

DIGITAL STRATEGY IN THE SKINCARE INDUSTRY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND IMAGE IN ENHANCING PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology and internet penetration has significantly transformed global marketing dynamics, including in Indonesia. Social media platforms, particularly TikTok, have emerged as effective tools for engaging with millennial consumers. This conceptual paper aims to examine the influence of social media marketing and influencer credibility on consumers' purchase intention, with brand image proposed as a mediating variable. Drawing upon relevant literature, this study develops a conceptual framework that highlights the importance of engaging content, digital influencer trustworthiness, and brand perception in shaping consumer behavior. The paper focuses on Skintific, a fast-growing skincare brand that leverages TikTok through influencer collaborations, live streaming, and affiliate strategies to enhance consumer interaction. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights and practical implications for digital marketing strategies, particularly in addressing the modern challenges of content-driven, credibility-based, and perception-oriented consumer engagement.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Influencer Credibility, Brand Image, Purchase Intention, TikTok, Skintific

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has transformed how individuals interact and transact in everyday life. One of the most significant innovations of this digital era is the emergence of social media and online marketplaces, enabling marketing activities to be carried out practically through mobile devices (Philip & Hermawan, 2016). Digital marketing leverages platforms such as websites, social media, email, smartphones, and digital television to reach a broader audience and foster long-term customer relationships (Agustina & Lahindah, 2020). According to Datareportal (2024), over 66% of the global population is connected to the internet, with more than 5.35 billion users worldwide—reflecting a global trend that has also significantly influenced business dynamics in Indonesia. Social media has now become a critical communication medium for businesses to establish closer relationships with consumers. As Carr (2015) noted, social media is an internet-based platform that allows real-time or delayed interaction and self-presentation. Social media marketing strategies have proven to be efficient, cost-effective, and capable of enabling two-way interaction between marketers and consumers (Ajina, 2019; Zhao et al., 2020). The proliferation of e-commerce and mobile applications has further strengthened the role of social media in bridging modern marketing communications. Social media is not only a promotional tool but also plays a key role in shaping consumer perceptions and engagement through dynamic and relevant content (Shih-Chih Chen, 2019).

Among the most influential platforms today is TikTok, which has rapidly gained popularity, especially in Indonesia. With an average monthly usage of 38 hours and 26 minutes and a 19.1% increase in advertising reach (Meltwater, 2024), TikTok offers a promising platform for digital marketing. Its short-form, entertaining video format creates ample opportunity for brands like Skintific—a fast-growing skincare brand—to execute viral and engaging campaigns (Sari, 2019). Skintific has adopted a range of digital strategies, including partnerships with prominent brand ambassadors and TikTok influencers, such as Nicholas Saputra and other content creators, to increase brand exposure and build credibility through authentic, relatable content (Ruslim & Setyaningsih, 2023). Influencer marketing has emerged as a primary strategy for reaching target audiences, especially millennials who are highly active on social media platforms (Pick, 2021). Influencer credibility plays a central role in establishing trust and shaping a strong brand image (Veirman et al., 2017; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Influencers serve not only as brand representatives but also as emotional connectors who maintain close relationships with their followers through consistent, interactive content (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers are often perceived as more authentic and relatable because they reflect lifestyles that resonate with the target audience (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019; Belanche et al., 2021).

Brand image represents consumers' perceptions and experiences with a brand, which can be influenced by various factors—including influencer promotions (Solomon, 2017; Hermanda, 2019). In the context of digital marketing, a positive perception of influencers significantly enhances brand image and strengthens purchase intention (Veirman et al., 2017). Purchase intention reflects a consumer's willingness to buy a product perceived as valuable or relevant to their needs. It is influenced by digital interactions, product information, and the credibility of the information source (Morwitz et al., 2017; Jayani et al., 2018). Previous studies have consistently shown that influencer credibility and brand image significantly affect consumers' purchase intention (Lim et al., 2017). Meanwhile, TikTok's ability to generate viral content further amplifies these effects through easily accessible reviews, tutorials, and promotional content. Therefore, in the case of Skintific—an emerging skincare brand actively leveraging TikTok—it is essential to explore the interrelationship between social media marketing, influencer credibility, and brand image in influencing consumer purchase intention. This aligns with the findings of Almohaimmeed (2019) and Appel et al. (2020), which highlight that digital marketing strategies that are adaptive and relevant to current consumer needs increasingly shape consumer behavior and brand loyalty.

This conceptual paper aims to examine the influence of social media marketing and influencer credibility on purchase intention, with brand image proposed as a mediating variable. The study focuses on how marketing content on TikTok—such as live streaming, product reviews, and collaborative campaigns—affects consumers' intention to purchase Skintific skincare products. The expected contribution of this paper is twofold: first, it seeks to enrich the theoretical discourse in digital marketing by proposing an integrated framework; second, it offers practical implications for businesses to develop more effective promotional strategies in the rapidly evolving digital economy.

II. LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989) has become a basic theory in explaining technology adoption behavior. TAM focuses on two main constructs, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, which influence behavioral intention to use and ultimately influence actual usage behavior. Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which a person believes that using a system will improve his/her task performance, while perceived ease of use reflects the belief that technology can be used easily and without great effort. The development of TAM continues to be carried out to adjust to the latest social and technological dynamics. One important modification is the Trust and Risk in Technology Acceptance Model (TRITAM) which introduces elements of trust and risk into the original TAM framework (Lui & Jamieson, 2003). In the context of e-commerce and

mobile commerce, Kucukusta (2015) stated that TAM needs to be expanded by considering external variables such as perceived risk to capture the innovation adoption process more comprehensively.

The development of information technology drives the transformation from traditional marketing to digital marketing. One of the main forms of digital marketing is Social Media Marketing (SMM), which refers to the use of technology and social media platforms to create, deliver, and exchange value with consumers (Jacobson et al., 2020). SMM enables real-time two-way communication between companies and consumers, strengthening consumer engagement with brands (Iqbal et al., 2021). A study by Chen & Lin (2019) confirmed that SMM has a positive effect on purchase intention, especially through the creation of a pleasant user experience and content personalization. Platforms such as TikTok, through the TikTok Shop feature, are an innovation in driving interactive digital marketing that has an impact on brand awareness and purchasing decisions (Rosiyana et al., 2021; Fortuna, 2022; Hayati & Sudrajat, 2022).

Influencer marketing is now a dominant strategy in influencing consumer behavior, especially by utilizing Social Media Influencers (SMI) to build more personal connections with target markets (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). The authenticity and credibility of influencers are key determinants of campaign effectiveness, even more so than conventional celebrities (Schouten et al., 2020). Research shows that recommendations from influencers are often considered more trustworthy because they are based on real experiences and closeness to the audience's values (Ya et al., 2021; Piotr et al., 2021). Geyser (2023) noted that TikTok is now the main platform for influencer marketing, used by more than 56% of global brands. Influencers are classified by the number of followers—from nanoinfluencers to megainfluencers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020)—and each has its own advantages in building audience engagement. Microinfluencers, for example, are considered more authentic and effective in promoting local or hedonistic products (Silalahi, 2021; Park et al., 2021).

Purchase intention is an indicator of consumer behavior that is greatly influenced by perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs towards a product or brand (Sohaib et al., 2022). Lin & Chang (2020) stated that repurchase intention is influenced by consistent shopping experience and product quality. Purchase intention is also influenced by consumer confidence in the security and convenience of transactions, especially on digital platforms (Zhang, 2021). According to Ping et al. (2022), purchase intention can be interpreted as the probability of a person making a purchase in the near future based on an evaluation of the brand or product. The higher the trust and positive attitude towards a brand, the greater the likelihood of an actual purchase.

Brand image is a consumer perception that is formed through consistent interaction between consumers and the marketing elements of a brand (Haudi et al., 2022). A positive image can create consumer loyalty and increase purchase intention. Keller (2013) defines brand image as a series of associations connected in consumer memory, including perceptions of quality, reliability, and assurance of product performance. Brand image also plays a role in reducing the risk perceived by consumers when transacting online (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Products with a strong brand image provide a sense of security, so consumers tend to be more confident in making purchases (Adetunji et al., 2018; Shiau, 2014). In the digital era, social media plays a key role in shaping brand image through visual communication, UGC (user-generated content).

Social media marketing (SMM) has become a key strategy in building relationships between brands and consumers. Marketing activities carried out through social media allow companies to create more intense and personal interactions with their consumers. Jacobson et al. (2020) explain that social media marketing includes promotional activities that utilize social platforms to convey value to stakeholders. In this context, social media is not only a means of promotion but also creates a brand image through visual content, direct interaction, and consumer experience (Gelashvili, 2021). A study by Hayati & Sudrajat (2022) found that marketing activities on TikTok can increase positive perceptions of brands in the minds of consumers. Thus, promotions carried out consistently and creatively through social media will have an impact on the formation of a stronger brand image. Therefore, we propose that brand image mediates the effect of influencer credibility on purchase intention

P1: There is a positive effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Image.

Influencer credibility plays a central role in creating positive perceptions of brands. According to Schouten et al. (2020), collaboration between brands and influencers has proven to be more effective than traditional celebrities. The credibility of an influencer is formed through a combination of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Baiq & Shahzad, 2022). Research by Yuwono et al. (2024) shows that a positive perception of influencer credibility can significantly improve brand image. When consumers trust an influencer's opinion, they tend to view the advertised brand in a more positive and convincing way. Therefore, we propose that Influencer Credibility has a positive effect on Brand Image.

P2: There is a positive effect of Influencer Credibility on Brand Image.

Social media marketing can influence consumer purchase intention through the delivery of interesting and relevant content. Choedon & Lee (2020) stated that consumer interaction with social media content can encourage interest in the promoted product. In addition, Laksamana (2018) added that social media provides a more authentic communication feel, thus increasing the likelihood of a purchase. Interactive content, exclusive promotions, and consistent brand presence on social media make consumers more engaged and motivated to buy products. Therefore, social media marketing can significantly influence purchase intention.

P3: There is a positive influence of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Intention.

Influencers who have high credibility are able to shape public opinion and influence purchasing decisions. Leandro F.P (2023) shows that influencer credibility has a direct impact on purchase intention, because consumers tend to trust recommendations from sources that are considered competent and trustworthy. Ooi et al. (2023) also found that recommendations from influencers have a significant effect on purchase intention, especially when there are similarities in values and preferences between influencers and their followers. This shows that influencer credibility plays an important role in driving consumer purchasing decisions.

P4: There is a positive influence of Influencer Credibility on Purchase Intention.

Brand image is a perception formed in the minds of consumers based on their experiences, exposure, and interactions with the brand. A strong brand image provides quality assurance and reduces the risk perceived by consumers, thus encouraging them to make purchases (Kotler & Keller, 2016). According to Tali et al. (2021), a positive brand image will increase consumer trust in the product and strengthen their loyalty. With a positive perception of the brand, consumers are more likely to show an intention to purchase the product.

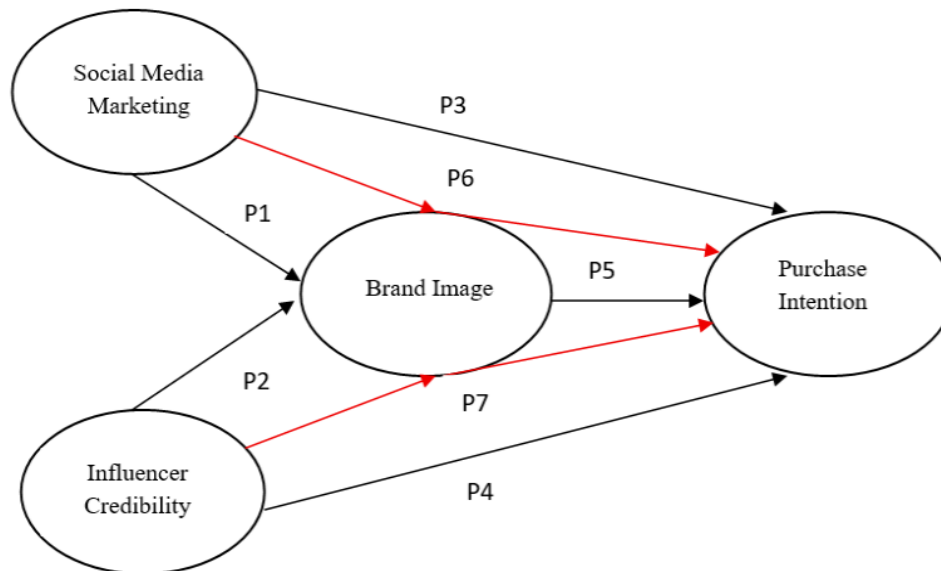
P5: There is a positive influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intention.

Brand image can be a mediating variable between social media marketing and purchase intention. According to Shin et al. (2021), quality social media content can strengthen brand perception and ultimately drive purchasing decisions. Raji et al. (2019) also explained that interesting and emotional promotional content through social media will create a positive perception of the brand image, which in turn increases purchase intention. Thus, brand image acts as a link between social media marketing activities and consumer purchase intentions.

P6: There is a positive influence of Social Media

Influencers play an important role in influencing consumers through their thoughts, attitudes, and views, which significantly affect product demand trends (Zak & Hasprova, 2020). The impact given by influencers can be very large on consumer decisions when they are going to buy a product. Although there are many other factors that also influence purchase intention, it is undeniable that influencer credibility has great potential to influence consumer purchase intention (Zak & Hasprova, 2020). Previous studies have shown that when credible influencers recommend a product, it can increase consumer trust and motivate them to make a purchase. Thus, this study further strengthens the understanding of the "strategic role" of influencers in shaping consumer behavior and emphasizes the importance of credibility in the process of recommending products to others.

P7: There is a positive influence of Influencer credibility on purchase intention through brand image



3. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

3.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the development of marketing theory by integrating social media marketing and influencer credibility into the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework with the mediating role of brand image. By extending TAM beyond traditional constructs such as perceived usefulness and ease of use, this research demonstrates how emotional and social dimensions—such as trust in influencers and brand perception—play a critical role in digital purchase decisions. The model enriches our understanding of how TikTok, as an emerging interactive platform, can be effectively used in the consumer decision-making process for skincare products. The findings also emphasize the importance of brand image not only as a standalone construct but as a central mediator that links digital marketing strategies with consumer intentions.

3.2 Practical Implications

From a managerial standpoint, this study highlights the importance of designing digital marketing strategies that prioritize content personalization, authenticity, and emotional connection. Brands like Skintific can enhance purchase intention by selecting credible influencers who reflect the values and lifestyles of their target audiences. Additionally, companies should invest in visual storytelling and user-generated content to strengthen brand image and foster trust. The study suggests that leveraging live-streaming features, interactive campaigns, and community engagement on TikTok can significantly influence how consumers perceive and respond to skincare brands.

3.3 Future Research Directions

Future studies can empirically test the proposed conceptual model using quantitative methods such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or Partial Least Squares (PLS). Further exploration could focus on moderating variables such as consumer demographics, cultural values, or platform engagement frequency. Comparative studies across different product categories or social media platforms (e.g.,

Instagram vs. TikTok) would also provide deeper insights into the generalizability of the model. Moreover, qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews could reveal additional psychological or emotional drivers that underlie digital consumer behavior, especially in beauty and personal care industries.

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