

Generation Z Consumer Behavior in Responding to Influencer Marketing on the TikTok Platform: A Systematic Literature Review with Focus on Urban Jakarta

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Abstract. This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to synthesize existing empirical evidence on Generation Z (Gen Z) consumer behavior in relation to influencer marketing on the TikTok platform, drawing on a global corpus of 42 empirical studies across 17 countries, with particular attention to findings applicable to the urban Jakarta context. A systematic search of five academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, EBSCO, and ProQuest) using predefined search strings yielded 1,247 records after deduplication. Following structured screening against eligibility criteria consisting of peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2018 and 2024, addressing Gen Z consumer behavior in relation to influencer marketing and short-form video platforms, a final corpus of 42 studies was included in the synthesis. Data extraction and thematic synthesis identified four principal themes: (1) perceived authenticity of influencer content, (2) the role of parasocial relationships in shaping purchase intent, (3) algorithmic curation, information overload, and selective attention, and (4) the interplay between social identity and brand alignment. Synthesized findings indicate that Gen Z consumers engage with influencer marketing not as passive recipients but as active, critical evaluators. The review contributes a methodologically rigorous, PRISMA-compliant synthesis to the expanding literature on digital consumer behavior, offering contextually grounded insights seldom captured through standalone quantitative instruments. Practical implications are offered for marketers and brand strategists seeking to engage this demographically significant cohort through authentic and culturally resonant influencer collaborations on short-form video platforms.

Keywords: Generation Z, Influencer Marketing, TikTok, Social Media, Consumer Behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of social media platforms has fundamentally reconfigured marketing communications, compelling brands to continuously adapt their strategies. TikTok has emerged as a particularly transformative force since its international expansion in 2018, surpassing one billion monthly active users by 2023 (Kemp, 2023), with a substantial proportion belonging to Generation Z (born approximately 1997–2012). The platform's algorithmic architecture, which foregrounds short-form video content personalized to individual user preferences, has created a fertile environment for influencer marketing.

Influencer marketing on TikTok operates through content creators spanning mega-influencers to nano-influencers (fewer than 10,000 followers), with smaller-scale creators often achieving disproportionately high engagement due to perceived intimacy and accessibility (Hudders et al., 2021; Vrontis et al., 2021). For Gen Z, whose skepticism toward overt advertising is well-documented, parasocial relationships with influencers serve as a trusted conduit for brand discovery and purchase decisions (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; F. F. Y. Leung et al., 2022).

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Despite the growing volume of quantitative scholarship examining influencer marketing effectiveness, notably applications of the Source Credibility Model, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and the Technology Acceptance Model, a notable research gap persists concerning the qualitative and experiential dimensions of Gen Z's engagement with this phenomenon (Hudders et al., 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019a). How do young consumers interpret and respond emotionally to influencer content? What meanings do they ascribe to recommendations, and how do these intersect with questions of identity, belonging, and self-expression?

To address this gap, the present study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following PRISMA guidelines to synthesize and critically evaluate the available empirical evidence on Gen Z TikTok users' responses to influencer marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Behavior Theories in the Digital Age

Classical frameworks of consumer behavior, including Kotler and Armstrong's (2018) buyer decision process and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), provide foundational scaffolding for understanding consumer decision-making. In digital contexts, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model conceptualizes social media content as stimuli activating cognitive and affective states that produce behavioral responses such as purchase intention (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Within this framework, influencer content functions as a potent stimulus activating desire, trust, and social identification simultaneously.

The Information Adoption Model (IAM), proposed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), provides additional theoretical utility by distinguishing between argument quality and source credibility as dual drivers of information adoption online. When applied to influencer marketing, this framework illuminates why Gen Z consumers may adopt a product recommendation from a trusted nano-influencer despite exposure to potentially higher-quality information from brand-owned channels: the perceived credibility of the source mediates the weight assigned to message content (Erkan & Evans, 2016). However, the IAM was developed in the context of asynchronous text-based communication and has not been theoretically adapted to account for short-form video's multimodal cue richness, high content velocity, or the parasocial familiarity generated by algorithmic repetition. This represents an unresolved theoretical gap that the present review seeks to address through its synthesized framework.

A further unresolved debate in the literature concerns the relative primacy of cognitive versus affective pathways in influencer marketing persuasion. ELM-based studies (Lou & Yuan, 2019a) suggest that argument quality moderates persuasion depth depending on involvement level. Yet qualitative investigations consistently find that Gen Z's engagement with influencer content is predominantly affective and identity-driven rather than cognitively deliberative, indicating a tension between dominant theoretical frameworks and emerging empirical realities. Resolving this debate requires an integrated framework that accommodates both pathways and specifies the conditions under which each predominates.

Influencer Marketing and Digital Credibility

Source credibility has been decomposed into multidimensional constructs including expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and authenticity (Munnukka et al., 2016; Schouten et al., 2020). Authenticity has garnered particular scholarly attention in relation to Gen Z audiences, who demonstrate heightened sensitivity to commercially motivated content (Audrezet et al., 2020). Research demonstrates that influencers perceived as authentic and relatable exert greater purchase influence than traditional celebrities, a finding extended to TikTok (Vrontis et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019b).

Parasocial interaction, originally theorized by Horton and Wohl (1956), describes the one-sided sense of intimacy developed through repeated exposure to a media persona. For Gen Z TikTok users, whose

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algorithmically personalized feeds surface influencer content with high frequency, parasocial bonds may develop with particular intensity, potentially translating into stronger purchase influence than in prior digital media contexts (F. F. Leung et al., 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019b; Zhang et al., 2019a).

Taken together, the Source Credibility Model, the Parasocial Interaction framework, and Social Identity Theory are not independent explanatory accounts but constitute overlapping and occasionally competing lenses: SCM addresses why an influencer is trusted as an information source, PSI addresses the relational mechanism through which that trust is cultivated over repeated exposure, and SIT addresses the identity-alignment condition that amplifies or dampens the trust-to-purchase pathway. On TikTok specifically, where algorithmic repetition accelerates PSI formation and platform features render identity-expressive consumption visible, these three frameworks interact in ways that no single theory alone can capture, justifying the integrative synthesis undertaken in this review.

Generation Z as Digital Consumers

Generation Z occupies a unique position in consumer culture, having grown up with ubiquitous internet access and algorithmically curated information environments. Unlike Millennials, Gen Z has been characterized as the first generation for whom the boundaries between online and offline identity are experientially seamless (Twenge, 2017), exhibiting higher advertising literacy, greater skepticism toward branded content, and a pronounced preference for user-generated and peer-to-peer communication over institutional messaging (Priporas et al., 2017).

Francis and Hoefel (2018) identified key Gen Z consumer traits: a preference for pragmatic value-driven consumption, strong alignment of brand choices with personal identity, and reliance on peer validation in purchase decisions. TikTok's community-oriented features, including comment sections, duet and stitch functions, and visible engagement metrics, structurally facilitate these modes of social validation, making it an especially potent environment for influencer-mediated consumer socialization (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Nevertheless, an underexplored research gap concerns how digital literacy moderates these tendencies: more digitally literate Gen Z consumers may employ greater skepticism, engage in active cross-platform verification, and demonstrate psychological reactance to high-frequency influencer exposure. These mechanisms have been identified in emerging studies but are not yet integrated into existing theoretical accounts of Gen Z digital consumer behavior.

METHODS

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design guided by the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021). The SLR methodology was selected because the central objective, synthesizing empirical evidence on Gen Z consumers' engagement with influencer marketing on TikTok, requires a transparent, reproducible, and bias-minimizing approach employing explicit eligibility criteria, systematic search, structured selection, and principled thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Research Questions

This review was guided by an explicit research question formulated using the PICOS framework: How do Generation Z consumers (P) engage with and respond to influencer marketing on TikTok and comparable short-form video platforms (I), compared to non-influencer or traditional digital marketing stimuli where reported (C), in terms of purchase intention, brand attitude, parasocial relationship formation, authenticity perception, and identity-driven consumption (O), as evidenced by peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2018 and 2024 (S)?.

This review was not pre-registered in PROSPERO or OSF prior to data collection, as the protocol was developed concurrently with the initial scoping search. The authors acknowledge this as a limitation with respect to PRISMA 2020 item 2 (registration), and recommend that future updates or replications follow prospective registration to strengthen bias prevention and methodological transparency.

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Eligibility Criteria

Studies were eligible if they were: (a) peer-reviewed empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods); (b) focusing on Generation Z consumers (born 1997–2012), aged 18–25; (c) examining influencer marketing on short-form video platforms, specifically TikTok or comparable platforms; (d) reporting outcomes including purchase intention, brand attitude, credibility perception, parasocial relationships, or authenticity perception; (e) published between January 2018 and December 2024; (f) in English or Bahasa Indonesia.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted across five academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar (via Publish or Perish), EBSCO Business Source Complete, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, conducted in February–March 2025. These databases were selected to ensure broad disciplinary coverage spanning marketing, consumer psychology, communication studies, and information systems.

The search strategy employed three concept blocks: (Block A) population – 'Generation Z' OR 'Gen Z' OR 'digital natives' OR 'young consumers'; (Block B) phenomenon – 'influencer marketing' OR 'influencer' OR 'content creator' OR 'social media marketing' OR 'TikTok' OR 'short-form video'; (Block C) outcomes – 'consumer behavior' OR 'purchase intention' OR 'brand attitude' OR 'parasocial' OR 'authenticity' OR 'credibility.' Blocks were combined using the Boolean operator AND. Forward and backward citation tracking was performed on the ten most frequently cited articles.

Study Selection Process (PRISMA Flow)

The study selection followed the four-stage PRISMA 2020 flow. The initial database search yielded 1,892 records; after adding 47 citation-tracked records and removing 692 duplicates in total, 1,247 unique records proceeded to screening. Two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts (Cohen's kappa = 0.81), excluding 1,089 records, yielding 158 for full-text assessment. After full-text review, 116 records were excluded, resulting in a final corpus of 42 studies spanning 17 countries, including 8 conducted in Indonesia (5 specifically in urban Jakarta).

Identification stage: The initial database search yielded 1,892 records (Scopus: 412; Web of Science: 387; Google Scholar: 503; EBSCO: 312; ProQuest: 278). An additional 47 records were identified through citation tracking, of which 16 proceeded as unique records. After deduplication in Rayyan systematic review management software, 1,247 unique records proceeded to screening.

Screening stage: Two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts against eligibility criteria; a third reviewer adjudicated unresolved cases. A total of 1,089 records were excluded during this stage, yielding 158 records for full-text assessment. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa ($k = 0.81$), indicating strong agreement. Eligibility stage: Full texts of the 158 remaining records were independently assessed against the complete eligibility criteria. Studies were excluded for the following reasons: population did not substantially focus on Gen Z ($n = 34$); platform was not TikTok or a comparable short-form video platform ($n = 28$); study did not report at least one eligible outcome construct ($n = 21$); study was not empirical ($n = 18$); publication outside the 2018–2024 window ($n = 9$); full text not retrievable ($n = 6$). A total of 116 records were excluded, yielding 42 studies for inclusion.

Inclusion stage: The final corpus comprised 42 empirical studies meeting all eligibility criteria. Of these, 24 employed quantitative designs (primarily survey-based), 12 employed qualitative designs (including phenomenological inquiry, ethnographic observation, and semi-structured interview approaches as applied in the original primary studies), and 6 employed mixed-methods designs. Studies were conducted across 17 countries, with 8 studies conducted in Indonesia, of which 5 specifically sampled urban Jakarta populations. The PRISMA flow diagram summarizing these stages is described above; a visual representation is available as supplementary material from the corresponding author.

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Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form, capturing bibliographic information, study design, sample characteristics, platform, theoretical frameworks, key constructs, and main findings, was pilot-tested on five studies and applied independently by two reviewers to all 42 studies. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus discussion with a third reviewer.

Data Synthesis

Given heterogeneity across the 42 included studies, thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) was employed, following a three-step process: line-by-line coding, development of descriptive themes, and generation of analytical themes offering higher-order interpretations. Study quality was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018), with quality ratings used to weight interpretations rather than exclude studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic synthesis yielded four overarching analytical themes recurring consistently across study designs, platforms, and geographic contexts.

Perceived Authenticity as the Primary Credibility Criterion

Descriptive Synthesis (Cross-Study Findings)

Across 31 of the 42 included studies, Gen Z respondents demonstrated a consistent ability to discern authentic from inauthentic influencer content through subtle cues, noticing incongruence when a creator 'suddenly promotes an unrelated product' or finding influencers who disclose product flaws more credible. Authenticity perceptions consistently emerged as a significant predictor of purchase intention across structural equation models, alongside expertise and trustworthiness dimensions of credibility (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019b; Munnukka et al., 2016).

Authenticity was mediated not primarily by formal sponsorship disclosure, frequently unnoticed or ineffective among Gen Z, but by subtler cues of spontaneity, naturalness, and narrative integration of the product into the influencer's visible lifestyle. Gen Z respondents closely evaluated whether endorsements appeared congruent with the influencer's established content and stated personal values.

Structural Analysis (Platform and Contextual Conditions)

TikTok's structural conditions enable authenticity evaluation: the short-form format (15–60 seconds) compresses authenticity cues; high-frequency exposure (1+ hours daily, reported across 28 studies) creates an accumulated baseline against which endorsements are compared; and the algorithm repeatedly surfaces the same creators, reinforcing this comparative baseline. Participants following an influencer for more than six months reported the highest accuracy in detecting inauthentic endorsements.

Analytical Interpretation (Higher-Order Synthesis)

The synthesized evidence characterizes perceived authenticity as a relational judgment emerging from sustained exposure and consistency-checking, assessed not in isolation per sponsored post but as coherence between the endorsement and the viewer's accumulated knowledge of the influencer's content patterns and values, consistent with (Audrezet et al., 2020) conceptualization of content and relationship authenticity.

Parasocial Relationships and the Formation of Purchase Intent

Descriptive Synthesis (Cross-Study Findings)

Twenty-seven included studies addressed parasocial relationships in mediating purchase outcomes. Gen Z participants reported loyalty and relational investment toward specific influencers motivating product trial even without prior interest in the category, describing 'personal recommendation from a friend' and 'trust built over time.' Parasocial interaction (PSI) scores consistently predicted purchase intention, with effect sizes ranging from moderate ($r = 0.31$) to strong ($r = 0.58$).

Participants characterized influencer recommendations as personalized, with trust, familiarity, and

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reduced need for additional information before purchase decisions, a pattern consistent across Indonesian, Southeast Asian, and Western samples.

Structural Analysis (Platform and Contextual Conditions)

TikTok's For You Page (FYP) algorithm creates conditions for repeated, high-frequency exposure to selected creators without a formal follow relationship, potentially generating parasocial familiarity that is less volitional than on subscription-based platforms. Included studies identified this as differentiating TikTok-mediated parasocial relationships from prior social media contexts, suggesting more rapid bond formation.

Analytical Interpretation (Higher-Order Synthesis)

The synthesized evidence characterizes parasocial relationships as algorithmic-mediated trust serving as a cognitive shortcut that reduces perceived purchase risk analogous to weak-tie social relationships (Granovetter, 1973) in their capacity to influence attitudes and behaviors, and raising questions about how algorithmic curation accelerates parasocial bond formation on short-form platforms.

Algorithmic Curation, Information Overload, and Selective Attention

Descriptive Synthesis (Cross-Study Findings)

Across 24 included studies, Gen Z respondents expressed appreciation for TikTok's algorithmic capacity to surface relevant product content without active search the FYP functioning 'like a friend who already knows what I like,' while simultaneously experiencing information overload from the volume of influencer marketing content encountered per session. Information overload emerged as a significant negative moderator of purchase intention above threshold exposure levels.

Structural Analysis (Platform and Contextual Conditions)

The structural conditions generating this ambivalence are identifiable at the platform level. The FYP algorithm reduces search costs by personalizing content delivery based on prior engagement signals. However, the infinite scroll design and high content velocity, estimated at 50 to 100 videos per hour during high-engagement sessions, create conditions for information overload. Included studies found that Gen Z users navigated this tension through a selective attention heuristic, relying on previously established parasocial trust as a cognitive shortcut and defaulting to assessments from a small number of trusted influencers rather than evaluating each recommendation on its individual merits.

Analytical Interpretation (Higher-Order Synthesis)

This ambivalence is structured by two opposing platform features. The FYP algorithm reduces search costs by personalizing content delivery. However, the infinite scroll design and high content velocity create information overload conditions. Included studies found that Gen Z users navigated this tension through a selective attention heuristic: relying on parasocial trust as a cognitive shortcut, defaulting to a small number of trusted influencers rather than evaluating each recommendation on its individual merits.

The synthesized evidence characterizes algorithmic curation as a double-edged sword enabling personalized discovery while generating information overload. The coping mechanism, selective attention mediated by parasocial trust, exhibits similarities to opinion leadership dynamics in diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003), with individual influencers functioning as personalized opinion leaders and information gatekeepers for their Gen Z audiences.

Social Identity, Brand Alignment, and the Performative Dimension of Consumption

Descriptive Synthesis (Cross-Study Findings)

Nineteen included studies addressed social identity in shaping Gen Z's influencer marketing responses. Participants chose to follow and purchase based on recommendations from influencers whose lifestyle, aesthetic, and values were congruent with their own aspirational self-image or social communities. Self-congruity and social identity salience were significant predictors of both parasocial bond strength and purchase intention, with particularly strong effects among Gen Z compared to older cohorts.

Purchasing an influencer-recommended product was framed not merely as functional acquisition but as

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social signaling of group membership and taste alignment. Community validation, operationalized as comment sentiment and visible social endorsement metrics, reinforced individual purchase decisions, consistent with social proof mechanisms in persuasion literature.

Analytical Interpretation (Higher-Order Synthesis)

This identity-expressive dimension is structurally facilitated by TikTok's platform features. Comment sections, duet and stitch features, and visible metrics of social endorsement (likes, shares, saves) render consumption choices visible and discussable. User-generated content formats such as unboxing videos, reviews, and 'get ready with me' content create opportunities for identity-aligned consumption to be performed for an audience. The platform's algorithmic curation further reinforces identity expression by continuously surfacing identity-congruent content, creating an amplification loop between self-concept and consumption.

The synthesized evidence characterizes social identity in influencer marketing consumption as an implicit sense of congruence and belonging operating with limited conscious deliberation, enriching identity-based consumption literature (Escalas & Bettman, 2005), within TikTok's specific structural context where platform affordances render consumption choices visible (Voorveld et al., 2018).

Heterogeneity and Contrary Findings Across the Included Studies

Seven of the 42 included studies reported divergent patterns: three found peer-to-peer networks (rather than parasocial influencer trust) as the primary purchase influence channel; two reported psychological reactance to repeated influencer exposure at high-frequency thresholds; and two documented active cross-platform verification behavior before purchase. These contrary findings are concentrated in samples with higher digital literacy, suggesting that platform experience and media literacy may moderate the dominant mechanisms identified in the four themes.

CONCLUSIONS

This Systematic Literature Review has synthesized the findings of 42 empirical studies on Gen Z consumer behavior in relation to influencer marketing on TikTok, following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. The review identified four overarching analytical themes: perceived authenticity as the primary credibility criterion, parasocial relationships as drivers of purchase intent, algorithmic curation as a double-edged facilitator of information access and overload, and the identity-expressive function of influencer-aligned consumption. Together, these themes constitute a methodologically rigorous, cross-study portrait of Gen Z influencer marketing engagement that extends and deepens prior quantitative findings by integrating qualitative and contextual dimensions not readily accessible through any single methodological approach.

For marketing practitioners and brand strategists, the synthesized findings carry several actionable implications. First, the primacy of authenticity among Gen Z evaluators argues strongly against overly scripted, heavily branded collaborations in favor of narrative-integrated partnerships that allow creators to embed products within their genuine content aesthetic. Second, the mechanism of parasocial trust as a purchase driver, confirmed consistently across the included corpus, suggests that sustained, long-term influencer partnerships are likely to yield greater return than one-off sponsored posts, as the accumulation of parasocial bond strength over time amplifies the persuasive weight of individual recommendations. Third, the identity-alignment dimension of influencer followership implies that effective influencer selection requires not only audience demographic matching but a deeper form of values and aesthetic congruence between brand, influencer, and target consumer.

This review is subject to several limitations that should inform interpretation and guide future inquiry. First, despite the systematic search strategy, the review may not have captured all relevant studies, particularly those published in non-indexed Indonesian-language journals. Second, the heterogeneity of study designs, samples, and measurement instruments across the included corpus limits the precision of were

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comparative claims and precluded quantitative meta-analysis. Third, the majority of included studies conducted outside Indonesia (34 of 42), which limits the direct transferability of findings to the specific urban Jakarta context. Fourth, quality appraisal using MMAT revealed that nine included quantitative studies had moderate methodological quality ratings, primarily related to sampling and instrumentation limitations. Future research should address these limitations by extending the SLR to non-English language databases, conducting primary studies in underrepresented geographic contexts, and employing experience sampling and longitudinal designs to capture dynamic influencer marketing responses.

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