



ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

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The Influence of Influencer Advertising on Gen Z Consumer Decisions: A Psychological Literature Review

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Abstract: The rapid development of social media has transformed marketing communication strategies from conventional approaches to socially driven influence-based techniques known as influencer marketing. Generation Z, as digital natives, demonstrates heightened sensitivity to persuasive messages delivered by influencers. This study aims to examine the psychological mechanisms mediating the influence of influencer advertising on Gen Z's purchasing decisions through a literature review from 2015 to 2025. A narrative- descriptive approach was employed by reviewing ten downloadable scholarly articles from Google Scholar and national scientific repositories. Thematic analysis identified five dominant psychological mechanisms: credibility, authenticity, parasocial relationships, attractiveness, and value congruence. These elements operate simultaneously across cognitive, affective, and conative processes, shaping Gen Z's perceptions, attitudes, and purchase intentions. This article provides theoretical insights into the role of consumer psychology in influencer marketing and practical recommendations for marketers to design effective digital campaigns.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Generation Z, Purchase Decision, Consumer Psychology, Parasocial Relationship.

Introduction

The development of social media over the past decade has drastically changed the dynamics of marketing communications. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become primary platforms for consumers, particularly Generation Z, to obtain information, construct identities, and interact with public figures. This shift marks a paradigm shift from traditional marketing to social influence-based marketing, or influencer marketing (Freberg, 2020). Influencers serve not only as communicators but also as symbolic figures with the ability to influence values, preferences, and consumption behavior.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, grew up in a highly connected digital environment. They use social media not only for entertainment but also as a space to

express themselves, build social identities, and shape their lifestyle perceptions (Fromm & Read, 2018). Various studies have shown that this age group is highly responsive to messages conveyed through social media due to their high usage intensity and reliance on online recommendations (Putra et al., 2023). This makes Gen Z an ideal target for influencer marketing strategies.

In the Indonesian context, the influencer marketing trend has grown rapidly over the past five years. According to data from We Are Social (2024), 92% of Indonesian internet users aged 16–24 actively follow at least one influencer on social media, and more than 70% of them admitted to having purchased a product based on an influencer's recommendation. This phenomenon indicates a psychological shift in consumer decision-making: from a rational model to a social and emotional model.

Various Indonesian studies confirm the significant role of influencers in purchasing behavior, but there is still variation in the results regarding the most dominant psychological factors. Some studies emphasize influencer credibility (Zaki, 2018; Amalia & Sagita, 2019), some highlight the role of authenticity and shared values (Lengkawati & Saputra, 2021; Seruni, 2024), while others emphasize aspects of digital social relationships such as parasocial interactions (Fahlevi et al., 2025). Therefore, a comprehensive literature review is needed to map the patterns of findings, explain the underlying psychological mechanisms, and highlight their relevance to Gen Z consumer behavior in Indonesia.

This study aims to review national research findings related to the influence of influencer advertising on Gen Z consumer purchasing decisions, focusing on psychological aspects such as trust, social identification, and emotional engagement.

The development of social media has introduced a new paradigm in marketing communications practices. Conventional, company-centered marketing has shifted to social influence-based marketing, known as influencer marketing (Freberg, 2020). In the context of consumer psychology, this phenomenon is seen not only as a promotional strategy but also as a form of interpersonal communication that influences the cognitive, affective, and conative aspects of an individual's purchasing behavior, particularly among Generation Z (Gen Z) (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2015; Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 2018). Conceptually, consumer psychology focuses on how individuals process information, form perceptions, and make purchasing decisions based on psychological and social factors (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2015). This process is not only rational but also influenced by emotions, social perceptions, and identity values (Solomon, 2017). Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (2018) suggest that purchasing behavior is the result of a complex interaction between internal motivations and external influences, including advertising, social opinion, and role models. Within this framework, influencers function as trusted sources of information and models of consumer behavior that their followers can emulate (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has unique characteristics as digital natives: they grew up in a social media ecosystem and are constantly exposed to digital content. For this group, social media is not just a communication space, but an arena for the formation of self-identity and social representation. Therefore, the influencers they follow are not only sources of entertainment but also symbolic figures who represent the values, aspirations, and lifestyles they aspire to achieve. This phenomenon reinforces the importance of understanding influencer marketing from a psychological, not just an economic, perspective.

Literature Review

The Concept of Influencer Marketing from a Consumer Psychology Perspective

Influencer marketing is a form of marketing communication in which individuals with strong social influence on digital media promote products or services to their followers. According to Freberg (2020), influencers have the capacity to influence consumption decisions because they are able to create a personal and emotional connection with their audience. This relationship is known as a parasocial relationship, a one-way connection that is psychologically perceived as real by followers, even though there is no direct two-way interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

The effectiveness of influencers as persuasive agents can be explained through the Source Credibility Model (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), which emphasizes the importance of source credibility in establishing trust in a message. This model describes three important components: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. These three factors determine the extent to which audiences accept or reject a message. In the context of influencers, credibility is built through content consistency, behavioral authenticity, and open communication with followers (Casaló et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is also an important foundation for understanding influencer-influenced purchasing behavior. This theory states that the intention to perform an action is influenced by three factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Influencers influence two key aspects of this theory: attitude (through positive image and product testimonials) and subjective norms (through social pressure or the tendency to follow popular figures) (Arlı, van Esch, & Northey, 2018).

Generation Z Purchasing Decisions

Gen Z purchasing decisions differ from those of previous generations. According to research by Fromm and Read (2018), Gen Z places authenticity and social relevance above material value. They are more attracted to products that reflect their personal identity and values (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). In this context, influencers serve as representatives of these values (Casaló et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Gen Z is known to have a high level of digital literacy and is skeptical of manipulative advertising messages. However, they tend to trust influencers who demonstrate transparency and consistency in product recommendations (Alifa, 2022). This suggests that the effectiveness of influencer advertising depends not only on the number of followers, but also on the quality of the psychological connection formed between the influencer and the audience (Putra, Wicaksono, & Santosa, 2023).

Psychological Factors in Influencer Influence

Based on the results of various studies, there are four main psychological factors that explain how influencers influence Gen Z purchasing decisions (Amalia & Sagita, 2019; Atika, Rahmawati, & Fauzan, 2025):

1. **Credibility:** the level of consumer trust in the influencer's competence and integrity.
2. **Authenticity:** the perception that the influencer is honest and not pretentious in conveying the message.
3. **Attractiveness:** encompasses physical attractiveness, communication style, and personality.
4. **Social Identification:** the extent to which consumers feel they share values, interests, or backgrounds with influencers.

These four factors work synergistically to influence cognitive processes (product evaluation), affective processes (emotional reactions), and conative processes (purchase intentions) (Engel et al., 2018). In other words, Gen Z's purchasing decisions are not solely the result of economic rationality, but also the result of social and emotional internalization of the figures they idolize.

Research Methods

This research employed a narrative-descriptive literature review approach, a method that collects, evaluates, and synthesizes relevant research without quantitative statistical procedures. This approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth mapping of the psychological themes emerging in influencer marketing research.

The first stage involved a literature search through Google Scholar, Garuda Ristekdikti, and various national journal repositories using the keywords: influencer marketing, purchasing decisions, Generation Z, authenticity, parasocial relationships, and consumer psychology. The initial selection yielded 32 articles, which were then screened based on the following inclusion criteria: published between 2015 and 2025, relevant to the topic, available for download, and targeting Generation Z or young consumers.

Ten articles met the final criteria. These articles were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), identifying key codes such as influencer credibility, authenticity, emotional closeness, communication style, and the influence of identity values. A narrative synthesis was constructed by comparing findings across studies, identifying consistent patterns, and relating them to consumer psychology theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Source Credibility Model.

Result and Discussion

Based on a series of literature analyses examining the influence of influencer advertising on Generation Z consumer decisions, it can be concluded that the phenomenon of the increasing role of influencers in the marketing communication process is not only a result of the development of digital media, but is also closely related to the psychological mechanisms that shape how Generation Z processes information, assesses credibility, and makes purchasing decisions. Generation Z, as a group born and raised with digital technology, exhibits consumption behavior patterns that are more influenced by figures they perceive as authentic, communicative, and emotionally close. The analyzed literature consistently shows that influencer credibility encompassing expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness, and authenticity is a core factor in generating interest and ultimately influencing purchasing decisions. Furthermore, parasocial relationships between followers and influencers have been shown to play a significant role in strengthening the acceptance of advertising messages, as they create a perception of psychological closeness that makes consumers feel as if they know the influencer personally.

Furthermore, the literature review indicates that Generation Z has a high sensitivity to authenticity; they tend to reject influencers who appear overly commercial or inconsistent with their previous self-image. Purchase decisions increase when the influencer's message is perceived as aligned with consumers' own experiences, needs, and aspirations. These emotional factors work hand in hand with cognitive factors, such as perceived product benefits, perceived information relevance, and alignment between the influencer's values and the followers' personal values. Overall, the literature suggests that influencer marketing

functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a complex psychological mechanism that creates a sense of social connectedness, trust, and self-identity validation for Generation Z.

Therefore, the influence of influencers on Gen Z purchasing decisions can be understood as the result of a combination of digital marketing strategies and psychological processes deeply internalized in this generation's consumer culture.

Conclusion

Based on these conclusions, several practical and theoretical recommendations can be developed in the context of influencer-based marketing and further research. From a practical perspective, marketers need to select influencers who not only have a large following but also demonstrate a high level of credibility, value alignment, and emotional closeness with the target audience. Content authenticity must be maintained, as Generation Z is highly sensitive to indications of manipulation or over-promotion. Therefore, collaborations with influencers need to be designed so that the content remains natural, relevant, and reflects the influencer's own communication style. Furthermore, marketers should not focus solely on popularity but also consider micro-influencers, who often have stronger social connections with their followers, which can generate a deeper psychological impact and more significant purchasing decisions.

From an academic and research perspective, further studies are needed that more deeply examine the psychological factors that bridge the relationship between influencers and consumer behavior, such as the influence of self-image, the need for social affiliation, and the dynamics of parasocial relationships. Future research should also expand the types of methods used, for example using experimental or mixed-methods approaches, to capture psychological processes more comprehensively. Furthermore, it's important to broaden the research context by comparing different social media platforms, as Gen Z engagement patterns can differ significantly between TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. These recommendations are expected to further sharpen marketing practices and academic research on influencer marketing, making them more relevant and contributing significantly to the development of consumer psychology and digital marketing strategies in Indonesia.

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