influencer credibility serves as a quick heuristic that shapes positive brand perceptions without in-depth rational evaluation (Petty *et al.*, 1983). In order to comprehend how influencer credibility might impact brand trust, brand awareness as a mediator, and buying intention, the ELM serves as a conceptual foundation. The model emphasises that the audience's cognitive elaboration while analysing the messages they receive is a major factor in influencers' efficacy on social media sites like TikTok.

2.2 Influencer Credibility

An influencer's credibility is crucial to the success of digital marketing, particularly on social media. This concept indicates how much audiences perceive influencers as experts, trustworthy, and attractive (Ohanian, 1990; Rungruangjit, 2022). This credibility plays a crucial role in building audience trust in promotional messages, especially in the digital age when consumers are becoming increasingly selective about commercial content (Yao *et al.*, 2025). According to Ohanian (1990), expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness are the three primary components of influencer credibility. Trustworthiness shows the audience's perception of the influencer's sincerity and authenticity in communicating the message, where expertise displays the influencer's or the product's level of competency. Attractive refers to the personal appeal of the influencer and their communication style, which promotes connection with audience. The combination of these three dimensions forms an important signal that influences the effectiveness of persuasion in the digital marketing communication process. Several previous studies have shown that influencer credibility significantly impacts brand trust, brand awareness, and buying intention (Çelik, 2022; Rahman *et al.*, 2022). In the context of Generation Z on TikTok, this influence is even stronger because they view influencers not just as promotional figures, but as authentic and relevant lifestyle representations (To, 2024).

2.3 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness shows how well customers can recognise and remember a brand in a variety of purchasing situations. (Angelique *et al.*, 2025). This concept reflects the strength of a brand in consumer memory, which is an important foundation in the decision-making process (X. Zhang, 2020). According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness is classified into four core levels represented in the brand awareness pyramid. At the lowest level is brand unawareness, where consumers are oblivious of or fully unaware of a brand's existence. The next stage is brand recognition, which is the most fundamental level of awareness where customers start to recognise a brand by its packaging, colour, or logo, usually when given a choice of products. Next is brand recall, the ability of a consumer to recall a particular brand when presented with a cue or in a particular setting is known as brand recall. Top-of-mind awareness, the state in which a brand naturally comes to mind first without outside help or cues, is the highest level. In keeping with this idea, Patmawati and Miswanto (2022) found that brand awareness serves as a mediator in the relationship between social media influencers and buying intention. According to their research, customers are more likely to accept and incorporate influencer messaging into their purchasing decisions when they have a high level of brand knowledge. In the context of digital marketing on TikTok, brand awareness plays a strategic role because Generation Z tends to quickly recognize brands through visual and emotional content, thereby strengthening consumer trust and driving buying intention.

2.4 Brand Trust

Brand trust refers to the perception held by customers that a company is trustworthy, sincere, and able to keep its word (Faradhilla *et al.*, 2024). Customer perceptions of value, satisfaction, service, and brand image all contribute to the development of brand trust, and sustainability-focused brand communication can enhance brand image and boost customer trust (Monfort *et al.*, 2025). In the context of digital

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marketing, brand trust is an important element because consumers interact with brands through social media and influencers who serve as the main intermediaries (Walean *et al.*, 2025). According to Febrian and Fadly (2021), brand trust is not only a result of marketing communication exposure, but also acts as a psychological mechanism that strengthens the influence of promotional stimuli on consumer attitudes and behaviour. Consequently, influencer credibility is crucial to building customer trust in the suggested brand in the context of influencer marketing (Al-Mu'ani *et al.*, 2023).

2.5 Buying Intentions

According to Ajzen (1991) in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, buying intention is defined as a person's psychological tendency to make a buying of a specific product or service after undergoing a process of information evaluation and brand perception. The indicator of how strongly someone plans and tries to perform a behaviour, including purchasing decisions, reflects buying intention. Buying intention reflects the level of consumer readiness to transact and is often a key predictor of actual purchasing behaviour (Nguyen *et al.*, 2023). In the context of digital marketing, buying intention is influenced by various factors such as influencer credibility, brand trust, and brand awareness (Alcántara-Pilar *et al.*, 2024; Ghosh, 2024). When consumers perceive influencers as expert, honest, and attractive figures, they are more likely to trust the promoted brand and show a higher buying intention (Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Alcántara-Pilar *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, high levels of brand trust and brand awareness strengthen consumer belief in product quality, ultimately driving purchasing decisions (Cheng *et al.*, 2022).

2.6 Mediating Effect of Brand Awareness and Brand Trust

In the field of digital marketing, brand awareness and brand trust serve as important mediators between influencer credibility and buying intention. Influencer credibility, which includes expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, can improve consumer awareness and trust in a brand (Al-Mu'ani *et al.*, 2023). When consumers trust influencers, they are more likely to identify and remember the promoted brands, which ultimately strengthens their tendency to buy (Patmawati and Miswanto, 2022). Brand awareness serves as a cognitive mediator that increases brand visibility in consumers' minds, while brand trust acts as an affective mediator that builds confidence in the brand's quality and integrity (Çelik, 2022). These two elements operate in stages, where increased brand awareness strengthens trust, and subsequently drives buying intention (Rahman *et al.*, 2022). The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) explains that consumer behaviour is formed through cognitive and affective processes triggered by beliefs, attitudes, and evaluations of a marketing object. Recent research indicates that influencer credibility can shape consumers' cognitive and affective evaluations of a brand, which in turn influences buying intention (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). While previous studies have examined the direct impact of influencer credibility on buying intention, they have not specifically evaluated the role of brand awareness and brand trust in the relationship. Therefore, this study aims to analyze and understand how brand awareness and brand trust mediate the influence of influencer credibility on consumer buying intention.

2.7 Moderating Effect of Gender

Gender is often seen as a key element that moderates the relationship between psychological aspects and consumer behaviour in the realm of digital marketing (L. Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Biological, social, and emotional differences between men and women lead to variations in how they process marketing messages and react to influencer impact (Luo *et al.*, 2025). Previous studies have shown that women are generally more sensitive to the emotional and social components in marketing materials and build brand trust more quickly when receiving recommendations from influencers considered credible (Garaus and Wolfsteiner, 2023). On the other hand, men tend to emphasize rational dimensions such as competence or evidence of product quality to determine whether a brand is trustworthy (Li *et al.*, 2024). Based on these differences in processing patterns, gender is expected to moderate the relationship between brand trust and buying intention, with the potential effect of brand trust on buying intention being stronger for women than for men.

2.8 Hypothesis Development

Influencer credibility is crucial to the success of digital marketing tactics on social media since it establishes how much the audience views influencers as information sources, with indicators including expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Al-Mu'ani *et al.*, 2023; Ohanian, 1990). According to a number of earlier research, brand awareness is positively impacted by influencer reputation because trustworthy influencers can convey information in an engaging and genuinely, making it easier for consumers to identify and recall the brand (Patmawati & Miswanto, 2022; Ramdani and Fietroh, 2025). Influencers with a solid track record and experience in product promotion can also foster a favourable opinion of the promoted brand, which immediately raises brand awareness (Bu *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that buying intention is influenced by influencer credibility (Mabkhot *et al.*, 2022). Influencers with high expertise and appeal are able to create emotional connections with their audience that drive the desire to buying (Masuda *et al.*, 2022). Customers are more inclined to accept product recommendations and convert that favourable opinion into actual buying intention when they perceive influencers as reliable individuals (Coutinho *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, influencer credibility also has a significant impact on brand trust (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Influencers who are considered honest and competent can transfer their credibility image to the promoted brand, thereby increasing consumer trust in that brand (Aenaya & Sulhaini, 2024). Consumer trust and brand loyalty are further strengthened by the emotional bond and intimacy that form between influencers and their followers (Siqi & Foong Yee, 2021).

H₁: Influencer credibility influences brand awareness.

H₂: Influencer credibility influences brand trust.

H₃: Influencer credibility influences buying intention.

Furthermore, brand awareness plays a crucial role in building trust in the brand. Customers are more inclined to believe that a brand is trustworthy and dependable when they can identify and recall it (Çelik, 2022; Cheng *et al.*, 2022). In other words, strong brand awareness helps reinforce consumer confidence in the brand's promises and reputation.

H₄: Brand awareness influences brand trust.

In the age of digital marketing, two important factors influencing customer buying intention are brand awareness and brand trust. Consumers' capacity to identify and recall a brand, which is the first stage in developing preferences and making a purchase, is reflected in brand awareness (Kuswati and Purwo Saputro, 2025; Smith and Aaker, 1992). The higher the level of brand awareness, the more likely consumers are to choose and buy products known for their familiarity and confidence in the brand's quality (Patmawati & Miswanto, 2022). Several studies indicate that brand awareness has a significant influence on buying intention, as well-known brands create perceptions of reliability and added value in consumers' minds (Çelik, 2022; Qin & Li, 2025). Meanwhile, brand trust serves as an emotional and cognitive foundation in buying intention (Ling *et al.*, 2023). Consumers tend to have higher buying intentions toward brands they trust because of the sense of security, reliability, and consistency demonstrated by those brands (Faradhilla *et al.*, 2024). Previous research confirms that brand trust strengthens long-term relationships with consumers and directly contributes to increased buying intention (Cheng *et al.*, 2022; Febrian & Fadly, 2021).

H₅: Brand awareness influences buying intention.

H₆: Brand trust influences buying intention.

In the context of digital marketing, influencer credibility's impact on buying intention is mediated by brand awareness and brand trust (Patmawati & Miswanto, 2022). Influencer credibility, which includes expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990), can influence how consumers perceive and evaluate a brand. When influencers are perceived as competent and honest, consumers are more likely to recognize and remember the recommended brand, thus strengthening brand awareness (Çelik, 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Additionally, influencer credibility also increases brand trust by creating a perception of authenticity and reliability toward the promoted products. This trust arises because

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audiences feel that influencers provide recommendations based on personal experience and integrity, not solely for commercial gain (Cheng *et al.*, 2022). In the context of Generation Z on TikTok, this factor is becoming increasingly strong because this group values authenticity and emotional closeness as important aspects of building trust in a brand (Angelique *et al.*, 2025). Prior studies verify that influencer credibility and consumer buying intention can be strengthened concurrently by brand awareness and brand trust (Çelik, 2022; Rahman *et al.*, 2022).

H₇: Brand awareness mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and buying intention.

H₈: Brand trust mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and buying intention.

Gender has long been considered an important factor in the study of consumer behaviour because it influences how individuals respond to marketing messages, process information, and make buying intention (Rogova and Matta, 2023). Previous studies have shown that women tend to be more responsive to emotional and social messages, while men are more focused on functional and rational aspects in decision-making (Guo, 2024; Kol and Levy, 2023). Women find it easier to form emotional attachments with influencers they perceive as authentic and relatable, making them more likely to develop high buying intentions toward recommended brands (Ni Made Putri *et al.*, 2025). Conversely, men tend to be more cautious and require rational justification, such as proof of reliability or product quality, before deciding to buy (Wiry Utami *et al.*, 2021). Some studies have also found that gender can strengthen or weaken the influence of influencer credibility on brand trust and buying intention. For example, a study Leung *et al.* (2022) showed that women are more easily influenced by trustworthiness and attractiveness factors, while men are more influenced by expertise in assessing influencer credibility.

H₉: Gender moderates the relationship between brand trust and buying intention.

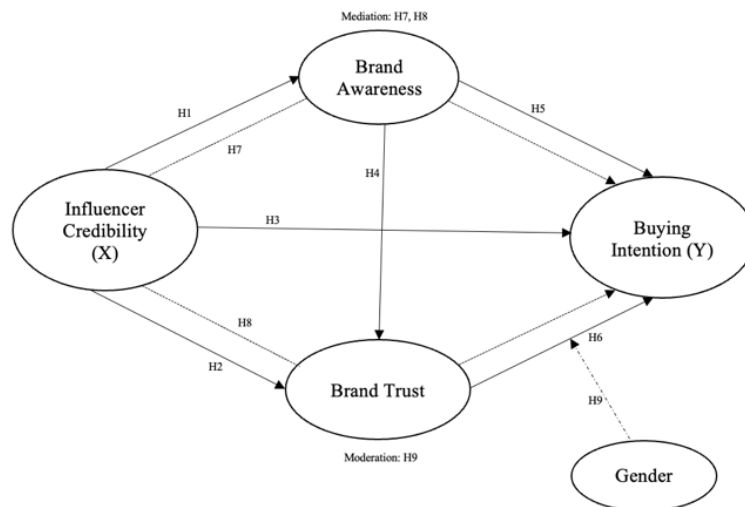


Figure 1. Research Framework

3. Research Methodology

This research uses a quantitative approach with a survey method and the purposive sampling technique was chosen to determine respondents based on specific criteria, namely active TikTok users and belonging to Generation Z, aged 13-28 years (born 1997-2012). The survey was shared online via Google Forms and promoted through social media, as this method was considered the most effective for reaching the population active on digital platforms. Through this data collection process, 138 respondents who met all inclusion criteria were gathered and used as the research sample. The sample size was calculated using G-Power calculations, which considered the statistical power, significance level, and

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effect size relevant to this study, resulting in a total of 138 respondents (Kang, 2021). The research instrument was developed using items adapted from standardized scales that have been validated in previous studies. The measurement was conducted using a Likert scale, with answer choices ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For the data, this study used the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) of SmartPLS software, because it can simultaneously assess the psychometric quality of constructs, including reliability and validity, as well as test the structural connections between its variables. Additionally, PLS-SEM does not require normal data distribution and is considered suitable for research focused on predictive goals. Table 1 presents the operational variables used in this study, specifically those related to the variables being investigated.

Table 1. Data Analysis

Variable	Item	Source
Influencer Credibility (X)	IC1. I find the influencer's speaking style appealing when explaining a product.	(Ohanian, 1990; Rungruangjit, 2022)
	IC2. I feel the influencer's way of expressing themselves makes the promotion enjoyable to watch.	
	IC3. I believe the influencer's appearance while speaking creates a positive impression of the promoted product.	
	IC4. I see the influencer's confident communication style as effective in capturing my attention toward the product.	
	IC5. I feel the influencer understands the product details they explain.	
	IC6. I find the influencer's product explanation clear and informative.	
	IC7. I feel the influencer has relevant knowledge about the product being discussed.	
	IC8. I believe the way the influencer explains product benefits reflects good understanding.	
	IC9. I feel the influencer delivers product information that easy to understand.	
	IC10. I feel influencer's way of speaking reflects honesty when promoting a product.	
	IC11. I feel the influencer is sincere when sharing their experience using the product.	
	IC12. I tend to trust the product recommendations given by the influencer.	
	IC13. I consider the influencer a trustworthy figure when providing product reviews.	
Brand Trust (M1)	BT1. I feel safe with this brand	(Febrian & Fadly, 2021)
	BT2. I trust the quality of the brand	
	BT3. The service make me trust the brand	
	BT4. This brand shows genuine concern for its customers	
	BT5. This brand is honest in responding my concerns	
Brand Awareness (M2)	BA1. This brand's product features quickly came to mind.	(Patmawati & Miswanto, 2022)
	BA2. I can easily recognize this brand's products from competing brands.	
	BA3. I am familiar with the products of this brand.	
Buying Intention (Y)	BI1. Do social media influencers motivate you to buying or try the products/services they recommend?	(Vejačka, 2017)
	BI2. Have you ever bought products/services that endorsed	

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by influencers?

BI3. In the future, Do you plan to buy products/services recommended by influencer?

BI4. Have you suggested to others any products/services that you used and that were recommended by an influencer?

BI5. Do influencer recommendation influence your decision?

4. Hasil dan Pembahasan

4.1 Hasil

Table 2. Respondent Characteristic (n = 138)

Demographic Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Woman	90	65,2%
	Man	48	34,8%
Age	13-28 Years	138	100%
Job	Student	68	49,4%
	Self-Employed	20	14,3%
	Employee	40	28,8%
	Housewife	7	4,8%
	Unemployed	4	2,8%
Last Education	Junior High School	77	56,1%
	High School	55	39,8%
	Bachelor's degree	5	3,5%
	Master's degree	1	0,5%

Table 2 presents the final sample of 138 respondents who met the research criteria, consisting of 90 women (65.2%) and 48 men (34.8%). All participants were within the age range of 13-28 years. Based on occupation, 49.4% of the respondents were students, 28.8% were employees, 14.3% were self-employed, 4.8% were housewives, and 2.8% were unemployed. In terms of educational background, 56.1% had completed Junior High School, 39.8% had completed High School, 3.5% held a Bachelor's degree, and 0.5% held a Master's degree. Overall, the majority of respondents in this study were women aged 13-28 years, dominated by students with Junior High School and High School education backgrounds. Convergent validity testing was used to assess the validity of measurement model, where all variables were found to meet the minimum thresholds. These results indicate variables used in this study are adequate and accurate represent constructs being measured, thereby reinforcing the reliability of the research model. Convergent validity testing aims to assess whether an indicator truly reflects the variable it represents. The results of the PLS algorithm calculations in SmartPLS are presented below, with testing conducted at both the variable and indicator levels. According to J. F. . Hair (2010), convergent validity is considered satisfactory if indicators have outer loading values above 0.70. Additionally, based on J. F. . Hair *et al.* (2017), Bagozzi and Yi (1988), and Fornell & Larcker (1981), if a construct's AVE or Average Variance Extracted is more than 0.50, it is considered convergently valid, so the outer loading values of each indicator and the AVE values for each variable were examined in order to assess convergent validity in this study. For the Influencer Credibility (X) variable, indicators IC10, IC13, IC5, IC7, IC9, and IC1 had loading factors of 0.764, 0.788, 0.791, 0.745, 0.718, and 0.750, in order, all exceeding 0.70, confirming indicator validity. For the Brand Trust (M1) variable, indicators BT1, BT2, BT4, and BT5 showed loading factors of 0.827, 0.743, 0.717, and 0.822, all above 0.70, indicating valid indicators.

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For the Brand Awareness (M2) variable, indicators BA1, BA2, and BA3 had loading factors of 0.879, 0.796, and 0.780, respectively, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold, confirming their validity. For the Buying Intention (Y) variable, indicators BI1, BI2, BI3, BI4, and BI5 had loading factors of 0.792, 0.714, 0.772, 0.725, and 0.787, respectively. All values surpassed 0.70, ensuring the construct validity of the indicators. By comparing each construct's square root of the AVE with its correlations with other constructs, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Discriminant validity is confirmed by the square root of the AVE for Influencer Credibility (X), which is $\sqrt{0.577} = 0.760$, higher than its correlation with other constructs. The square root of the AVE for Brand Trust (M1) is $\sqrt{0.606} = 0.778$, which is likewise higher than its correlations with other factors. Discriminant validity is satisfied because the square root of the AVE for Brand Awareness (M2) is $\sqrt{0.672} = 0.820$, which is higher than its correlations with other constructs. The square root of the AVE for Buying Intention (Y) is $\sqrt{0.576} = 0.759$, which once more exceeds correlations with other variables and validates its discriminant validity. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), both of which should be more than 0.70, and the Influencer Credibility (X1) variable had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.854 and CR of 0.891, indicating excellent internal consistency. Brand Trust (M1) had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.783 and CR of 0.860, demonstrating high reliability. Brand Awareness (M2) showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.755 and CR of 0.859, indicating good internal consistency. Buying Intention (Y1) exhibited a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.816 and CR of 0.871, reflecting strong and consistent reliability across all indicators. The Heterotrait Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) was used to further evaluate discriminant validity. According to Hair *et al.* (2022), all create pairs HTMT values should be below 0.90 to satisfy discriminant validity criteria. Each variable in this study has sufficient discriminant capability, and there is no overlap among the assessed constructs, as demonstrated by the results in Table 3, where HTMT values among constructs were below the threshold. In conclusion, every variable in this study satisfies the requirements for reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity, making them appropriate for use in structural model testing.

Table 3. Result of HTMT

	Brand Awareness	Buying Intention	Brand Trust	Gender	Influencer Credibility
Brand Awareness					
Buying Intention	0,894				
Brand Trust	0,863	0,753			
Gender	0,138	0,144	0,068		
Influencer Credibility	0,786	0,781	0,819	0,061	

Table 4. Result of The Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Original Sample	Sample Mean (M)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Direct Influence				
Influencer Credibility to Brand Awareness	0,639	0,641	8,852	0,000
Influencer Credibility to Brand Trust	0,423	0,428	5,706	0,000
Influencer Credibility to Buying Intention	0,307	0,306	3,928	0,000
Brand Awareness to Brand Trust	0,404	0,404	5,673	0,000
Brand Awareness to Buying Intention	0,436	0,437	5,177	0,000
Brand Trust to Buying Intention	0,085	0,080	0,632	0,527
Gender x Brand Trust to Buying Intention	0,047	0,049	0,345	0,730
Indirect Influence				
Influencer Credibility to Buying Intention	0,278	0,281	4,136	0,000

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through Brand Awareness				
Influencer Credibility to Buying Intention	0,036	0,035	0,603	0,547
through Brand Trust				

Table 5. Result of The Hypothesis Testing

Variable	R2	R2 Adjusted
Brand Awareness	0,408	0,404
Brand Trust	0,560	0,554
Buying Intention	0,587	0,572

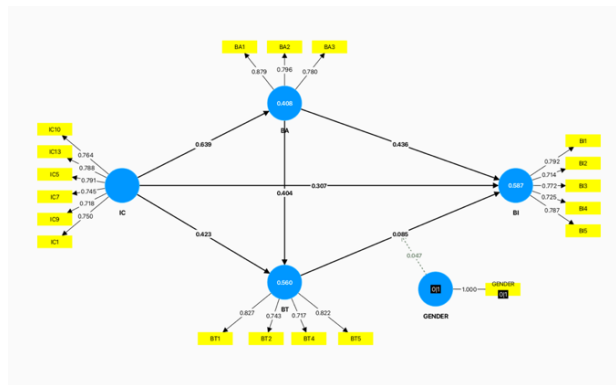


Figure 2. Research Model Framework

After evaluating outer model, next step is to evaluate the inner model using R-square values and hypothesis testing to use to evaluate the inner model, so the R-square test is determine how much of a dependent variable can be explained by the model's independent variables (J. Hair & Alamer, 2022). According to J. F. Hair *et al.* (2019), If the model's R2 value is 0.75, it is deemed strong; if it is 0.50, it is deemed moderate; and if it is 0.25, it is deemed weak. Based on Table 5, the Brand Awareness (BA) R-square value is 0.408, indicating the moderate category. This indicates that Influencer Credibility explains 40.8% of the variation in Brand Awareness, while the remaining 59.2% is explained by other variables not included in this study. The R-square value for Brand Trust (BT) is 0.560 and is categorized as moderate, showing that Brand Awareness and Influencer Credibility explain 56.0% of the variation in Brand Trust, and the remaining 44.0% is influenced by other factors. Meanwhile, the value of the R-square for Buying Intention (BI) is 0.587, which belongs to the moderate category. This suggests that Brand Awareness, Brand Trust, Influencer Credibility, Gender, and the characteristics of Generation Z as the respondent group explain 58.7% of the variation in Buying Intention, while the remaining 41.3% is accounted for by variables outside the model. These results indicate the model has significant predictive capability in capturing the development of consumer buying intention, especially among the study's target Gen Z consumers and the results further emphasize how crucial brand-related perceptions are in influencing consumer choices. Table 4 presents the hypothesis testing, which evaluates Brand Awareness, Brand Trust, Influencer Credibility, and Buying Intention. The analysis includes both direct effects and moderating effects. With a p-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05), the hypothesis test shows that Brand Awareness (BA) significantly affects Buying Intention (BI). As seen in the result, H0 is rejected and H5 is accepted, confirming that Brand Awareness positively influences Buying Intention. Additionally, the influence of Brand Awareness (BA) on Brand Trust (BT) displays a p-value of 0.000; as a result, H0 is rejected and H4 is accepted, confirming that Brand Awareness positively affects Brand Trust. Meanwhile, the effect of Brand Trust (BT) on Buying Intention (BI) provides a p-value of 0.527 (higher than 0.05), which in a result shows that the acceptance of H0 and rejection of H6, indicating that Buying Intention is not greatly influenced by Brand Trust. With a p-value of 0.000 for the relationship between Influencer Credibility (IC) and Brand Awareness (BA), H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted, indicating that Influencer Credibility

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significantly and favourably affects Brand Awareness. Similarly, the effect of Influencer Credibility (IC) on Buying Intention (BI) displays a p-value of 0.000; hence, H0 is rejected and H3 is accepted. The relationship between Influencer Credibility (IC) and Brand Trust (BT) also yields a p-value of 0.000, which leads to the rejection of H0 and acceptance of H2. In terms of the mediation analysis, a p-value of 0.000 for Brand Awareness as a mediator between Influencer Credibility and Buying Intention indicates that the mediation effect is substantial. As a result, H7 is approved, demonstrating that the relationship between Influencer Credibility and Buying Intention is mediated by Brand Awareness. On the other hand, a p-value of 0.547 indicates that the mediation impact of Brand Trust on the connection between Influencer Credibility and Buying Intention is not significant. As a result, H8 is rejected, indicating that the relationship between Influencer Credibility and Buying Intention is not mediated by Brand Trust. Lastly, the moderating influence of Gender x Brand Trust on Buying Intention yields a p-value of 0.730 (higher than 0.05), which means that H0 is accepted and H9 is rejected. This suggests that the association between brand trust and buying intention is not moderated by gender. These results demonstrate that Influencer Credibility and Brand Awareness play a major role in influencing customers' buying intention and offer a solid basis for additional investigation of the interactions among the variables in the suggested research model.

4.2 Discussion

Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), this study identifies how Influencer Credibility, Brand Awareness, and Brand Trust shape Buying Intention among Generation Z TikTok users. Influencer Credibility acts as a persuasive cue that triggers both cognitive and affective evaluations, leading to increased Brand Awareness and Brand Trust. The findings show that Brand Awareness plays a stronger role than Brand Trust in influencing Buying Intention, indicating that Gen Z relies more on familiarity and recognition than emotional trust when making buying decisions on TikTok. Additionally, the association between brand trust and buying intention is not moderated by gender, suggesting that consumers of both sexes react similarly to cues related to trust in influencer marketing. This study finds that influencer credibility significantly strengthens brand awareness among Generation Z TikTok users. Customers process influencers' words more carefully when they are seen as knowledgeable, reliable, and appealing, which makes it simpler for them to identify and remember the advocated brand. This aligns with previous research showing that credible influencers strengthen brand-related memory and increase familiarity through authentic and persuasive communication (Çelik, 2022; Patmawati and Miswanto, 2022; Ramdani and Fietroh, 2025). Credibility cues are particularly useful in raising brand awareness among Gen Z on TikTok since they tend to react favourably to influencers who seem real and relevant. (Bu *et al.*, 2022). Influencer credibility serves as a strong persuasive driver that elevates brand recognition in fast-paced and visually driven digital platforms like TikTok (Alcántara-Pilar *et al.*, 2024).

This research shows that influencer credibility positively influences brand trust among Generation Z TikTok users. When influencers demonstrate expertise, honesty, and authenticity, consumers tend to transfer their positive perceptions of the influencer to the endorsed brand, thereby strengthening trust. This finding aligns with previous studies stating that credible influencers increase consumers' confidence in brand reliability because audiences perceive them as truthful and competent sources of information (Aenaya and Sulhaini, 2024; Liu and Zheng, 2024; Siqi and Foong Yee, 2021). When an influencer seems trustworthy and genuine, consumers are more likely to transfer their trust to the advertised brand. Credibility cues are particularly useful in fostering trust towards the promoted company since Gen Z users, who are extremely engaged with digital content, are especially receptive to influencers that communicate in a natural, honest, and relatable manner (Walean *et al.*, 2025). Overall, the findings highlight how influencer credibility plays a significant role in fostering favourable emotional and cognitive assessments that result in brand trust. (Febrian and Fadly, 2021). Generation Z TikTok consumers' buying intentions are positively impacted by influencer credibility. Customers are more likely to follow influencers' advice and become willing to buy the promoted company when they are seen as attractive, trustworthy, and expertise. This supports previous studies showing that credible influencers enhance persuasive impact by increasing consumers' confidence in product claims and reducing perceived risk (Mabkhot *et al.*, 2022; Masuda *et al.*, 2022). Credible influencers create a sense of assurance that the product is reliable and worth trying, which

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increases consumers' intention to buy. Generation Z tends to rely on influencer cues when making buying decisions, especially on TikTok where content is fast, engaging, and relatable. Authentic communication and honest product sharing strengthen consumers' belief in the influencer's judgment, leading to higher buying intention. Similar findings from earlier research show that consumers are more inclined to buy the endorsed brand when they see an influencer as reputable. (Coutinho *et al.*, 2023). The study reveals that brand awareness has a positive effect on building brand trust among Generation Z users on TikTok. When consumers are familiar with a brand and consistently recognize its presence across platforms, they are more inclined to think of the brand as trustworthy and legitimate, which increases their level of confidence. This result aligns with previous studies showing that higher brand familiarity reduces uncertainty and increases confidence in the brand's performance (Çelik, 2022; Cheng *et al.*, 2022). Generation Z often encounters repeated brand exposure through TikTok content, especially from influencers, which strengthens their sense of recognition. The more frequently a brand appears in their feeds, the more comfortable and assured they feel about the brand. Previous studies similarly confirm that strong brand awareness grows trust because familiarity helps consumers form positive evaluations (Açıkgöz *et al.*, 2024; Morimoto, 2024). Brand Awareness is a strong influence of buying intention among Generation Z TikTok users. Customers are more likely to feel secure and confident when making buyings when they are familiar with and can quickly identify a brand. Several studies indicate familiarity with a brand reduces perceived risk and strengthens positive associations, making consumers more likely to prefer unfamiliar alternatives (Çelik, 2022; Qin and Li, 2025). TikTok users in Generation Z often develop this familiarity through repeated exposure to brand-related content, especially in short, engaging videos that reinforce recall. Consistent brand visibility leads to stronger cognitive recognition, which encourages consumers to move from awareness to actual buying intention (Patmawati and Miswanto, 2022).

According to this study, among Generation Z TikTok users, Brand Trust had no discernible impact on Buying Intention. Although prior studies commonly report that trust enhances consumers' willingness to buy by reducing uncertainty and increasing confidence in product claims (Cheng *et al.*, 2022; Febrian and Fadly, 2021), the present findings show a different pattern. Gen Z tends to prioritize trend-driven cues, social proof, and influencer recommendations over trust-based evaluations when shopping through TikTok, which makes trust less decisive in shaping intention (Wu *et al.*, 2021). Some research also suggests that for younger consumers, buying decisions are often impulsive and emotionally driven, reducing the weight of trust in the process of decision-making (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). This difference highlights that in fast-paced social commerce environments, especially on TikTok, credibility of influencers and brand familiarity may play more dominant roles than trust in driving buying intention. Among Generation Z TikTok users, brand awareness serves as a mediating factor between influencer credibility and buying intention. Customers become more familiar with the brands that influencers promote when they are seen as trustworthy, and this familiarity boosts their confidence in making a buying. Increased recognition helps consumers reduce uncertainty and form positive impressions, which then strengthens their intention to buy (Çelik, 2022; Lou and Yuan, 2019). TikTok's short-form and repetitive content also enhances brand recall, making familiar brands more appealing to Gen Z. This indicates that brand awareness plays a key cognitive role in connecting influencer credibility to buying intention (Rahman *et al.*, 2022). This study demonstrates that among Generation Z TikTok users, brand trust does not serve as a substantial mediator between influencer credibility and buying intention. Although previous studies generally suggest that trust can bridge the persuasive impact of influencers and consumers' buying decisions by reducing perceived risk and increasing confidence (Aenaya and Sulhaini, 2024; Liu and Zheng, 2024; Siqi and Foong Yee, 2021), the findings of this research present a different outcome. One possible reason is that Gen Z tends to rely more on rapid cues such as trend relevance, authenticity of influencer content, and brand familiarity rather than trust-based evaluations when engaging with TikTok promotions (Tong *et al.*, 2022; Wu *et al.*, 2021). Some studies also note that in fast-paced social commerce environments, trust may be less influential because consumers prioritize immediacy and social validation over deeper cognitive assessments (Rahman *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, for Gen Z users on TikTok, the weak mediation function of brand trust suggests that trust is not the main psychological pathway connecting influencer credibility to buying intention.

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The association between brand trust and buying intention was not found to be moderated by gender. When they trusted a brand, Generation Z TikTok users, both male and female, expressed comparable levels of buying intention. This is consistent with earlier studies showing that consumers' responses to trust cues in digital marketing environments are not much influenced by gender differences (Lady *et al.*, 2025). Both genders appear to process brand trust similarly due to their shared digital consumption patterns, where exposure to the same social media trends and influencer content minimizes behavioural differences. Studies on younger consumers also show that male and female individuals tend to demonstrate comparable decision-making styles in online environments because they engage with similar platforms, trends, and purchasing experiences (Mumu *et al.*, 2022). No gender-moderating role was found in the trust intention relationship, suggesting that psychological responses toward trusted brands are consistent across genders. This result suggests that additional elements, such as brand familiarity or influencer credibility, may be more influential than gender in shaping buying intention among Gen Z social media users.

5. Conclusion

According to the study's findings, Generation Z TikTok users' consumer reactions are significantly influenced by the legitimacy of their influencers. Influencer Credibility significantly enhances Brand Awareness and Brand Trust, while also directly increasing Buying Intention. Among the two psychological variables, compared to brand trust, brand awareness has a greater impact on buying intention, indicating that familiarity and recognition are more decisive for Gen Z when evaluating products promoted on TikTok. The study also finds that Brand Awareness serves as an effective mediator, linking Influencer Credibility to Buying Intention, whereas Brand Trust does not demonstrate a significant mediating effect. This suggests that consumers tend to rely more on cognitive familiarity than emotional assurance when deciding whether to buy influencer-endorsed products. Additionally, the association between brand trust and buying intention is not moderated by gender, indicating that Gen Z consumers of both genders react similarly to cues related to trust in influencer marketing. Overall, the research highlights that in fast-paced social media environments, especially TikTok, persuasive cues from credible influencers operate primarily through brand familiarity and direct persuasion rather than trust-based mechanisms. These findings provide insights for marketers in designing influencer-based strategies tailored to Generation Z consumers.

Future research should think about broadening the range of variables to include socioeconomic and cultural aspects, as these could have a big impact on how Indonesian Generation Z users react to influencer marketing. Gen Z's interpretation of influencer legitimacy and processing of brand-related information may be influenced by cultural norms prevalent in Indonesian society, such as collectivism, social conformity, and strong peer influence. Meanwhile, socio-economic status may also play an important role; individuals with higher purchasing power may be more responsive to influencer promotions, while those with lower income levels may prioritize value-driven cues or price sensitivity. A more thorough grasp of how influencer material fits with consumers' cultural backgrounds and economic realities can be obtained by taking these elements into account. In addition, future research is encouraged to explore other potential moderating variables, considering that Gender did not demonstrate a significant moderating effect in this study. Variables such as digital literacy, parasocial relationships, personality traits, or social media usage intensity may offer richer insights into how consumers respond differently to influencer endorsements. Future studies could also investigate the long-term impact of influencer marketing on consumer behaviour. Since TikTok trends evolve rapidly, examining how consistent exposure to certain influencers or content types shapes brand loyalty, trust development, and sustained purchasing behaviour over time would be valuable. Moreover, this study found that brand awareness is the strongest predictor of buying intention, indicating that familiarity plays a more substantial role than trust in driving purchasing decisions. Future research may examine cognitive mechanisms behind this phenomenon, particularly how repeated exposure, visual formats, or narrative techniques in influencer content amplify awareness among

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Gen Z. By expanding variables, deepening contextual analysis, and applying more diverse methodological approaches, future studies are expected to generate richer, more holistic insights into how influencer credibility and brand-related perceptions shape consumer decision-making in the evolving digital landscape.

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