

TikTok Live Host Authenticity on Purchase Intention: The Role of Customer Engagement as a Mediating

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ABSTRACT

The growth of social commerce via TikTok Live has transformed consumer behavior patterns, particularly among Generation Z, who are characterized as digital natives. In the live shopping process, the host's authenticity is a key factor capable of shaping audience engagement and driving purchase intentions. This study aims to analyze the impact of authenticity on customer engagement, customer engagement on purchase intention, and authenticity on purchase intention, as well as the mediating role of customer engagement in the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention among Generation Z users of TikTok Shop in Samarinda City. A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing primary data collected via online questionnaires (Google Forms). The research instrument utilized a five-point Likert scale, and data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that authenticity has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement (path coefficient: 0.716; T-statistic: 15.564; P-value: 0.000). Customer engagement has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention (path coefficient: 0.464; T-statistic: 5.602; P-value: 0.000). Authenticity also has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention (path coefficient: 0.401; T-statistic: 4.601; P-value: 0.000). Furthermore, customer engagement was found to mediate the effect of authenticity on purchase intention (path coefficient: 0.332; T-statistic: 5.251; P-value: 0.000). R-square values of 0.513 for customer engagement and 0.643 for purchase intention indicate a moderate level of model explanatory power. Thus, the more authentic the host is in conveying information and interacting naturally, the higher the engagement among Generation Z, which ultimately strengthens purchase intentions via TikTok Live.

Keywords: authenticity, customer engagement, Generation, purchase intention, TikTok Live,

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INTRODUCTION

The evolution of digital technology in the modern era has become the main basis for significant changes in influencing consumer behavior in various sectors. This technological transformation has created a new ecosystem that acts as a medium for consumers to interact, browse information, and make purchase considerations flexibly compared to previous conventional behavior patterns. One of the factors that strengthens the occurrence of this shift pattern is the development of an e-commerce ecosystem that is increasingly accessible to the public.

The growth of the global e-commerce ecosystem has an integral relationship with the increasing use of social media as a space for digital interaction significantly. Based on the publication report We Are Social (2025), it was recorded that the number of users reached 5.24 billion active social media worldwide, with a growth of 4.1% of total internet users in the last 12 months. The social media adoption rate reached 94.2% of total internet users, showing that social media is able to play a key determinant in strengthening digital consumptive behavior patterns. Although this growth rate is relatively slower than the growth rate seen in the last decade, the digitalization trend that has reached more than 60% of the global population will still position social media as one of the main catalysts for changes in digital consumer behavior.

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of changing digital consumer behavior is increasingly seen significantly along with the increasing adoption of social media as a source of information and entertainment media. Based on the We Are Social (2025) report, Indonesia is recorded to have a population of 285 million people in January 2025 and achieved an increase of 2.3 million people (0.8%) compared to the previous year. Of the total population, the We Are Social (2025) report notes that the number of active users is 143 million on social media, equivalent to 50.2% of the total Indonesian population. In addition, there are 126 million social media users aged 18 years and older and cover 62.7% of Indonesia's adult population. This high prevalence of social media use emphasizes that digital platforms have become the main media in the economic, social, and consumption activities of the Indonesian people (Retnosari & Nadlifatin, 2024).

One of the digital platforms that currently occupies the most significant growth position in Indonesia is TikTok. Based on the We Are Social (2025) report, TikTok's advertising resources show that by early 2025 there will be 108 million active TikTok users aged 18 years and older, making Indonesia the second largest market for TikTok globally. Now TikTok does not only function as an entertainment platform, but also develops as a social commerce medium that brings together social interaction in real-time. The combination of entertainment content and direct transactions makes TikTok one of the unique digital platforms compared to conventional e-commerce platforms. The dominance of active TikTok users in Indonesia is also supported by the demographic composition of Generation Z. Generation Z born in the period 1997 – 2012 is known as digital natives who have been closely coexisted with digital technology, the internet, and gadget-based devices since the beginning of their lives (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022). This group shows the ability to multitask in adapting to high technology and having quick access to information through the internet in filtering content critically, and the tendency to build emotional relationships through interactive and personal content (Saputra et al., 2024). These unique characteristics make Generation Z one of the potential consumer groups in the social commerce ecosystem.

Samarinda City is one of the centers of economic growth and urbanization in East Kalimantan that has also experienced the development of the digital ecosystem. Based on the Opendata report (2025), the population of Samarinda City was recorded to reach 888,184 people. Based on the overall total, the age

group classified as Generation Z in Samarinda City reached 244,893 people, which confirms that almost a quarter of the city's population is in the age range of digital natives. However, although various national reports explain the high adoption rate of digital shopping and live shopping in Generation Z, until now there is no empirical data that specifically describes the digital shopping behavior of Generation Z in Samarinda City or East Kalimantan. However, the high proportional scale of Generation Z makes Samarinda City an area with a strong segment for the development of digital consumption behavior that is relevant to be studied, especially through interactive platforms such as TikTok.

TikTok is a digital platform in social media that is currently experiencing the fastest growth and functions as a medium for sharing entertainment content that transforms into a medium for digital transactions through the TikTok Live feature (Retnosari & Nadlifatin, 2024). Tiktok Live is the main medium for promoting products to audiences in real-time. In addition, TikTok

Live facilitates a space between the host and the audience to create two-way interaction, so that the audience is not only limited to receiving product-related information, but can also ask questions, provide comments, and make transactions directly during the TikTok Live session (Lin & Nuangjamnong, 2022). This system then makes TikTok Live one of the effective digital marketing mediums that is able to provide a realistic and participatory shopping experience compared to conventional marketing methods.

The first step in building a relationship between the TikTok live streaming platform and its audience lies in the formation of a sense of trust in the marketing communication process that takes place in real-time (Razina, 2025). In this context, the TikTok Live host plays the role of the main actor who facilitates interaction and conveys product information to the audience. The role of the host is not only limited to delivering promotional messages, but also on how the communication is perceived by the audience in building credibility, attracting attention, and creating emotional closeness. The success of the host in influencing the audience's buying interest is greatly influenced by their ability to convey information clearly, responsively, and consistently during the TikTok Live session, thus forming a positive perception of the communication conveyed (Lim et al., 2017).

The authenticity of hosts on TikTok Live is reviewed on the audience's perception that the host conveys the message honestly, openly, and in accordance with his personal identity. This perception makes marketing communication feel natural and increases the audience's trust in the product information conveyed (Liao & Chen, 2024). In the Generation Z group, host authenticity is an important factor in receiving marketing information because this group tends to be critical of excessive communication. Therefore, host authenticity plays a role in shaping the audience's initial response to live shopping activities on TikTok.

Customer engagement describes audience engagement that is reflected through attention, interaction, and emotional attachment during a TikTok Live session. This engagement is formed through the active participation of the audience, such as commenting and responding to information delivered by the host (Lin & Nuangjamnong, 2022). A positive perception of host authenticity encourages the audience to be more actively involved in the marketing communication process. Thus, customer engagement becomes the link between the host's communication and the subsequent consumer response.

Purchase intention is the consumer's intention to make a purchase that arises after evaluating information and building trust in the source of communication (Peña-García et al., 2020). Positive interaction and high engagement during TikTok Live sessions can strengthen the audience's confidence in the products offered. Among Generation Z, an interactive and authentic shopping experience is an important

consideration in shaping purchase intent. Therefore, purchase intention is positioned as the end result of the communication process and audience engagement on TikTok Live.

A number of previous studies have proven that authenticity affects customer engagement and purchase intention in the context of digital marketing and live streaming commerce (Eigenraam et al., 2021; Liu & Sun, 2024; Sallaku & Vigolo, 2022). However, most of these studies still examine the relationship between variables partially and have not integrated customer engagement as a mediation mechanism that explains how host authenticity affects purchase intention more comprehensively. In addition, studies that specifically place host authenticity in the context of TikTok Live with a focus on the local context and Generation Z in Samarinda City as active users of live streaming and buyers on TikTok Shop are still relatively limited. This limitation shows that there is a research gap to test in an integrated way the influence of host authenticity on purchase intention through customer engagement in the context of interactive and real-time live streaming commerce.

METHODS

The data collection method in this study was carried out through the collection of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from Generation Z respondents in Samarinda City who met the research criteria through the distribution of questionnaires online using Google Form. The questionnaire was distributed through social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and other social media to reach respondents who had watched TikTok Live Shopping. The research instrument used a Likert scale with five alternative answers, namely Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The data obtained from the questionnaire was then used to measure the variables of Authenticity, Customer Engagement, and Purchase Intention. In addition to primary data, this study also used secondary data obtained from statistical reports, official publications on data provider websites such as We Are Social and Opendata, as well as previous research and scientific literature as sources of support for research. Data collection was carried out systematically to obtain data relevant to the research objectives and then analyzed using the Partial Least Square–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method. This study does not use a large number of research datasets stored in public databases as the main source of analysis, so there is no access code or database access code that needs to be included.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability Test

Reliability tests in PLS can use two methods, namely Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability. Cronbach's alpha measures the lower limit of the reliability value of a construct, while Composite reliability measures the true value of the reliability of a construct. Composite reliability should > 0.7 even though the stated value of 0.6 is still acceptable for other constructs in the model. AVE is recommended to be > 0.5 (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015).

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	Cronbach's alpha
Authenticity (X)	0.877
Customer Engagement (U)	0.880
Purchase Intention (Y)	0.876

Source: Processed data (2026)

Based on the results of the Cronbach's Alpha test, all variables in this study had a value above 0.70. The Authenticity (X) variable obtained a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.877, Customer Engagement (Z) of 0.880, and Purchase Intention (Y) of 0.876. These results show that all constructs have a good level of internal consistency, so that all variables are declared reliable and suitable for use in the study.

Table 2. Composite Reliability

Variable	Composite Reliability
Authenticity (X)	0.915
Customer Engagement (U)	0.917
Purchase Intention (Y)	0.924

Source: Processed data (2026)

The results of the composite reliability test showed that all variables had a > value of 0.7. The value of Authenticity was 0.915, Customer Engagement was 0.917, and Purchase Intention was 0.924. Thus, all constructs are declared reliable.

R-Square (R2 Value)

The researcher used this metric with the aim of measuring the level of impact from exogenous variables to endogenous variables. The R2 values calculated from endogenous variables, showed a strong level of clarity at 0.75, medium at 0.50, and weak at 0.25 (Ghozali & Kusumadewi, 2023).

Table 3. R-Square

Variable	R-square
Customer Engagement (U)	0.513
Purchase Intention (Y)	0.643

Source: Processed data (2026)

Based on the results shown in the table above, the R2 value of Customer Engagement is 0.513 and the value of R2 Purchase Intention is 0.643. This can be interpreted that Authenticity has an impact of up to 51.3% on Customer Engagement. In addition, Authenticity and Customer Engagement have an impact of up to 64.3% on Purchase Intent. Additional factors that have not been researched and studied in this study have the potential to affect Customer Engagement at a level of 48.7% and on Purchase Intention of 35.7% of the R2 value that cannot be explained in this study. Thus, these values are included in the medium category.

F-square (F2)

The F-square value serves as the main metric used to determine the magnitude of the influence exerted by independent variables on the dependent variable. The range set is from 0.02 to but does not include 0.15 indicates a small effect, values between 0.15 and a little below 0.35 indicate a moderate effect, and a value of 0.35 or higher indicates a large effect (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015).

Table 4. F-Square

Variable Influence	F-square
Authenticity → Customer Engagement	1.052
Customer Engagement → Purchase Intention	0.294
Authenticity → Purchase Intention	0.219
Authenticity → Customer Engagement → Purchase Intention	0,110

Source: Processed data (2026)

Based on the results of the F-square test in the table above, it is known that the effect of authenticity on customer engagement has a value of 1.052 so it is included in the category of large effects. Furthermore, the effect of customer engagement on purchase intention has a value of 0.294 and the effect of authenticity on purchase intention is 0.219, both of which are included in the category of medium effects. Meanwhile, the indirect effect of authenticity on purchase intention through customer engagement has a value of 0.110 so it is included in the category of small effects. These results show that authenticity has a strong influence on customer engagement, while customer engagement and authenticity have a moderate influence on purchase intention.

Path Coefficients

The path coefficients method is used to measure the strength and direction of influence between latent constructs. Hypothesis testing requires an in-depth examination of the relationship between these variables, with coefficients ranging from -1 to +1 with values close to +1 indicating a strong positive relationship, while values close to -1 indicating a strong negative relationship.

Table 5.Path Coefficients

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Conclusion
X → Z	0.716	0.718	0.046	15.564	0.000	Significant
Z → Y	0.464	0.462	0.083	5.602	0.000	Significant
X → Y	0.401	0.403	0.087	4.601	0.000	Significant
X → Z → Y	0.332	0.332	0.063	5.251	0.000	Significant

Source: Processed data (2026)

Based on the table above, the H1 correlation regarding the effect of authenticity on customer engagement shows significant positive results, the H2 correlation regarding the influence of customer engagement on purchase intent shows significant positive results, and the H3 correlation regarding the

effect of authenticity on purchase intent shows significant positive results, and the H4 correlation regarding the effect of authenticity on purchase intention through customer engagement shows significant positive results.

Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Variable descriptive analysis is used to describe the tendency of respondents' responses to each indicator in the study. This analysis is carried out by looking at the mean value of respondents' answers to each variable indicator. The mean value is then categorized into several assessment criteria to determine the level of respondents' perception of the research variable. According to Maman et al., (2026) data can be categorized based on:

4.21 – 5.00 = very good / very high
3.41 – 4.20 = good / high
2.61 – 3.40 = enough
1.81 – 2.60 = low
1.00 – 1.80 = very low

Table 6. Results of Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Indicator	Red	Categories
A1	3.336	Enough
A2	3.491	Good
A3	3.309	Enough
A4	3.227	Enough
CE1	3.382	Enough
CE2	3.391	Enough
CE3	3.518	Good
CE4	3.318	Enough
PI1	3.345	Enough
PI2	3.291	Enough
PI3	3.309	Enough

Source: Processed data (2026)

Table 6 shown above shows that the general opinion of the respondents mostly gives sufficient and good results. Between A1 to A4 as an indicator of authenticity shows that the highest rating is in A2 with an average score of 3.491 and the lowest rating is in A4 with an average score of 3.227. Between CE1 to CE4 as a customer engagement indicator shows that the highest rating is in CE3 with an average value of 3.518 and the lowest rating is in CE4 with an average value of 3.318. Between PI1 to PI3 as an indicator of purchase intention shows that the highest rating is in PI1 with an average value of 3.345 and the lowest rating is in PI2 with an average value of 3.291.

Hypothesis Testing

Evaluating the hypothetical relationships between the constructs, we established a bootstrapping resampling method to calculate the t-value. The hypothesis was tested at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. A path coefficient indicating a t-value above 1.96 (two tailed) or 1.64 (one tailed) was considered statistically significant (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015). This approach allows a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed

theoretical model.

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing

Variable Influence	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
$X \rightarrow Z$	15.564	0.000
$Z \rightarrow Y$	5.602	0.000
$X \rightarrow Y$	4.601	0.000
$X \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	5.251	0.000

Source: Processed data (2026)

In PLS-SEM, each hypothesized relationship undergoes statistical testing through simulation. The following are the results of the bootstrapping analysis in the PLS study.

Hypothesis 1 (Authenticity affects customer engagement)

Hypothesis 1 tests the relationship between authenticity and customer engagement which results in a path coefficient value of 0.716 with a statistical T value of 15.564, and a P value of 0.000. These results show that authenticity has a significant positive influence on customer engagement. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2 (Customer engagement affects purchase intention)

Hypothesis 2 tests the relationship between customer engagement and purchase intention which results in a path coefficient value of 0.464 with a statistical T value of 5.602, and a P value of 0.000. These results show that customer engagement has a significant positive influence on purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is accepted.

Hypothesis 3 (Authenticity affects purchase intention)

Hypothesis 3 tests the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention which results in a path coefficient value of 0.401 with a statistical T value of 4.601, and a P value of 0.000. These results show that authenticity has a significant positive influence on purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Hypothesis 4 (Authenticity affects purchase intention through customer engagement)

Hypothesis 4 tests the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention through customer engagement which results in a path coefficient value of 0.332 with a statistical T value of 5.251, and a P value of 0.000. These results show that authenticity has a significant positive influence on purchase intention through customer engagement. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is accepted.

Discussion

The effect of authenticity on customer engagement

The authenticity of the TikTok Live host shows the authenticity, honesty, and natural behavior of the host in interacting with the audience during the live stream. Eigenraam et al., (2021) and Sallaku & Vigolo (2022) stated that authenticity has a positive effect on customer engagement through increasing emotional closeness and psychological involvement of the audience. Similar findings were also put forward by Gao et al., (2022) which showed that the authenticity of influencers Capable Build consumer

trust and increase customer engagement emotionally and behaviorally.

In addition, Schönberner & Woratschek (2023) and Chen et al., (2020) stated that the authenticity of media figures plays an important role in strengthening customer engagement with digital promotional content. In the context of live streaming and Generation Z, Xinzhe & Fernandez (2025) explained that the authenticity of content and the responsiveness of the host in real-time are able to strengthen the psychological relationship of the audience so as to increase customer engagement during live sessions. The above statement shows that the results of the authenticity path coefficient on customer engagement are 0.716, the T-statistics value is 15.564, and the P-values are 0.000 show that authenticity has a positive and significant influence on customer engagement. The results of this study show that the higher the authenticity of the TikTok Live host, the higher the customer engagement of Generation Z at the TikTok Shop in Samarinda City. So based on the study, it is known that:

H1: There is an influence of authenticity on customer engagement.

The Influence of Customer Engagement on Purchase Intention

Customer engagement represents emotional involvement and consumer behavior towards a brand or platform that can affect consumers' purchase intent (Dewi, 2021; Rather et al., 2019). Arisman & Salehudin (2022) in their research on Shopee Live found that customer engagement has a positive effect on purchase intent. Similar findings were also put forward by Ramadhoni & Prassida (2025) which show that customer engagement on social commerce live streaming contributes significantly to consumer purchase intention.

In addition, Prentice et al., (2019) explained that customer engagement is able to form user identity and attachment so as to increase purchase intent. In the context of influencer marketing and social commerce, Xinzhe & Fernandez (2025), Sun et al., (2019, Ayuningtyas, (2024), Triady et al., (2025) stated that customer engagement acts as a psychological bridge that strengthens the influence of live streaming attributes on consumer purchase intention.

The above statement shows that the results of the coefficient of the customer engagement path to purchase intention are 0.464, the T-statistics value is 5.602, and the P-values value is 0.000 shows that customer engagement has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. The results of this study show that the higher the customer engagement of Generation Z on TikTok Shop, the higher the purchase intention for products promoted through TikTok Live in Samarinda City. So based on the study, it is known that:

H2 : There is an influence of customer engagement on purchase intention.

The Influence of Authenticity on Purchase Intention

The role of authenticity in shaping purchase intent supports a number of previous studies. Studies such as those of Utami & Praswati (2023) and Gohil et al., (2025) show that authenticity has a positive effect on purchase intent. Other studies such as Lee et al., (2023) and Liu & Sun (2024) confirm that authenticity not only increases purchase intention but also builds positive attitudes towards brands. Additional findings from Audrezet et al., (2020) and Zniva et al., (2023), as well as the results of studies by Zou & Fu, (2024) and Kusbianto et al., (2025) reinforce the evidence that authenticity influencers drive audience engagement and increase purchase intent.

The above statement shows that the results of the authenticity path coefficient to purchase intention

are 0.401, the T-statistics value is 4.601, and the P-values value is 0.000 shows that authenticity has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. The results of this study show that the higher the authenticity of the TikTok Live host, the higher the purchase intention for products promoted through TikTok Live in Samarinda City. So based on the study, it is known that: H3: There is an influence of authenticity on purchase intention.

The Influence of Authenticity on Purchase Intention Through Customer Engagement

Authenticity in this study plays a role as a stimulus that is able to increase customer engagement so as to encourage consumer purchase intent (Chen et al., 2020). Authenticity reflects the honesty, consistency, and openness of the host in conveying product information, thus influencing audience perception during live streaming Xinzhe & Fernandez (2025). Customer engagement also acts as a psychological process that channels the influence of authenticity on consumer purchase intent (Utami & Praswati, 2023; Gohil et al., 2025).

Sallaku & Vigolo (2022) found that customer engagement mediates the relationship between authenticity and customer loyalty. Similar findings were put forward by Suharyadi et al., (2024) who stated that customer engagement mediates the relationship between authenticity influencers and brand perception. In addition, Xinzhe & Fernandez (2025) explain that customer engagement functions as a psychological bridge between livestream attributes and purchase intent.

The above statement shows that the results of the indirect influence of authenticity on purchase intention through customer engagement of 0.332, T-statistics value of 5.251, and P-values of 0.000 show that customer engagement is able to mediate the influence of authenticity on purchase intention. The results of this study show that the higher the authenticity of the TikTok Live host, the higher the customer engagement, which ultimately increases the purchase intention of Generation Z at the TikTok Shop in Samarinda City. So based on the study, it is known that:

H4: There is an influence of authenticity on purchase intention through customer engagement.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis carried out in the previous chapter, the main conclusions that can be drawn are as follows: This study confirms the significant positive impact of authenticity on Generation Z customer engagement in Samarinda City, thus supporting hypothesis 1 that authenticity to customer engagement effectively affects the level of customer engagement. This shows that the higher the level of authenticity displayed by the host in TikTok Live, the more participation, attention, and interaction carried out by Generation Z during the live streaming process.

This study confirms the significant positive impact of customer engagement on Generation Z's purchase intention at TikTok Shop in Samarinda City, thereby supporting hypothesis 2 which states that the higher the customer engagement formed during TikTok Live activities, the greater the tendency of Generation Z to have the intention to make purchases on promoted products. This study confirms the significant positive impact of authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intention on TikTok Shop in Samarinda City, thus supporting hypothesis 3 which states that the level of authenticity of hosts in delivering product information in real-time is able to increase consumer trust and confidence that has the potential to form buying interest.

This study confirms the significant positive impact of authenticity on Generation Z's purchase intention on TikTok Shop through customer engagement in Samarinda City, thus supporting hypothesis 4 which states that authenticity does not only directly affect purchase intention, but also indirectly through customer engagement. This indicates that the more authentic the host is in conveying the message, the higher the customer engagement that is formed and will ultimately strengthen the purchase intention of Generation Z in Samarinda City.

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