

TRUSTING THE INFLUENCER: HOW BRAND CREDIBILITY SHAPES BUYING BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of influencer marketing on consumer purchase decisions, with brand trust serving as a mediating variable. With the growing reliance on social media platforms for brand communication, understanding the mechanisms behind consumer behaviour has become increasingly important. A quantitative approach was employed using data from 250 respondents in Indonesia, analysed through Structural Equation Modelling with Smart-PLS. The results reveal that influencer marketing does not directly affect purchase decisions. However, it has a significant positive impact on brand trust, which in turn strongly influences purchase behaviour. Furthermore, brand trust is proven to mediate the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase decisions effectively. These findings emphasize that trust in the endorsed brand plays a pivotal role in converting influencer exposure into actual purchasing actions. The study provides valuable insights for marketers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of influencer campaigns by focusing on strategies that build consumer trust. It also contributes to the growing body of digital marketing literature by clarifying the indirect pathway through which influencer marketing shapes consumer intentions. Future research is encouraged to explore other mediating or moderating variables and to examine the model in broader cultural contexts.



INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies, particularly the rise of social media platforms, has significantly transformed marketing strategies. One increasingly adopted approach is *influencer marketing*, which involves leveraging the persuasive power of influential social media figures to shape audience purchasing behaviour (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). These influencers are often perceived as credible authorities by their followers due to their ability to establish close, authentic, and persuasive personal connections. Consequently, influencers have become an effective tool in digital marketing, especially in engaging Millennials and Generation Z consumers (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

In the Indonesian context, the adoption of influencer marketing has surged considerably. As reported by DataReportal (2024), Indonesia hosts over 170 million active social media users, positioning platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube as prime venues for influencer-based promotional efforts. This trend is further supported by research from Populix (2023), revealing that 67% of Indonesian consumers have made purchase decisions influenced by reviews or endorsements from social media influencers. These findings highlight a shift in

consumer decision-making processes, which are now increasingly shaped by influencer opinions rather than traditional brand-led advertising.

Despite the growing influence of influencer marketing, its success largely hinges on the level of consumer trust in the promoted brand. In this context, *brand trust* emerges as a critical mediating factor. Prior research has shown that when consumers trust a brand endorsed by an influencer, their likelihood of purchasing increases significantly (Erdoğan & Cicek, 2012; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Conversely, other studies argue that influencer engagement alone may not effectively drive consumer behaviour if brand trust has not been firmly established (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017). Thus, there is a pressing need to explore how influencer marketing impacts consumer purchase decisions, and to what extent brand trust mediates this relationship. Gaining such insight is essential not only for academic contributions to digital marketing literature but also for marketers aiming to develop more targeted and effective influencer campaigns.

The urgency of this research lies in the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between influencer marketing, brand trust, and purchase decision-making within the digital consumer landscape of Indonesia. Given the exponential growth of social media usage and the increasing prevalence of influencer collaborations, this study seeks to determine whether influencers directly impact purchasing behaviour or whether brand trust serves as the underlying mechanism. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching models of digital consumer behaviour and provide practical insights for companies designing more strategic, effective, and sustainable influencer-based marketing initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Influencer Marketing and Purchase Decision

Influencer marketing has become an integral strategy in digital promotion, wherein social media personalities with a substantial following are employed to shape consumer attitudes and behaviour. Influencers are seen not only as content creators but also as opinion leaders whose recommendations can significantly affect their followers' purchase decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Recent studies highlight that the authenticity and credibility of influencers play a key role in shaping consumer behaviour. For instance, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) emphasized that influencers who are perceived as trustworthy and relatable are more likely to impact consumer buying intentions.

Similarly, Talwar et al. (2021) found that repeated exposure to influencer content on social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube positively affects consumers' willingness to consider and ultimately purchase the promoted products. The persuasive power of influencers stems from their perceived similarity to followers and the informal nature of their endorsements, which often mimic peer recommendations. Therefore, it can be inferred that influencer marketing exerts a direct and positive influence on consumers' purchase decisions.

H1: Influencer marketing positively influences purchase decision.

Influencer Marketing and Brand Trust

Brand trust is commonly understood as a psychological state in which consumers believe that a brand will deliver its promised value reliably and consistently (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017). Influencers can significantly contribute to building or enhancing this trust by communicating brand messages in a manner that resonates with their audience. Lim et al. (2020) demonstrated that influencers with high levels of expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness contribute to increased trust in the brands they promote. Their role as intermediaries between brands and consumers means that the influencer's personal credibility can transfer to the brand being endorsed.

Furthermore, studies by Jalilvand and Samiei (2021) show that influencer-led content can humanize the brand, allowing followers to build an emotional connection that fosters trust. In particular, when influencers consistently promote products that meet expectations, consumers begin to associate this reliability with the brand itself. This suggests that influencer marketing has a substantial effect on the development of brand trust among consumers.

H2: Influencer marketing positively influences brand trust.

Brand Trust and Purchase Decision

Trust in a brand is a critical determinant of purchase behaviour, especially in digital environments where consumers face greater uncertainty. When brand trust is high, consumers are more likely to engage in transactions, remain loyal, and even advocate for the brand (Laroche et al., 2022). Islam et al. (2020) assert that brand trust reduces perceived risk and increases consumers' confidence in their purchase choices. Moreover, trust can serve as a form of assurance, particularly when consumers lack direct experience with a product or service.

Empirical findings also indicate that brand trust can significantly predict purchase intention. For example, Wang et al. (2022) found that consumers are more inclined to finalize their purchase decisions when they believe in the brand's reliability and integrity. Thus, brand trust plays a pivotal role in guiding consumers from consideration to actual purchasing behaviour.

H3: Brand trust positively influences purchase decision.

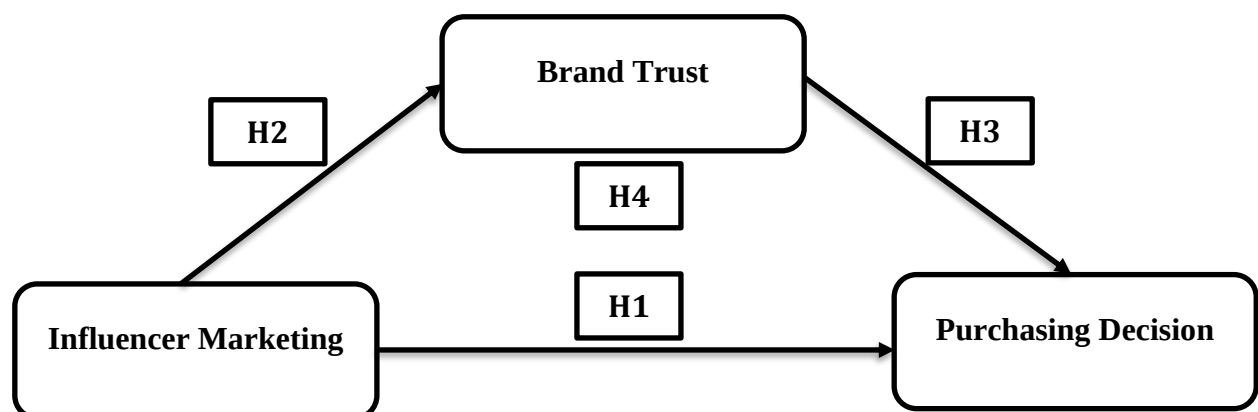
The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

Several researchers have proposed that brand trust functions not only as an outcome but also as a mediating mechanism in marketing influence models. According to Wongkitrungrueng and Assarut (2020), brand trust mediates the relationship between social commerce cues and purchase intention. Similarly, Kusumasondjaja and Tjiptono (2019) provide evidence that brand trust partially mediates the effect of digital influencer characteristics on consumer behaviour, highlighting its crucial intermediary function.

Brand trust can be considered a psychological bridge that connects the credibility and appeal of influencers to the final decision-making process of consumers. When consumers trust the brand being promoted by an influencer, the promotional effort is more likely to lead to actual purchase behaviour. This supports the proposition that brand trust mediates the influence of influencer marketing on purchase decision.

H4: Brand trust mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase decision.

Therefore, based on the theoretical basis, the author tries to describe the conceptual framework in this study as shown in **Figure 1** below.



Source: Author's Personal Conception (2024)

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a causal design, aiming to examine the influence of influencer marketing on purchase decisions, with brand trust serving as a mediating variable. The causal design is considered appropriate for this research as it allows for hypothesis testing and the identification of directional relationships among the studied variables (Susilana, 2015). A survey method was adopted to collect data from respondents using a structured questionnaire designed with validated measurement items adapted from previous studies (Singarimbun, M & Effendi, 2008).

The population in this research consists of active social media users in Indonesia who have been exposed to influencer marketing and have made purchasing decisions influenced by social media endorsements within the past six months. These users represent digitally engaged consumers, particularly from urban centres, where the use of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube is most prominent. Given the impracticality of accessing the entire population, a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was used. The selection criteria included individuals aged between 18 and 40 years, who follow at least one social media influencer and have purchased a product or service based on an influencer's recommendation.

The sample size for this study was determined based on the minimum requirements for structural equation modelling (SEM), which suggests a ratio of at least 5–10 respondents per estimated parameter (Hair et al., 2021). Accordingly, a total of 250 respondents were targeted, providing sufficient statistical power and ensuring robustness in the analysis. Data were collected via an online questionnaire distributed through social media platforms, which allowed for wide geographic reach and minimized data collection costs.

The research was conducted in Indonesia, with data collection taking place over a three-month period, from January until March 2024. This period was chosen to capture contemporary consumer behaviour and ensure the relevance of the data to current influencer marketing trends. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small group of respondents ($n = 30$) to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity before full-scale distribution.

For data analysis, the study employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach with the help of Smart-PLS 4 software (Ghozali & Latan, 2015; Hair et al., 2019; Santosa, 2018). SEM-PLS was chosen due to its suitability for predictive models and its ability to handle complex relationships among latent variables, particularly when data distribution may not be normal. The analysis included testing for measurement model validity (convergent and discriminant validity), reliability (composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha), and structural model evaluation (path coefficients, R-squared values, and mediation effects) (Haryono, 2017). Mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping method, which provided insight into the indirect effects of influencer marketing on purchase decisions through brand trust.

Below we present **Table 1**, which is a table of measurement indicators for research variables that will be used in this study.

Table 1. Measurement Items and Sources

Variable	Item Code	Measurement Item	Source
Influencer Marketing	IM1	The influencer appears knowledgeable and credible in the product they promote.	Lou & Yuan (2019)
	IM2	The influencer shares content that is engaging and relevant to my interests.	Lou & Yuan (2019)

Variable	Item Code	Measurement Item	Source
Brand Trust	IM3	I trust the opinions and recommendations given by the influencer.	Sokolova & Kefi (2020)
	IM4	I feel emotionally connected to the influencer I follow.	Sokolova & Kefi (2020)
	BT1	I believe the brand delivers what it promises.	Erdoğan & Cicek (2012)
	BT2	I trust the quality of the products offered by the brand.	Laroche et al. (2012)
	BT3	The brand is honest and ethical in its practices.	Iglesias et al. (2019)
Purchase Decision	BT4	I feel confident in the brand's reliability.	Laroche et al. (2012)
	BT5	I consider the brand to be safe and secure.	Iglesias et al. (2019)
	PD1	I am willing to purchase the product promoted by the influencer.	Pradhan et al. (2020)
	PD2	I have purchased products because they were endorsed by an influencer.	Djafarova & Rushworth (2017)
	PD3	The influencer's recommendation positively affects my buying decision.	Pradhan et al. (2020)
	PD4	I prefer buying from brands that are endorsed by influencers I trust.	Lim et al. (2017)
	PD5	I often finalize a purchase after watching a review or content from an influencer.	Djafarova & Rushworth (2017)

Source: Compiled from various literature (2024)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Demographic

The following table presents the demographic profile of the 250 respondents who participated in the survey.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 250)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	92	36.8%
	Female	158	63.2%
Age	18–24 years	104	41.6%
	25–30 years	88	35.2%
	31–40 years	58	23.2%
Education Level	Senior High School	18	7.2%
	Diploma/Bachelor's	200	80.0%
	Postgraduate	32	12.8%
Monthly Income	< IDR 2 million	52	20.8%
	IDR 2–5 million	113	45.2%

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Social Media Used	> IDR 5 million	85	34.0%
	Instagram	148	59.2%
	TikTok	72	28.8%
	YouTube	30	12.0%

Source: Primary data processed (2024)

The survey was completed by 250 participants, with the majority being female (63.2%), indicating that women are more actively engaged with social media content and potentially more responsive to influencer marketing in Indonesia. This aligns with prior studies suggesting that female users often demonstrate higher involvement in digital purchasing behaviour and social media interactions.

In terms of **age distribution**, most respondents fell within the 18–24 age group (41.6%), followed by those aged 25–30 years (35.2%). This reflects a demographic heavily associated with digital consumption and suggests that young adults are the primary audience targeted by influencer campaigns. The age range represented in this study is consistent with the typical user base of platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where influencer content is most prevalent.

Regarding **educational background**, 80% of participants held a diploma or undergraduate degree, indicating that the respondents are generally well-educated. This educational level may contribute to a more critical evaluation of influencer content, potentially influencing how brand trust is formed. Additionally, 12.8% of respondents held postgraduate qualifications, suggesting a segment of mature digital consumers with advanced cognitive decision-making processes.

Monthly income levels varied, with 45.2% earning between IDR 2 to 5 million, and 34% earning above IDR 5 million. These figures suggest that most respondents have sufficient purchasing power, making them a relevant target for brands that utilize influencer endorsements. This income distribution is indicative of the urban middle-class population in Indonesia, which is highly active in e-commerce and digital services.

Finally, when asked about their **most frequently used social media platforms**, the majority of respondents selected Instagram (59.2%), followed by TikTok (28.8%) and YouTube (12%). This affirms that Instagram remains the dominant platform for influencer interactions, though TikTok is gaining considerable traction, particularly among younger audiences. These findings highlight the strategic importance of platform selection in influencer marketing campaigns.

Instrument Validity and Reliability Test

Prior to hypothesis testing, assessments of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability were conducted. The factor loadings for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong convergent validity. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct were above 0.50, supporting the presence of adequate discriminant validity. Furthermore, both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) scores for all variables surpassed the 0.70 benchmark, demonstrating a high level of internal consistency. The detailed results are presented in **Table 3** and **Table 4** below.

Table 3. Evaluation of Measurement Models

Construct	Code	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Influencer Marketing	IM1	0.907	0.899	0.912	0.768
	IM2	0.920			

Brand Trust	IM3	0.869	0.869	0.886	0.657
	IM4	0.804			
	BT1	0.798			
	BT2	0.781			
	BT3	0.895			
Purchase Decision	BT4	0.853	0.899	0.905	0.712
	BT5	0.715			
	PD1	0.851			
	PD2	0.874			
	PD3	0.823			
	PD4	0.840			
	PD5	0.829			

Source: Primary Data Processed with Smart-PLS (2024)

Table 4. Discriminant Validity with the Fornell Larcker Approach

Variable	Influencer Marketing	Brand Trust	Purchase Decision
Influencer Marketing	0.876		
Brand Trust	0.590	0.811	
Purchase Decision	0.398	0.595	0.844

Source: Primary Data Processed with Smart-PLS (2024)

By comparing the correlation value between latent variables with the Average Variance Extracted Square Root (AVE), the discriminant validity can also be verified. The square root value of AVE must be higher than the correlation between latent variables, using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. This is shown in **Table 4**, where the square root of AVE is greater than the correlation coefficient between latent variables. As a result, each statement item in the research instrument is reliable and suitable for use as a measuring tool.

Structural Model Analysis (R-Square & Effect Size). The R-Square (R^2) values indicate the proportion of variance explained by the independent variables. The results show that 34.8% of brand trust is explained by influencer marketing ($R^2 = 0.348$), while 35.8% of purchase decisions are explained by influencer marketing and brand trust ($R^2 = 0.358$), indicating a moderate explanatory power (Hair et al., 2019). (See **Table 5**)

Table 5. R-Square Value

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Brand Trust	0.348	0.346
Purchase Decision	0.358	0.353

Source: Primary Data Processed with Smart-PLS (2024)

The effect size (f^2) analysis further supports the structural model's validity. The influence of influencer marketing on brand trust is classified as strong ($f^2 = 0.535$), while the effect of brand trust on purchase decisions is classified moderate ($f^2 = 0.310$). In contrast, the direct effect of influencer marketing on purchase decisions is relatively weak ($f^2 = 0.005$). (See result at **Table 6**)

Table 6. F-Square Value

Variable	Influencer Marketing	Brand Trust	Purchase Decision
Influencer Marketing		0.535	0.005
Brand Trust			0.310
Purchase Decision			

Source: Primary Data Processed with Smart-PLS (2024)

This research model also shows good relevance. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value as seen in **Table 7** is 0.077, lower than the recommended threshold of 0.080.

Table 7. Model Fit Result

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.063	0.063
d_ULS	0.410	0.410
d_G	0.223	0.223
Chi-square	321.206	321.206
NFI	0.865	0.865

Source: Primary Data Processed with Smart-PLS (2024)

Figure 2 below shows the path coefficients for the structural equation model.

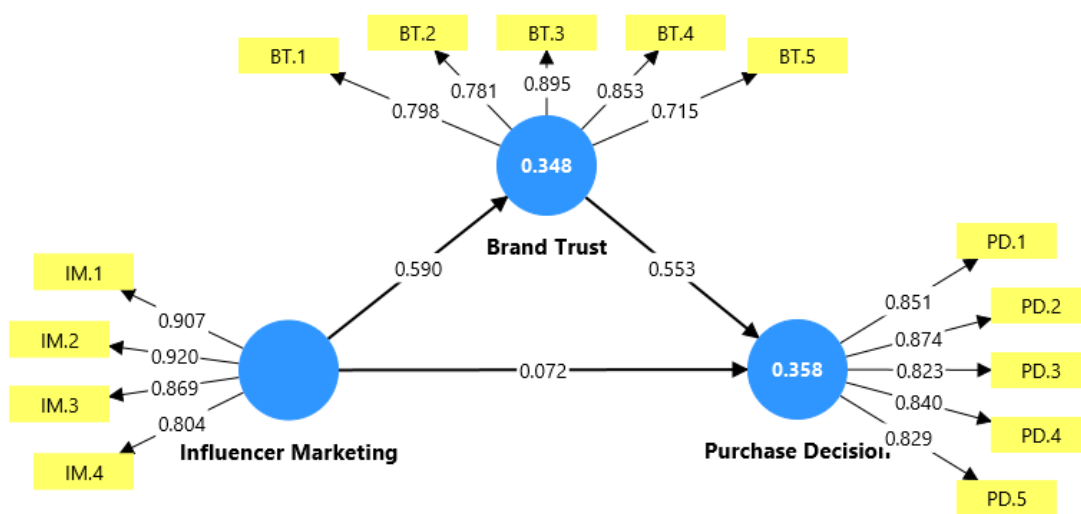


Figure 2. Structural Equation Modeling

Source: Primary Data Processed with Smart-PLS (2024)

Hypothesis Testing Results. The study tested four hypotheses using bootstrapping analysis in SEM-PLS. The results are summarized as follows:

Table 9. Path Coefficient and Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Relation	Original Sample	Mean	SD	T-Statistics	P-Values	Description
H1	IM → PD	0.072	0.069	0.075	0.958	0.338	Not Supported
H2	IM → BT	0.590	0.592	0.049	12.036	0.000	Supported
H3	BT → PD	0.553	0.555	0.066	8.343	0.000	Supported
H4	IM → BT → PD	0.326	0.329	0.050	6.467	0.000	Supported

Note: IM = Influencer Marketing; BT = Brand Trust; PD= Purchase Decision

Source: Primary Data Processed with Smart-PLS (2024)

The results of the path analysis using Smart-PLS provide important insights into the relationships between influencer marketing, brand trust, and purchase decisions. The first hypothesis (H1), which proposed a direct effect of influencer marketing (IM) on purchase decision (PD), is not supported, as indicated by a low T-statistic (0.958) and a p-value of 0.338, which exceeds the conventional significance level of 0.05. This suggests that influencer

marketing, in isolation, does not have a statistically significant direct impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. One possible explanation is that consumers may be skeptical of promotional content unless it is backed by perceived credibility or trust toward the brand being endorsed.

In contrast, the second hypothesis (H2), which examined the influence of influencer marketing on brand trust (BT), is supported, with a high path coefficient ($\beta = 0.590$), a T-statistic of 12.036, and a p-value of 0.000. This result confirms that influencer marketing plays a critical role in shaping consumer trust in a brand. Influencers, particularly those perceived as authentic and relatable, can significantly enhance consumers' trust toward the brands they promote.

The third hypothesis (H3), which tested the effect of brand trust on purchase decision, is also supported ($\beta = 0.553$; $T = 8.343$; $p = 0.000$), reinforcing the importance of trust as a key determinant in consumer decision-making. When consumers trust a brand, they are more inclined to proceed with a purchase, demonstrating that brand trust acts as a strong predictor of behavioural intention.

Most notably, the fourth hypothesis (H4), which tested the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase decision, is supported as well. The indirect effect is significant ($\beta = 0.326$; $T = 6.467$; $p = 0.000$), indicating that influencer marketing positively influences purchase decisions through the enhancement of brand trust. This finding highlights that the impact of influencer marketing on consumer behavior is largely mediated by the degree of trust consumers place in the brand, rather than the marketing stimulus alone.

In summary, the results underscore the mediating role of brand trust in the digital consumer journey. Marketers should not merely rely on the popularity or visibility of influencers but should strategically leverage influencers who can cultivate genuine trust in the brands they represent. This strategic alignment can increase the likelihood of converting digital engagement into actual purchase behaviour.

Discussion

Influencer Marketing and Purchase Decision

The results indicate that the direct relationship between influencer marketing and purchase decision is statistically insignificant, as reflected by the p-value of 0.338 and a T-statistic of 0.958. This finding suggests that exposure to influencer marketing alone does not necessarily lead consumers to make purchasing decisions. Although influencers may have substantial reach and visibility, their influence appears insufficient to directly drive consumer action unless other factors—such as trust or perceived credibility—are present to support the persuasive message.

This outcome contrasts with several previous studies which have found a significant positive relationship between influencer endorsement and consumer buying behaviour (Lim et al., 2017; Pradhan et al., 2020). However, it aligns with emerging perspectives that emphasize the contextual and psychological filters consumers use when processing influencer content. In particular, source credibility theory posits that the effectiveness of persuasive communication depends not only on message exposure (Londong et al., 2024) but also on the receiver's evaluation of the source's trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). If consumers perceive an influencer's message as overly commercial or lacking authenticity, it may weaken the persuasive impact—even if the influencer is highly visible.

Moreover, the finding may also be interpreted within the framework of elaboration likelihood model (ELM), which explains that in low-involvement purchase situations, consumers tend to rely on peripheral cues such as attractiveness or familiarity of the influencer. However, in high-involvement or risk-sensitive decisions, they are more likely to evaluate the

brand's intrinsic value, reducing the direct influence of the influencer's appeal (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In the Indonesian digital consumer context—where influencer saturation is rising and audience scepticism is becoming more pronounced—consumers may require stronger signals of brand reliability before they commit to a purchase. This reinforces the notion that influencer marketing may be more effective when integrated with mechanisms that foster brand trust and authenticity (J. B. Halik et al., 2025; Sahetapy et al., 2025).

Influencer Marketing and Brand Trust

The results from this study reveal a significant and positive relationship between influencer marketing and brand trust, as evidenced by a path coefficient of 0.590, a T-statistic of 12.036, and a p-value of 0.000. These findings suggest that influencer marketing exerts a strong influence on the development of consumer trust toward a brand. When influencers present branded content in a consistent, authentic, and credible manner, it enhances consumers' perception of the brand's reliability, ultimately fostering trust.

This outcome aligns with prior research that emphasizes the role of influencers as trust-builders in the digital marketplace. Lou and Yuan (2019) argue that consumers often perceive influencers not merely as promotional agents, but as trusted opinion leaders whose endorsements can signal brand integrity and quality. Similarly, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) highlight that parasocial interaction—the sense of intimacy and personal connection followers feel with influencers—can significantly elevate consumers' emotional and cognitive trust in the brands being promoted.

The concept of source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) is especially relevant in interpreting this result. According to the theory, a communicator's perceived expertise and trustworthiness are critical determinants of persuasive effectiveness. In the case of influencer marketing, when influencers are perceived as both knowledgeable and authentic, their brand endorsements are more likely to be trusted by followers, even if followers have limited prior experience with the brand itself.

In the context of Indonesian digital consumers, where social media plays a central role in shaping purchase behaviour, influencer credibility becomes a decisive factor in shaping brand trust (Tamara et al., 2023). Consumers increasingly look to influencers as curators of taste and quality, relying on their endorsements as a heuristic for brand evaluation. This trend is particularly pronounced among Millennials and Gen Z consumers, who tend to place higher value on peer-driven recommendations and social proof over traditional advertising (Populix, 2023).

Taken together, the findings confirm that influencer marketing is not merely a promotional tool but a relational strategy that helps brands establish and sustain trust-based connections with target audiences. Therefore, marketers should focus on selecting influencers whose personal values, content style, and audience engagement align well with the brand's identity, ensuring that the collaboration fosters genuine credibility and trust.

Brand Trust and Purchase Decision

The empirical results confirm a significant positive relationship between brand trust and purchase decision, with a path coefficient of 0.553, a T-statistic of 8.343, and a p-value of 0.000. This finding implies that consumers who develop a strong sense of trust in a brand are more likely to proceed with purchasing decisions. Trust functions as a crucial psychological mechanism that reduces perceived risk and uncertainty, particularly in digital and e-commerce contexts where consumers cannot directly experience the product before buying.

These findings are consistent with the established understanding in marketing literature that brand trust is a key determinant of consumer behaviour (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001;

Morgan & Hunt, 1994). When consumers believe a brand will deliver consistent value, keep its promises, and act in their best interest, they are more inclined to maintain a long-term relationship with the brand—starting with an initial purchase (J. Halik et al., 2021). As Doney and Cannon (1997) emphasized, trust not only facilitates commitment but also significantly enhances purchase intention by serving as a foundation for favourable brand evaluations.

Moreover, in today's saturated digital marketplace, brand trust often becomes the decisive factor that distinguishes one offering from another (J. B. Halik et al., 2023; J. B. Halik & Halik, 2024; Pagiling et al., 2024). While product quality, pricing, and availability are important, trust can serve as a competitive advantage when consumers are faced with too many options. Research by Laroche et al. (2013) also highlights that trust reduces cognitive dissonance and helps consumers feel confident about their purchase choices, especially in high-involvement or online purchase contexts.

In the Indonesian context, where social media and digital platforms are major sources of brand discovery, trust becomes even more vital. Given the prevalence of sponsored content and influencer endorsements, consumers may rely heavily on their perception of the brand's credibility before making a decision. This further supports the notion that brand trust is not merely a mediating factor but a pivotal antecedent to purchasing behavior, especially among younger, tech-savvy consumers who value transparency, authenticity, and consistency in brand communication.

In summary, the findings substantiate the theoretical assertion that trust serves as a cornerstone of consumer decision-making. For marketers, this underscores the importance of building and maintaining trust through consistent brand messaging, customer engagement, and value delivery—both online and offline.

The Mediating Role of Brand Trust in the Relationship between Influencer Marketing and Purchase Decision

The results of the study demonstrate that brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase decision, as indicated by a path coefficient of 0.326, a T-statistic of 6.467, and a p-value of 0.000. While the direct path from influencer marketing to purchase decision was found to be insignificant, the presence of brand trust as an intervening variable establishes a strong and statistically significant indirect effect, suggesting a full mediation.

This finding confirms that influencer marketing alone may not directly lead consumers to make purchase decisions unless it simultaneously contributes to the development of trust in the brand. In essence, the persuasive power of influencers is channelled through the trust they help build in the brand, which then influences the consumer's intent and behaviour. This supports the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, where influencer marketing (stimulus) affects internal consumer evaluations like trust (organism), which in turn lead to behavioural responses such as purchasing (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

Existing research supports this mediating mechanism. Lou and Yuan (2019) emphasized that the effectiveness of influencer content is highly contingent on its ability to enhance brand credibility and trustworthiness in the eyes of the audience. Similarly, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that influencers who are perceived as authentic and relatable can positively shape consumer trust, which plays a crucial role in translating endorsement into buying decisions.

From a theoretical standpoint, this mediation effect highlights the dual role of influencers—not just as promoters, but as facilitators of relational value between the brand and its audience. The absence of brand trust in this process weakens the impact of influencer efforts, regardless of their reach or popularity. This aligns with the trust transfer theory, which suggests

that trust in one entity (e.g., the influencer) can transfer to another (e.g., the brand) when a meaningful association exists (Stewart, 2003).

In the Indonesian market, where influencer marketing is highly prevalent but consumer scepticism is also on the rise, this insight is particularly valuable. It underscores the idea that brands must not only choose influencers based on visibility, but also prioritize authenticity, audience alignment, and long-term brand fit. This strategic alignment is essential to build trust that will ultimately lead to purchasing behaviour.

To conclude, the mediating role of brand trust illustrates the critical importance of trust-building in digital marketing ecosystems. Brands should view influencer marketing not as a direct selling tactic, but as a trust-enhancing strategy that bridges the gap between brand exposure and consumer action.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the influence of influencer marketing on consumer purchase decisions, with brand trust acting as a mediating variable. The research findings provide meaningful insights into the dynamics of digital consumer behavior, particularly in the context of Indonesia's growing social media landscape. While influencer marketing did not have a significant direct impact on purchase decision, it showed a strong and positive influence on brand trust, which in turn significantly affected purchase decision.

The first hypothesis, which proposed a direct relationship between influencer marketing and purchase decision, was not supported by the empirical data. This suggests that exposure to influencer promotions alone does not automatically lead to consumer action. The second hypothesis was supported, affirming that influencer marketing plays a key role in building brand trust. Similarly, the third hypothesis was confirmed, showing that brand trust is a significant predictor of purchase behavior.

Most notably, the fourth hypothesis, which proposed the mediating role of brand trust, was strongly supported. This confirms that influencer marketing exerts its influence on purchase decision primarily through the development of trust in the brand being endorsed. These findings align with previous studies and reinforce the notion that trust functions as a critical mechanism in the consumer decision-making process, especially within digital environments.

From a practical standpoint, the results highlight the necessity for brands to move beyond surface-level influencer partnerships and instead cultivate collaborations that genuinely enhance brand credibility. Marketers must ensure that influencers align with the brand's values and messaging in order to build trust that converts into purchasing behavior. For academics, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital marketing by underscoring the mediating role of brand trust in online persuasion processes.

Research Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Despite its valuable findings, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample was limited to consumers in Indonesia and primarily collected through online surveys, which may limit generalizability across different cultural or geographic settings. Second, the research focused only on three constructs and did not include other potential moderating or mediating variables such as perceived expertise, consumer involvement, or brand attitude. Future studies could adopt a cross-cultural approach or utilize longitudinal data to capture shifts in consumer trust and behavior over time. Furthermore, incorporating qualitative methods may provide deeper insights into how trust is formed through influencer-brand relationships.

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