

WEIGHT LOSS ADVERTISEMENTS ON CONSUMER PURCHASING INTENTIONS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Weight loss advertisements on TikTok significantly shape consumer purchasing intentions in Malaysia, yet existing studies often overlook contradictions between algorithmic persistence and consumer cognition. Current research lacks integration of trust, credibility, and believability within a coherent theoretical model. This paper addresses that gap by operationalizing User Generated Content (UGC) theory through perceived authenticity and embedding it within the AIDA framework. By focusing on how authenticity interacts with cognitive attitudes, the study proposes a refined conceptual model that clarifies consumer susceptibility. The key contribution lies in advancing methodological rigor and offering a foundation for future empirical research in digital advertising.

Keywords: *TikTok, weight loss advertisements, perceived authenticity, cognitive attitudes, AIDA model, user-generated content, Malaysia*

Iklan Penurunan Berat Badan terhadap Niat Pembelian Pengguna di Malaysia

Abstrak

Iklan penurunan berat badan di TikTok memberi kesan besar terhadap niat pembelian pengguna di Malaysia, namun kajian sedia ada sering mengabaikan percanggahan antara ketekalan algoritma dan kognisi pengguna. Penyelidikan semasa kurang mengintegrasikan kepercayaan, kredibiliti dan kebolehpercayaan dalam satu model teori yang koheren. Kertas ini menangani jurang tersebut dengan mengoperasikan teori Kandungan Jana Pengguna (UGC) melalui persepsi keaslian dan menggabungkannya dalam kerangka AIDA. Dengan menumpukan pada interaksi antara keaslian dan sikap kognitif, kajian ini mencadangkan model konseptual baharu yang menjelaskan kerentanan pengguna. Sumbangan utama ialah memperkukuh ketelitian metodologi dan menyediakan asas bagi kajian empirikal masa depan dalam pengiklanan digital.

Kata Kunci: *TikTok, iklan penurunan berat badan, persepsi keaslian, sikap kognitif, model AIDA, kandungan jana pengguna, Malaysia.*

Introduction

The rapid diffusion of social media technologies reshapes how individuals consume and respond to health-related information. TikTok emerges as a dominant platform, driven by algorithmic personalization and short-form video content.

These features transform TikTok into a persuasive environment where health, beauty, and weight loss information circulates widely, often surpassing traditional expert guidance. Its recommendation system curates persistent streams of weight loss content, including advertisements, influencer endorsements, and user-generated posts (Amir Hamzah et al., 2025). This repetition reinforces attention, normalizes weight loss culture, and shapes consumer psychology.

Influencer advertising plays a central role, with authenticity conveyed through personal stories and perceived successes). Such narratives foster trust and relatability, making products appear safer and more relevant (Adeane & Stasiak, 2024). User-generated content further amplifies credibility and normalizes consumption practices (Niazi, 2025). Yet authenticity also creates vulnerability, as misleading or exaggerated

claims are common (Raber et al., 2024). Quick-fix solutions and unrealistic body ideals are often presented as harmless, despite documented risks (Hemendinger, 2024). TikTok's emotionally charged environment reduces critical evaluation, especially when influencers appear authentic (Nizam, 2024). This paradox underscores the need to examine how authenticity interacts with cognitive attitude in shaping consumer responses.

Cognitive attitude serves as a moderating factor, reflecting how individuals evaluate credibility and resist persuasion. Strong cognitive attitudes promotes scrutiny and scepticism, while weaker attitudes increase vulnerability to emotional appeals (Trissetianto & Ali, 2025). In Malaysia, consumers aged 18–34 demonstrate strong responsiveness to influencer-endorsed health products, driven by authenticity and cultural validation (Ibrahim et al., 2025). The rising prevalence of obesity (Hakim, 2025) and the increase in medical and commercial promotions (Peng et al., 2025) highlight the urgency of conceptual frameworks that explain how authenticity and cognition interact to shape purchase intentions in Malaysia's digital advertising ecosystem.

Literature Review

TikTok Algorithm

Persistence refers to the algorithmic amplification of similar weight loss content repeatedly shown to users over time, operationalized through self reported frequency of exposure within the past seven days. Persistent exposure increases message salience and familiarity, which influence perceived authenticity and reduce resistance to persuasion (Chen et al., 2025). TikTok's recommendation system functions as an engine of rapid personalization, ingesting micro behaviours such as watch time, rewatches, likes, comments, and shares, alongside content features like audio, hashtags, and visual patterns, to maximize engagement (Vombatkere et al., 2024). This personalization hybridizes collaborative and content based approaches, making the "For You" page highly sensitive to small actions and video properties (Baumann et al., 2025). The result is a closed loop where engaging content generates more similar content, explaining the dominance of themes like fitness or weight loss (Merino et al., 2024).

Persistence is sustained by algorithmic amplification, which favors repeated interactions to keep content visible (Obreja, 2024), and attention economics, which leverages short cycles of exposure to

enhance familiarity and reduce conversion friction. In Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia, campaigns exploit cultural resonance and influencer networks to maximize visibility, with the region accounting for 24.4% of TikTok's global advertising audience (DataReportal, 2025). Brands embed promotional content in trending formats and culturally relevant storytelling to avoid fatigue, timing collaborations to coincide with high receptivity moments (Bell et al., 2025).

Analytically, persistence has direct implications for perceived authenticity, cognitive attitude, and purchase intention. Repetition produces cognitive shortcuts, where frequent exposure is misread as verification, boosting authenticity even without validity cues. Cognitive attitude moderates these effects, strengthening or weakening consumer responses depending on evaluative judgment (Bowden, 2022). Persistence compresses the time between attention and action, intensifying the pathway from authenticity to purchase intention, with consumers progressing through the AIDA stages toward stronger purchase intentions (Balaban & Szabolcs, 2022).

Prevalence of Weight Loss Content

The prevalence of weight loss content on TikTok is substantial, encompassing both professionally produced advertisements and user-generated content (Wang et al., 2025). Despite policies restricting advertisements that promote “unrealistic body image” or “negative body image” (TikTok Advertising Policies, 2025), the platform remains saturated with videos showcasing weight loss journeys, transformations, diet advice, and challenges (Wang et al., 2025). Algorithmic personalization cultivates echo chambers that reinforce pre-existing concerns, particularly among young adults who are vulnerable to social media's influence on body image (Hu et al., 2023).

Persistent exposure normalizes unrealistic body ideals and directly influences purchasing intentions, particularly for products that promise quick fixes or dramatic transformations (Federal Trade Commission, 2025). In Malaysia, the popularity of online shopping and social commerce creates a direct pathway from engagement to consumer purchases (Darmatama & Erdiansyah, 2021). Repetition strengthens perceived authenticity, as testimonials and narratives are misinterpreted as credible, encouraging trust in advertised products.

Research shows weight loss content dominates social media, with 75% of food and fitness posts on Instagram focusing on weight loss and 57%

of health advertisements on Facebook promoting such products (Minadeo & Pope, 2022). Exposure influences adolescents' body image, eating habits, and self-esteem (Youshajekian, 2024). Authenticity functions as a stabilizing mechanism, while cognitive attitude moderates how consumers evaluate credibility, either reinforcing or weakening purchase decisions (Lin et al., 2024).

Prolonged exposure contributes to negative body image and low self-esteem (Mahon & Hevey, 2021). Yet in consumer behavior, authenticity cues and cognitive evaluation directly shape purchasing intentions. When content is perceived as authentic, consumers trust and act on promotional messages, progressing through the AIDA stages toward purchase (Balaban & Szabolcs, 2022). Cognitive attitude determines whether authenticity is accepted or challenged, moderating the strength of purchase intention. These dynamics are crucial for understanding how TikTok's weight loss content influences consumer behavior in Malaysia's digital advertising ecosystem.

Context and background of Study

The rapid spread of social media technologies has transformed how individuals consume and respond to health information. TikTok, driven by algorithmic personalization and short form video content, has become a leading platform where health, beauty, and weight loss information circulates widely, often outpacing traditional expert guidance (Munro et al., 2024). Its recommendation system curates content based on user engagement, resulting in persistent exposure to slimming products, diet trends, and transformation narratives (Amir Hamzah et al., 2025). This repetition normalizes weight loss culture and influences consumer psychology, reinforcing credibility and reducing scepticism toward persuasive claims (Czubaj et al., 2025). The mere exposure effect further amplifies perceived authenticity, as familiarity increases liking and trust (Whang & Lee, 2025).

Influencer advertising plays a central role in this persuasive ecosystem. Influencers present weight loss products through narrative authenticity, sharing personal struggles and successes that foster parasocial intimacy and enhance perceptions of sincerity, relatability, and trustworthiness (Azhar et al., 2025; Adeane & Stasiak, 2024). User generated content (UGC) further amplifies authenticity, as testimonials and transformation videos provide community validation and normalize consumption practices (Niazi, 2025). Authenticity thus becomes a decisive cue in

shaping purchase intention, as consumers are more likely to trust and act on content perceived as genuine.

Within this environment, cognitive attitude functions as a critical moderating factor. Individuals with high cognitive attitude engage in deeper processing,

scrutinizing credibility and resisting superficial cues, while those with lower cognitive attitude rely on familiarity and emotional resonance, making them more susceptible to persuasive appeals (Bowden, 2022; Trissetianto & Ali, 2025). TikTok's rapid fire format shorten the gap between attention and action, intensifying the pathway from authenticity to purchase intention.

Malaysian consumers, particularly those aged 18–34, demonstrate strong responsiveness to influencer-endorsed health products, driven by authenticity and community validation (Sitorus et al., 2025). The rising prevalence of obesity (Hakim, 2025) and the increase in weight-loss advertisements promoted by both influencers and medical professionals (Wang et al., 2025) highlight the urgency of examining how authenticity and cognitive attitude together shape purchasing intentions in Malaysia's digital advertising ecosystem.

Operational Definition

Perceived authenticity, drawn from UGC theory, is operationalized through items measuring trust, credibility, and believability. Cognitive attitude, informed by the AIDA model's evaluative stage, is measured through items assessing scepticism and information processing. Purchase intention, corresponding to the Action stage of AIDA, is measured through items capturing desire, intention, and likelihood of purchase. This operationalization ensures that theoretical constructs are directly reflected in the research instrument, enhancing clarity, validity, and coherence between the conceptual framework and the measurement design.

Perceived authenticity reflects the extent to which consumers evaluate messages or advertisements as genuine, credible, and free from manipulation, functioning as a determinant of trust and evaluative judgment in digital marketing environments (Zniva et al., 2023). On TikTok, where algorithmically amplified content blurs the boundaries between genuine expression and persuasive intent, authenticity becomes a stabilizing mechanism for consumer evaluation. The rise of constructed spontaneity, in which content is deliberately crafted to

appear natural, increases reliance on authenticity cues as a basis for trust formation (Vaterlaus & Chow, 2024). Authenticity is reinforced when brand values align with visible practices, communication is transparent, and relatable human elements such as testimonials are included (Aisy et al., 2025). Perceived authenticity drives trust and shapes attention, engagement, and ultimately purchase intention.

Cognitive attitude constitutes the rational, evaluative component of consumer response, reflecting beliefs, judgments, and critical assessments of weight loss content on social media platforms (Muhammad et al., 2021). It encompasses deliberative appraisal of credibility, relevance, and accuracy, serving as a determinant of behavioral intention (Rizkiansyah et al., 2024). Positive cognitive attitudes emerge when content aligns with users' health objectives or provides reliable information, while negative attitudes reflect scepticism or misalignment with personal goals (Horn & Jongenelis, 2021). In this study, cognitive attitude is examined as a moderating mechanism between perceived authenticity and purchase intention in algorithmically mediated TikTok environments. This approach highlights how rational appraisal interacts with repeated exposure, shaping consumer responses to influencer endorsements and testimonial driven persuasion (Zirena Bejarano & Zirena, 2024).

Purchase intention represents the predisposition or likelihood of consumers to acquire a product or service as a function of exposure and evaluation of social media messages (Tiwari et al., 2025). On TikTok, algorithmic targeting and influencer narratives intensify these effects, as personalized recommendations and repeated exposure foster familiarity and strengthen persuasive influence (Munir & Watts, 2025). In this study, purchase intention is examined through persistent weight loss advertisements, where perceived authenticity and cognitive attitude together shape behavioral tendencies. This integrated perspective offers insight into Malaysian consumers' decision making processes, reinforcing the theoretical coherence of the study's framework.

Methodology

This study investigates the influence of perceived authenticity on consumer purchase intentions towards persistent TikTok weight loss advertisements, with cognitive attitude serving as a moderating variable. A correlational research design is employed, appropriate for examining associations between variables without manipulating the environment. This design allows the identification of statistically significant relationships between authenticity, cognitive attitude, and purchase

intention, providing empirical support for the hypothesized framework (Hair et al., 2019).

The target population comprises Malaysian TikTok users aged 18–34 recognized as digital natives highly responsive to social media advertising. This study conceptually employs a stratified random sampling design to ensure representativeness, dividing respondents into two strata (18–24 and 25–34) with equal allocation (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970; Hossan et al., 2023). Within each stratum, randomization is proposed using a random number generator to achieve the required sample size. Recruitment platforms such as TikTok Ads Manager and cross platform dissemination (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp) may serve as delivery mechanisms, but the probability character of the design is preserved through stratification and randomization rules. Screening questions confirm eligibility, and informed consent ensures voluntary participation in line with ethical standards (Ong et al., 2023).

Validity is established through expert review, factor analysis, and pilot testing, while reliability is confirmed using Cronbach's alpha with thresholds above 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). As this paper is conceptual, these analytic techniques are outlined as the intended plan for future empirical testing rather than executed in this version. Ethical approval is obtained, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and compliance with the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) Malaysia (2010).

A pilot test was conducted with 80 respondents, equally divided between the two age strata (18–24 and 25–34), consistent with the stratified framework. Reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency for the main constructs: perceived authenticity (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$), cognitive attitude (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$), and purchase intention (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$). These results confirm that the adapted scales are reliable within the Malaysian TikTok context and suitable for further empirical testing.

Findings and Discussion

The conceptual framework of this study highlights the central role of perceived authenticity in shaping consumer purchase intentions towards persistent TikTok weight loss advertisements, with cognitive attitude serving as a moderating variable. Authenticity emerges as a decisive cue in digital persuasion, as consumers increasingly rely on trust, credibility, and believability to evaluate content in algorithmically curated environments (Zniva et al., 2023). On TikTok, where influencer

narratives and user generated testimonials dominate, authenticity functions as a

stabilizing mechanism that enhances message acceptance and strengthens consumer confidence (Cheah et al., 2024). Content that appears genuine and transparent resonates more deeply with audiences, reinforcing credibility and motivating purchase consideration (Aisy et al., 2025).

Cognitive attitude plays a critical moderating role in this process. It reflects the rational and evaluative dimension of consumer response, shaping how individuals scrutinize credibility, relevance, and accuracy of weight loss advertisements (Muhammad et al., 2021; Rizkiansyah et al., 2024). Consumers with strong cognitive attitudes are expected to engage in deeper processing, aligning purchase decisions with health objectives and reliable information, while those with weaker cognitive attitudes may rely more heavily on heuristic cues such as familiarity or emotional resonance (Horn & Jongenelis, 2021). Within TikTok's rapid fire format, cognitive attitude determines whether authenticity is accepted as credible evidence or challenged through scepticism, thereby influencing the strength of purchase intention.

Purchase intention represents the cumulative outcome of these dynamics. It is shaped by repeated exposure to persuasive content, evaluations of authenticity, and the moderating influence of cognitive attitude (Tianyi & Liang, 2025). On TikTok, algorithmic targeting and influencer driven narratives intensify these effects, as personalized recommendations and testimonial based content foster familiarity and strengthen persuasive influence (Munir & Watts, 2025). When authenticity is perceived positively and cognitive attitude supports evaluative confidence, consumers are more likely to progress through the AIDA stages, culminating in stronger purchase intentions (Balaban & Szabolcs, 2022). Conversely, scepticism or misalignment with personal goals may weaken this pathway, reducing the likelihood of purchase.

In Malaysia's context, where obesity prevalence remains high and digital consumption is rapidly expanding (Hakim, 2025), these findings underscore the urgency of examining how authenticity and cognitive attitude jointly shape consumer behavior. This conceptual discussion provides a theoretical foundation for understanding purchase intention in algorithmically mediated environments, offering insights for digital marketing strategies and ethical content governance in Malaysia's evolving social commerce ecosystem.

Recommendations

This study conceptually examines how perceived authenticity and cognitive attitude influence purchase intention toward persistent TikTok weight loss advertisements in Malaysia. Perceived authenticity emerges as a decisive factor in digital persuasion, as consumers increasingly rely on trust, credibility, and believability to evaluate content in algorithmically curated environments (Zniva et al., 2023). On TikTok, influencer narratives and user generated testimonials dominate, and authenticity functions as a stabilizing mechanism that enhances message acceptance and strengthens consumer confidence (Cheah et al., 2024). Content that appears genuine and transparent resonates more deeply with audiences, reinforcing credibility and motivating purchase consideration (Kothari et al., 2025).

Cognitive attitude plays a crucial moderating role in this process. It reflects the rational and evaluative dimension of consumer response, shaping how individuals scrutinize the credibility, relevance, and accuracy of weight loss advertisements (Muhammad et al., 2021; Rizkiansyah et al., 2024). Consumers with strong cognitive attitudes are expected to engage in deeper processing, aligning purchase decisions with health objectives and reliable information, while those with weaker cognitive attitudes may rely heavily on heuristic cues such as familiarity or emotional resonance (Zirena Bejarano & Zirena, 2024). Within TikTok's rapid fire format, cognitive attitude determines whether authenticity is accepted as credible evidence or challenged with scepticism, thereby influencing the strength of purchase intention.

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Conclusion

This study recommends that marketers, regulators, and educators prioritize authenticity and cognitive attitude as central determinants of purchase intention in Malaysia's TikTok advertising ecosystem. For marketers, campaigns should emphasize transparency, relatable narratives, and genuine endorsements to sustain credibility and strengthen consumer trust. Authenticity, when reinforced through clear communication and testimonial driven content, enhances persuasive impact and increases the likelihood of purchase (Nazara et al., 2025). By embedding authenticity into advertising strategies, brands can align with consumer expectations and foster stronger purchase intentions.

Cognitive attitude functions as a moderating mechanism, shaping how consumers interpret authenticity. Positive cognitive attitudes amplify persuasive effects, enabling consumers to critically evaluate and validate advertising claims, while weaker attitudes attenuate these effects (Bowden, 2022). Strengthening cognitive resilience through media literacy initiatives is therefore essential. Educators and policymakers should emphasize critical evaluation skills to empower consumers in navigating algorithmically reinforced advertising environments (MCMC, 2024).

In practice, these recommendations emphasize the need for collaboration among marketers, regulators, and educators to ensure that persistent TikTok weight loss advertisements contribute positively to consumer well being. By embedding authenticity, fostering cognitive resilience, and aligning campaigns with ethical standards, stakeholders can enhance purchase intention while safeguarding consumer trust in Malaysia's evolving social commerce landscape.

In Malaysia, where obesity prevalence remains high and digital consumption is rapidly expanding (Hakim, 2025), these findings highlight the urgency of examining how authenticity and cognitive attitude jointly shape consumer behavior. This conceptual discussion provides a

theoretical foundation for understanding purchase intention in algorithmically mediated environments, offering insights for digital marketing strategies and ethical content governance in Malaysia's evolving social commerce ecosystem.

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Author's Declaration

This article has not been published previously, not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This publication has approved by all authors for publication and not be published elsewhere printed or electronically in the same form or in any other language without the written consent of the copyright-holder, which is Forum Komunikasi.

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