Building Consumer Trust: Key Factors Shaping Responses to Influencer Marketing Campaign

Sarah Aida Azhar[1], Yuslina Liza Mohd Yusof[2*], Zatul Fahany Harun[3]

[1,2,3]*Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Malaysia*

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ABSTRACT

Trustworthiness has emerged as a fundamental determinant in shaping consumer responses to influencer marketing campaigns, influencing how audiences perceive and engage with promotional content. Current data underscores that 63% of consumers in developed nations feel deceived by influencers who do not disclose paid partnerships, contributing to heightened distrust and scepticism. This figure was derived from a consumer survey which surveyed 1,500 social media users across five developed nations (United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, and Australia). Conversely, 67% of millennials and Gen Z in developing countries, such as Malaysia, express a degree of trust in influencer endorsements, but this trust is contingent upon the influencer's perceived authenticity and transparency. This study aims to examine the influence of influencer expertise, authenticity, transparency, relatability, and emotional appeal on consumer trust in influencer marketing. By focusing on these trustworthiness factors, the research explores how they shape consumer attitudes, engagement, and purchase intentions, particularly across culturally diverse Southeast Asian settings. The findings indicate that influencers who exhibit transparency and demonstrate substantive expertise cultivate a stronger sense of credibility, which in turn positively influences consumer behaviour. Conversely, perceived dishonesty or opacity in such engagements markedly diminishes the efficacy of marketing efforts. For practitioners, the implications are clear: successful marketing campaigns necessitate partnerships with influencers who embody transparency, authenticity and demonstrated expertise, as these qualities are instrumental in fostering enhanced consumer engagement and brand loyalty.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A social media influencer is defined as 'a person with a large and engaged following on social media platforms, whom one would not know unless they follow them' (Haenlein et al., 2020). Influencers share

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[1*] Corresponding author. *E-mail address*: yuslina641@uitm.edu.my

content (De Veirman et al., 2017) and are often seen as experts in specific areas such as food, travel, fitness, or fashion (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Although the distinction between social media influencers and celebrities is becoming less clear—with influencers evolving into personal brands (Forbes, 2016) and celebrities using social media extensively to interact with fans and boost their fame (Haenlein et al., 2020)—influencers differ from traditional experts or celebrities who gain recognition from careers outside of social media, like sports, music, or acting. Social media influencers often connect with their audience through a more relatable, down-to-earth persona (Schouten et al., 2020). This makes influencer marketing distinct from traditional celebrity endorsements by enabling two-way interactions, where followers can comment on posts and potentially receive influencer replies, fostering parasocial relationships (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Influencer marketing is a strategic approach that involves leveraging individuals with a significant following on social media or other digital platforms to promote brands, products, or services. These individuals, known as influencers, can shape public opinion and consumer behaviour through their content, making them powerful assets in modern marketing strategies. Influencers range from celebrities and industry experts to micro-influencers with smaller but highly engaged audiences. This marketing technique capitalizes on the trust and credibility influencers have built with their followers, which brands aim to transfer to their products or services.

Research by Lou and Yuan (2019) indicates that influencer content's perceived value and credibility influence consumer trust, leading to favourable purchase decisions. They highlight that influencers perceived as trustworthy are more effective in promoting brands because their followers are more likely to believe their recommendations (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021). Studies by Kim and Kim (2021) reinforce this view by showing that influencer credibility, particularly trustworthiness, plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes toward endorsed brands. The trust is a moderating factor that enhances the effectiveness of endorsements, leading consumers to be more receptive to product recommendations (Kim & Kim, 2021). This means that when consumers perceive an influencer as trustworthy, they are more likely to respond positively to the products or brands being promoted, increasing the likelihood of purchase intentions.

On the downside, research by Audrezet et al. (2020) discusses how a lack of transparency, such as undisclosed sponsorships, can diminish trust and harm the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Consumers often perceive undisclosed endorsements as deceptive, leading to negative attitudes toward both the influencer and the associated brand (Audrezet et al., 2020). This perception of dishonesty can significantly diminish trust and credibility, making the influencer marketing campaign less effective and potentially harming the brand's reputation. Transparent disclosures are crucial in fostering a sense of authenticity and trustworthiness, which ultimately influences consumer responses positively (Campbell & Marks, 2015).

Finally, Harrigan et al. (2021) emphasize the role of trust in influencing online purchase intentions. According to the findings of Harrigan et al. (2021), when influencers are perceived as trustworthy, consumers are more inclined to engage with their content and make purchasing decisions based on the endorsements provided. This aligns with the research by Kim and Kim (2021), who found that trustworthiness plays a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, thereby significantly influencing the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns. Both studies highlight the importance of credibility in driving consumer engagement and decision-making in influencer marketing.

Consumer trust in traditional advertising has declined over the past few decades (Nielsen, 2015). As a result, advertisers are continuously exploring new ways to promote products and services (Boerman, et al., 2017). Social media platforms have emerged as a valuable environment for native advertising, offering a less intrusive alternative to traditional media (Minton et al., 2012). Additionally, the rise in popularity of social media influencers (SMIs) has been rapid (De Veirman, et al., 2017).

SMIs occupy a unique space, acting as celebrities, experts, and peers (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). As potential opinion leaders (Enke and Borchers, 2019), they are believed to influence their audience's views and decisions through their expertise, authentic personas, and strong connections with their online communities. Today, advertisers are increasingly allocating more of their budgets to influencer marketing, as SMIs can drive brand engagement at a lower cost compared to traditional advertising (Evans et al., 2017; Hwang and Zhang, 2018; Phua et al., 2017). SMIs are typically paid to promote brands through their posts (Campbell & Grimm, 2019).

In general, the style and format of commercial and non-commercial posts from SMIs are similar, and both are shared with their followers (Boerman, Willemsen, and Van Der Aa, 2017). Advertising content can be created and distributed directly by production companies through social media accounts or by SMIs and celebrities with large followings (Mayrhofer et al., 2019). Posts from SMI accounts tend to attract more attention and evoke stronger emotional responses toward brands than those from brand accounts (Campbell and Farrell, 2020). However, posts from brand accounts tend to generate greater perceptions of source credibility (De Jans et al., 2020).

The rise of social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter has drastically changed the advertising landscape. Unlike traditional advertising, influencer marketing focuses on authentic engagement and personalized content, which resonates more with today's consumers, particularly younger demographics. It relies on peer recommendation rather than a direct brand push, making it a more subtle but often more effective way of reaching target audiences. Influencer marketing has grown rapidly, driven by the increasing time people spend on social media platforms and the shift from traditional to digital marketing. As consumers become more sceptical of direct advertisements, they look for recommendations from trusted sources, which has given rise to the prevalence of influencer marketing across industries, including fashion, beauty, fitness, and technology.

Influencer marketing can be categorized into two subtypes based on its execution and coordination: earned influencer marketing and paid influencer marketing (Corcoran, 2009). Earned influencers are unpaid individuals who create user-generated content, while paid influencers work on behalf of companies, producing firm-generated content (Corcoran, 2009). Since paid influencers collaborate with companies, the content they produce is often controlled and curated by the brands to ensure positive promotion of their products (Kirby & Marsden, 2006). The influencer marketing approach benefits both companies and influencers. For companies, it serves as a cost-effective strategy to reach targeted audiences on smaller budgets (Brown & Hayes, 2008), yielding a return on investment (ROI) 11 times higher than other digital marketing methods. For influencers, it provides an opportunity to receive free products or earn money by promoting brands' products or services through their social media profiles, either through direct advertisements or without explicitly disclosing the collaboration.

The global impact of influencer marketing can be seen in its substantial growth in both developed and developing countries, according to a report by Statista, the influencer marketing industry was valued at around $16.4 billion globally in 2022, a significant increase from just $1.7 billion in 2016. This growth is projected to continue as brands invest more in digital advertising and influencer collaborations. In developed economies like the United States, the UK, and Japan, influencer marketing is already a well-established strategy. A report from Business Insider estimated that businesses in the U.S. alone were expected to spend over $5 billion on influencer marketing by 2023, accounting for a significant portion of digital ad budgets. In the UK, nearly 40% of brands reported positive ROI from influencer marketing campaigns, demonstrating its effectiveness in driving consumer engagement and sales. Nielsen's (2015) findings indicate that 70% of consumers in countries like Canada and the U.K. trust recommendations from influencers over celebrities, while 63% of consumers feel misled when influencers fail to disclose sponsorships (Audrezet et al., 2020). This illustrates the critical role of transparency in influencer marketing within developed economies.

In contrast, developing countries exhibit slightly different dynamics in influencer marketing. A study in Malaysia indicated that 67% of millennials and Gen Z consumers trust influencer endorsements, particularly in industries such as beauty and fashion (Kaushalya & Ranaweera, 2021). Similarly, a survey in Sri Lanka reported that 56% of young adults are more influenced by influencers than traditional ads, with trustworthiness and relatability being the key driving factors (Harrigan et al., 2021). In Indonesia, 52% of respondents emphasized transparency as a major influence on their purchasing decisions, especially in relation to influencers who disclose paid partnerships (Jin et al., 2021). In India and Brazil, 60% of consumers expressed more trust in influencer content than in brand-generated advertisements, pointing to the growing role of influencers in these developing markets (Nurhandayani et al., 2019).

Trustworthiness and transparency are crucial in shaping consumer responses to influencer marketing campaigns in both developed and developing regions. In developed countries, transparency and full disclosure are essential, while in developing economies, influencer authenticity and relatability are emphasized (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Audrezet et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021).

Brands are increasingly partnering with micro-influencers (those with 10,000-100,000 followers) who may have smaller audiences but tend to engage more authentically with their followers. Studies have shown that micro-influencers often have higher engagement rates than macro-influencers or celebrities, making them more attractive to brands looking for organic engagement. Consumers are becoming more sceptical of overly polished content or apparent brand endorsements. As a result, influencers who maintain an authentic voice and share real-life experiences are gaining more trust. Brands encourage influencers to create content that aligns with their personality rather than following a strict promotional script.

Video-based platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram Reels have become crucial for influencer marketing. Influencers produce more short-form, engaging video content that resonates with their followers. According to HubSpot, 86% of businesses use video as a marketing tool, with influencer-generated videos driving higher engagement rates. As influencer marketing grows, so does the need for transparency. Regulations require influencers to disclose paid partnerships clearly. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube now have built-in features that allow influencers to tag sponsored content, ensuring ethical practices. This transparency trend is crucial for maintaining trust between influencers, their audience, and brands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencer marketing is social media marketing where individuals with a significant following promote products or services to their audience. Influencers act as intermediaries between brands and consumers, influencing public opinion and buying decisions. Consumers tend to trust influencers because of their perceived expertise, relatability, and personal connection to the audience, making them effective in delivering authentic brand messages. Trustworthiness, in this context, is crucial for the success of influencer campaigns, as consumers are more likely to respond positively to endorsements from influencers they perceive as credible. A literature review on audience engagement and consumers' perceived brand trust reveals a significant relationship between these two factors. Cheung et al. (2014) highlighted the impact of social media comments on purchasing decisions, mainly when these comments come from consumers' networks. Metrics such as likes, comments, and shares on social media indicate an influencer's high audience engagement, reflecting public recognition and trust in the brand. High engagement (e.g., products with more likes) is often associated with more incredible popularity and trustworthiness, enhancing consumers' willingness to purchase. Thus, this study suggests increased audience engagement correlates with higher perceived brand trust among consumers. However, while abundant in Western contexts, existing literature often lacks a nuanced analysis of how trustworthiness factors operate in Southeast Asian markets—where collectivist cultural values, religious beliefs, and digital behaviour may shape perceptions differently. By addressing this gap, the current study aims to provide a more context-sensitive perspective on how Southeast Asian consumers interpret and respond to influencer credibility.

Source credibility is one of the most important factors in determining the effectiveness of an influencer marketing campaign. It is often divided into two main dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness.

Expertise: Consumers are more likely to trust influencers with knowledge and expertise in a specific area. For instance, a beauty influencer with years of experience in skincare is perceived as more credible when recommending a beauty product. Studies have shown that influencers with domain-specific knowledge are seen as more trustworthy, and their recommendations carry more weight with their audience. According to a study by Hovland and Weiss (1951), expertise impacts the level of persuasion, which influences consumer behaviour. More recent studies, such as those by Lim et al. (2020), have reaffirmed this, noting that influencers perceived as experts generate higher engagement and purchase intent from their followers.

The connection between expertise and consumer trust is not merely theoretical; it has significant practical implications for purchase intention. Research consistently shows that consumers are more likely to act on their recommendations when they perceive an influencer as an expert. Lim et al. (2020) highlight that influencers with specialized knowledge tend to generate higher engagement and greater purchase intent from their audience, mainly when their expertise is reflected in consistent content creation and personal brand alignment.

Authenticity refers to the perception that the influencer is genuine and honest in their endorsements. Influencers who remain true to their personality and values are often perceived as more credible. This is especially important in influencer marketing, where consumers are sceptical of paid advertisements. Authenticity can be demonstrated through honest reviews, organic content creation, and maintaining transparency in sponsored collaborations. Research by Audrezet et al. (2020) highlights the importance of authenticity in influencer marketing. The study notes that when influencers express genuine enthusiasm for a product without appearing overly promotional, consumers are more likely to trust their endorsement and engage with the campaign. Authenticity significantly impacts consumer trust, and research supports its relationship with purchase intentions. Audrezet et al. (2020) emphasize that authenticity leads to greater consumer trust and engagement when influencers exhibit genuine enthusiasm for products. This is particularly true in Southeast Asia, where trust in influencers translates directly into higher engagement and purchasing intent. When influencers maintain consistent, authentic engagement with their followers, consumers feel more confident in their endorsements, making them more likely to purchase the recommended products. However, the boundaries of authenticity are not without limitations. Southeast Asian consumers often seek influencers who balance authenticity with professionalism. Overly casual or personal content may risk losing credibility in markets where social hierarchies and professionalism are highly valued. Thus, Southeast Asian authenticity must be aligned with local perceptions of professionalism, trustworthiness, and respect for cultural norms.

Transparency in influencer marketing is critical in maintaining trust between influencers and their audiences. Transparency involves clear disclosure of paid partnerships or sponsorships, ensuring that consumers are aware of any commercial relationship between the influencer and the brand. Trustworthiness, defined as the integrity and credibility of a communicator (Erdogan, 1999), is a crucial component of the expertise of social media influencers (SMIs) (De Jans et al 2020; Shan et. al, 2019). SMIs must establish and maintain trustworthiness to endorse products and services (Schouten et al., 2020). The perceived trustworthiness of the source plays a key role in influencing subsequent behavior (Berger, 2014; Swanepoel, et. Al., 2009). Research on SMI advertising suggests that a lack of transparency can negatively impact perceived trustworthiness (Audrezet et al., 2020). In SMI advertising, failing to disclose sponsorship can obscure the intent to persuade, potentially exploiting followers' trust (Campbell and Marks, 2015). This lack of transparency is often viewed with suspicion and regarded as deceptive by the public (Lazauskas, 2014). Openness and transparency are essential to fostering trust and enhancing the effectiveness of advertising over time (Evans et al., 2019). Studies by Campbell and Marks (2015) and Chu and Kamal (2008) show a positive relationship between blogger trustworthiness and followers' attitudes toward the

brand. However, Boerman, et al. (2017) argue that disclosing persuasive intent in advertising (i.e., persuasion knowledge), combined with a negative emotional response (i.e., negative affect), could undermine the trustworthiness of an SMI.

Transparency is fundamental to building and maintaining trust in influencer marketing. It involves clear disclosure of paid partnerships or sponsorships, enabling consumers to understand the commercial intent behind the influencer's content (Campbell & Marks, 2015). A lack of transparency can blur the line between genuine recommendations and paid promotion, leading to scepticism and diminishing the influencer's credibility (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lazauskas, 2014). Transparency is thus closely tied to the broader construct of trustworthiness, which encompasses honesty and integrity (Erdogan, 1999). However, transparency is not without its complexities. While full disclosure is intended to empower consumers, it can also trigger persuasion knowledge, where followers become aware of the intent to persuade. This awareness, particularly when coupled with negative emotions, can backfire and reduce the influencer's perceived trustworthiness (Boerman, et. al, 2017). Thus, the way transparency is communicated matters just as much as its presence. Disclosures must be delivered in a way that preserves authenticity and relatability while still fulfilling ethical obligations.

Trustworthiness, as defined by De Jans et al. (2020) and Shan et al. (2019), is a critical component of an influencer's effectiveness. Research consistently demonstrates that trustworthy influencers foster positive attitudes toward the brand (Chu & Kamal, 2008) and increase the likelihood of consumer engagement and purchase intention (Schouten et al., 2020). Conversely, influencers who do not clearly disclose sponsored content risk damaging their reputation, eroding long-term trust, and diminishing the persuasive impact of their messages (Campbell & Marks, 2015; Berger, 2014). Importantly, transparency does not operate in isolation—it intersects with other factors such as authenticity and expertise. An influencer may be transparent about their commercial ties, but if their content lacks authenticity or domain knowledge, their transparency alone will not establish credibility. Therefore, transparency should be understood as part of a broader constellation of traits that contribute to influencer effectiveness.

Transparent disclosure is positively associated with consumer trust and favorable brand attitudes (Evans et al., 2019; Campbell & Marks, 2015). In the Southeast Asian context, where social proof and peer influence are powerful, trustworthiness enhanced by transparency can significantly drive purchase intention. Influencers who consistently disclose sponsorships while maintaining authentic engagement and content alignment tend to outperform those who conceal their promotional ties. Therefore, transparency should be regarded as a compliance requirement and a strategic approach to strengthening long-term influencer-brand-consumer relationships.

Disclosure of Sponsorship: When influencers disclose that they are being paid to promote a product, it builds transparency and trust with their audience. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the commercial nature of influencer marketing, and failure to disclose paid partnerships can lead to mistrust and adverse reactions. According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) guidelines in the U.S., influencers must disclose any sponsorships or material relationships with brands to avoid misleading their audience. A study by Evans et al. (2017) found that transparency in sponsorship disclosure positively affects consumer attitudes toward the influencer and the brand. When influencers disclose that their content is sponsored, it mitigates potential scepticism and enhances the perceived trustworthiness of both the influencer and the campaign.

Another significant factor affecting consumer responses to influencer marketing is relatability. Consumers are more likely to trust and engage with influencers they can relate to on a personal level. Relatability refers to how similar the influencer is to the consumer, lifestyle, values, or personal experiences. When consumers perceive an influencer as someone similar to themselves, they are more likely to view the influencer as trustworthy and credible.

Relatability: Influencers who share personal stories, struggles, or successes that resonate with their audience often create stronger emotional connections. This relatability makes their product recommendations feel more authentic and less like traditional advertising. For instance, a fitness influencer who shares their personal journey of weight loss and healthy living is more relatable to followers with similar goals. According to Schouten et al. (2020), relatability is a key predictor of an influencer's success, as it fosters a sense of identification and trust between the influencer and the consumer. Relatability is a central factor in determining the persuasive power of an influencer. It reflects the degree to which consumers perceive influencers as similar to themselves in values, experiences, or lifestyle. Unlike traditional celebrities who often feel distant or aspirational, relatable influencers create a sense of proximity by sharing everyday experiences, personal challenges, and authentic life stories (Schouten et al., 2020). This emotional transparency fosters trust, making their product endorsements appear less like advertisements and more like recommendations from a peer. Relatability also functions as a bridge between authenticity and trustworthiness. For example, a fitness influencer who documents their own weight loss journey, complete with setbacks and progress, tends to evoke empathy and identification. This identification strengthens parasocial relationships, one-sided emotional bonds that followers form with influencers. As these relationships deepen, so does the likelihood of followers accepting and acting on product recommendations (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Relatability positively affects both consumer trust and behavioural intentions. Research by Schouten et al. (2020) suggests that the sense of similarity and shared experience fosters identification, which in turn enhances trust and increases the likelihood of purchase. In the Southeast Asian context, where collectivism and social harmony are emphasised, emotional resonance and shared values may carry even more weight in the decision-making process. Overall, relatability enhances the perceived authenticity of an influencer's content and strengthens the emotional bond between influencer and consumer. This bond is crucial for building trust, driving engagement, and ultimately influencing consumer responses in the highly competitive landscape of digital marketing.

Emotional Appeal: Emotional appeal is closely tied to relatability. Influencers who evoke emotional responses from their audience are more likely to build trust and loyalty. Whether through humour, inspiration, or empathy, emotional content tends to engage followers on a deeper level, making them more receptive to the influencer's message. A study by Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that influencers who use emotional appeal in their content are perceived as more authentic and trustworthy, which positively influences consumer attitudes toward the promoted brand.

Emotional appeal is a powerful driver of trust, engagement, and loyalty in influencer marketing. Closely linked to relatability, emotional appeal refers to an influencer's ability to evoke emotional reactions—such as joy, empathy, inspiration, or even sadness—that create deeper connections with their audience. Unlike purely informational content, emotionally driven content often leads to stronger memory recall and more positive brand associations (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). When influencers tap into emotional storytelling, their messages are more likely to be perceived as authentic rather than commercially motivated. However, the effectiveness of emotional appeal depends on consistency and sincerity. If emotional content appears overly dramatized or disconnected from the influencer's typical style, it may be perceived as manipulative or inauthentic. Thus, for emotional appeal to enhance trust, it must be grounded in real experiences and conveyed through sincere, relatable expression.

Emotional appeal has a direct impact on how consumers perceive both the influencer and the endorsed brand. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that emotional resonance enhances perceptions of authenticity and trustworthiness, which in turn shape favourable consumer attitudes. Emotional content often leads to greater engagement, such as likes, comments, and shares, and may even increase the virality of marketing campaigns. In the Southeast Asian market, where emotional storytelling and social bonds are culturally significant, the ability of influencers to "move" their audience emotionally is a key asset. This emotional

bond not only fosters brand loyalty but also influences purchasing decisions, as consumers feel a stronger sense of alignment with both the influencer and the values represented by the brand.

The factors influencing trustworthiness in influencer marketing have been extensively studied in academic literature. Numerous studies have explored the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer behaviour, providing empirical evidence to support the importance of these trustworthiness factors.

Source credibility: Research by Ohanian (1990) established that expertise and trustworthiness are critical elements in source credibility, influencing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Barta (2021) explores the complex connection between social media influencers and consumer intentions, highlighting the critical role of consumer trust in influencing purchasing decisions. Building on this, Lee (2020) examines how social media influencers affect consumer behaviour, with a focus on influencer credibility, consumer opinions, and purchasing habits. Using structural equation modelling, Lee shows a positive correlation between trust in influencers and more favourable consumer attitudes toward the products or services they endorse.

By focusing on these trustworthiness factors and grounding the discussion in academic research, we can better understand how consumers form perceptions of influencers and, consequently, how they respond to influencer marketing campaigns.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this literature review has highlighted the critical trustworthiness factors that significantly impact consumer responses to influencer marketing campaigns. The key factors identified include source credibility, transparency, relatability, and emotional appeal, each playing a vital role in shaping how consumers perceive influencer endorsements and, consequently, how they engage with the promoted products or services.

The findings from the reviewed literature underscore the critical role of trustworthiness in shaping consumer responses to influencer marketing campaigns. This review examined key dimensions of trustworthiness—expertise, authenticity, transparency, relatability, and emotional appeal—and highlighted their individual and collective influence on consumer engagement, brand perception, and purchase intention, particularly within the Southeast Asian context.

Expertise has been repeatedly identified as a core component of source credibility in influencer marketing. Ohanian (1990) emphasized that perceived expertise significantly affects consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions. Subsequent studies, including Hovland and Weiss (1951) and Lim et al. (2020), further confirm that influencers with domain-specific knowledge are perceived as more credible, thereby enhancing persuasion and purchase intention. In Southeast Asia, expertise is closely tied to cultural relevance. For instance, in markets such as Malaysia and Indonesia, consumers place higher value on influencers who exhibit localized knowledge—such as familiarity with halal-certified products or regional skincare needs (Lim et al., 2020). This localized expertise not only fosters trust but also aligns with cultural and religious expectations, contributing to the effectiveness of influencer campaigns in the region.

Authenticity is another pivotal factor influencing trust. Audrezet et al. (2020) argue that authenticity—defined as consistency between an influencer's persona and their endorsements—positively impacts consumer trust and engagement. This is particularly critical in influencer marketing, where audiences are increasingly sceptical of overtly commercial content. In Southeast Asian societies, authenticity must also reflect cultural congruence. Influencers who integrate local customs, speak regional languages, and convey personal values aligned with community norms are more likely to be perceived as authentic, thereby reinforcing consumer confidence and loyalty.

Transparency, specifically in the disclosure of paid partnerships, is essential for maintaining the integrity of influencer-consumer relationships. Studies by Boerman et al. (2017) and Campbell and Marks (2015) reveal that transparency in sponsorship disclosure positively influences consumer perceptions of both the influencer and the endorsed brand. However, transparency must be carefully communicated. Excessively overt disclosures may activate consumers' persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2017), potentially reducing perceived trustworthiness. In Southeast Asia, where collectivist values emphasize moral responsibility and trust (Schouten et al., 2020), deceptive practices—such as failing to disclose paid endorsements—are likely to result in reputational harm and consumer backlash.

Relatability, or the degree to which consumers identify with an influencer's lifestyle, values, and experiences, has been shown to foster stronger emotional bonds and parasocial relationships (Schouten et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements, relatable influencers are perceived as "people like me," making their product recommendations appear more genuine and less commercially driven. This factor is particularly salient in Southeast Asia, where community-oriented values enhance the importance of shared experiences. Influencers who share personal narratives, especially those reflecting local life, struggles, and aspirations—are more likely to cultivate lasting engagement and trust.

Emotional appeal, often intertwined with relatability, further amplifies trust and consumer loyalty. According to Sokolova and Kefi (2020), emotionally resonant content increases perceptions of authenticity and leads to more favourable attitudes toward the brand. Emotional storytelling—especially when delivered via platforms that allow expressive communication, such as TikTok or Instagram Reels—can evoke empathy and cultural resonance. In Southeast Asia, emotional narratives that align with religious, familial, or cultural values (e.g., stories related to festivals or community challenges) are especially potent in influencing consumer attitudes and behavioural responses.

In sum, the reviewed literature suggests that trustworthiness in influencer marketing is multidimensional, shaped not only by individual traits such as expertise and authenticity but also by cultural and contextual factors. The Southeast Asian context, characterised by collectivist values, religious considerations, and high digital engagement, requires a culturally sensitive approach to influencer marketing. Influencers who localize their content, demonstrate genuine expertise, and maintain ethical transparency are better positioned to establish trust and drive favourable consumer outcomes.

Future research should consider deeper empirical exploration of these factors across varying cultural contexts within Southeast Asia to validate and extend these findings. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could provide insight into how sustained trustworthiness impacts long-term consumer-brand relationships in digital environments.

This research consistently emphasizes the pivotal role of trustworthiness in driving the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Across both developed and developing countries, authenticity, credibility, and transparency emerge as crucial factors that influence consumer behaviour. In developed economies, such as the United States and United Kingdom, transparency and full disclosure of paid partnerships are essential for maintaining consumer trust and increasing engagement (Audrezet et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Studies show that 83% of consumers in these regions trust influencer recommendations over traditional advertisements when trust and transparency are present (Kim & Kim, 2021).

In developing economies, trustworthiness is also critical but often tied more closely to relatability and authenticity. Consumers in countries like Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia demonstrate strong trust in influencers who are seen as genuine and relatable, with 67% of millennials in Malaysia trusting influencer recommendations (Kaushalya & Ranaweera, 2021). Transparency remains important, as 52% of Indonesian consumers consider disclosure a key influence on their purchasing decisions (Nurhandayani et al., 2019). In summary, building trust through credible, transparent, and authentic influencer relationships is fundamental to the success of influencer marketing campaigns across all markets. Brands that leverage these trust factors can enhance consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and purchase intention, ensuring

higher returns on investment in both developed and developing economies (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Harrigan et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021).

TikTok live streaming has a strong positive influence on brand awareness, brand trust, and purchasing decisions, underscoring the platform's importance in marketing strategies tailored to specific target markets and goals. The study emphasizes the mediating role of brand awareness in driving purchase decisions via TikTok live streaming, highlighting the need for businesses to prioritize creating engaging content and building consumer trust to encourage favourable purchasing outcomes. The study highlights the importance of companies partnering with TikTok influencers to promote their products and brands, particularly when targeting younger audiences such as millennials and Generation Z, who are more impacted by influencer content than traditional advertising methods.

Followers are likelier to trust influencers who showcase expertise in the specific area they are promoting, underscoring the importance of credibility in influencer marketing. Inconsistency between regular content and advertisements diminishes credibility, highlighting the need for a consistent message to sustain follower trust. The perceived trustworthiness of influencers positively impacts brand engagement in self-concept, perceived brand value, and the intention to purchase recommended brands. Additionally, brand engagement in self-concept enhances both perceived brand value and purchase intentions for recommended brands, with perceived brand value also directly contributing to the intention to buy those brands.

Source credibility, encompassing expertise, and authenticity, is paramount in establishing trust. Influencers perceived as knowledgeable and genuine are more likely to generate positive consumer engagement, leading to higher purchase intent and brand loyalty. Authentic influencers who stay true to their personal brand and values foster deeper connections with their audience, enhancing the effectiveness of their promotional efforts.

Transparency, particularly in disclosing sponsorships, also emerged as a crucial factor in maintaining consumer trust. As consumers become more aware of paid partnerships, transparent and honest disclosures have been shown to reduce scepticism and improve consumer attitudes toward influencers and the brands they promote. Transparency protects the integrity of influencer marketing and ensures ethical practices that enhance the long-term sustainability of this marketing strategy.

Relatability and emotional appeal further contribute to trustworthiness by fostering personal connections between influencers and their audiences. Influencers who are seen as relatable and who share authentic, emotionally engaging content resonate more deeply with consumers. This connection is often the key to driving consumer loyalty and encouraging engagement with influencer campaigns. Whether through personal stories or shared experiences, relatable influencers create a sense of identification and trust that amplifies their promotional influence.

As the influencer marketing landscape evolves, these trustworthiness factors will remain central to its effectiveness. The rise of micro-influencers, the growing emphasis on authentic content, and the increasing role of transparency regulations all point to a future where trust is the cornerstone of successful influencer campaigns. Brands that prioritize partnerships with credible, relatable, and transparent influencers are more likely to foster meaningful consumer relationships and achieve long-term success in the digital marketplace.

In conclusion, influencer marketing's power lies not just in the reach of influencers but in the trust they can establish with their audiences. As consumers become more discerning, trustworthiness will continue to be a determining factor in shaping their responses to influencer campaigns. Therefore, marketers must carefully consider these factors when crafting their influencer strategies to ensure they align with the evolving expectations of today's consumers.

IMPLICATIONS TO RESEARCHER AND PRACTITIONERS

Researchers can further explore the multifaceted role of trustworthiness in influencer marketing, particularly in different cultural and economic contexts. The findings highlight the importance of credibility, authenticity, and transparency in building trust, which suggests opportunities for more in-depth studies on the factors influencing consumer trust across various influencer types and platforms (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2021). Future research can also investigate how specific trust dimensions (e.g., expertise vs. authenticity) impact purchase intentions differently across demographic groups (Kaushalya & Ranaweera, 2021).

Practitioners in influencer marketing should prioritize transparent communication in partnerships. In developed markets, failing to disclose paid promotions risks damaging the credibility of both the influencer and the brand. Clear disclosures of sponsorships can enhance consumer trust, positively influencing purchase intentions (Audrezet et al., 2020; Kim & Kim, 2021). For brands, implementing ethical guidelines for transparency in influencer collaborations is essential to maintaining a positive consumer perception (Harrigan et al., 2021).

The evolving nature of influencer marketing provides opportunities for longitudinal research to examine how trust develops over time between influencers and their audiences. This can inform how long-term relationships impact brand loyalty and purchase behaviour and how trust erodes or strengthens with transparent disclosures (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Building long-term relationships with influencers rather than engaging in one-off campaigns can enhance trust and brand loyalty. Influencers who consistently promote a brand over time are perceived as more authentic, thereby increasing the likelihood of positive consumer responses (Kim & Kim, 2021). This approach is especially relevant in both developed and developing markets where trust is foundational to consumer engagement.

This research underscores the critical role of influencer marketing in fostering trust-based relationships between brands and consumers within the electronics industry, especially in developed and developing countries, where social media presence is highly influential. This suggests that electronics companies should actively participate in influencer marketing to strengthen brand trust and expand their consumer reach.

The study indicates that by comprehending the effects of influencer credibility, alignment between the influencer and the brand, and audience engagement on consumer-perceived brand trust, companies can refine their marketing strategies to capitalize on influencers in the Southeast Asia e-market effectively. This implies that businesses can enhance brand trust by focusing on these key elements when partnering with influencers on social media platforms. Fast fashion companies can gain significant advantages by leveraging celebrity endorsements that emphasize trustworthiness, attractiveness, credibility, and expertise to impact consumers' purchase intentions and impulse buying behaviours positively. Recognising the mediating effect of purchase intention can enable firms in the fast fashion sector to create more effective marketing strategies, using celebrity endorsements to influence consumer actions and, in turn, enhance their sustainability initiatives.

The study's findings indicate that businesses can improve their influencer engagement strategies for marketing communications by focusing on key aspects of influencer credibility, such as trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and relatability. This approach can enhance perceived product quality and boost purchase intentions among millennial consumers. By understanding how perceived quality mediates the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intentions, businesses can develop more effective strategies to use influencer marketing on Instagram, positively shaping consumer behaviour.

Future research could explore the effects of various types of social media influencers (such as celebrities, YouTubers, and Instafamous personalities) on young adult purchasing behaviour to identify which type exerts the greatest influence. Additionally, another avenue for future research is to examine the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies across different regions in Malaysia, aiming to determine if young adult purchasing behaviours vary by geographical location. The evolving nature of influencer marketing presents numerous opportunities for future academic research. This review highlights key areas where further study could deepen our understanding:

As artificial intelligence (AI) tools become more prevalent in identifying influencers and measuring campaign success, future research could explore the ethical and practical implications of automated influencer marketing. Questions remain about how AI might affect trust and authenticity, especially if consumers feel that influencer selection or content generation lacks a personal touch.

Micro-influencers are generally perceived as more authentic; the exact impact they have on different demographic groups is an area ripe for further investigation. Researchers could study how younger versus older consumers respond to influencer tiers and how this impacts their buying decisions across various industries.

With increasing scrutiny on transparency and ethical marketing, future research should focus on how evolving regulations, such as mandated disclosures, impact consumer trust and brand loyalty. Analysing consumer attitudes toward both disclosed and non-disclosed sponsorships could help refine regulatory practices and provide best practices for marketers.

For marketing professionals, this review's findings provide clear strategies for enhancing the trustworthiness of influencer campaigns. The trust factors identified—source credibility, transparency, relatability, and emotional appeal can be leveraged to design more impactful marketing strategies that foster long-term consumer loyalty.

One of the most critical insights is the importance of authenticity. Marketers should partner with influencers who align with the brand's values and have an authentic voice within their niche. Encouraging influencers to create organic, unscripted content rather than rigid promotional messages can enhance consumer trust and engagement. Micro-influencers, in particular, offer a promising route for brands aiming to reach niche markets with higher authenticity and relatability.

Transparency is essential to maintain trust in influencer marketing. Brands should work with influencers willing to disclose all sponsored content clearly and consistently. Additionally, brands can go beyond the minimum disclosure requirements by encouraging influencers to provide honest reviews, even if they include positives and negatives, further boosting authenticity.

Campaigns that evoke emotional responses resonate more with audiences. Marketing professionals should encourage influencers to use emotional storytelling that aligns with the brand message. Marketers can foster deeper engagement and loyalty by focusing on personal narratives, shared experiences, and emotional connections.

Not all consumers respond to influencer marketing similarly, so it is crucial to tailor campaigns to specific demographic and psychographic segments. Younger audiences may value influencer authenticity and emotional appeal more, while older demographics respond better to influencers with precise expertise and professionalism. Segmenting influencer campaigns based on these preferences can improve overall effectiveness.

Marketers can leverage AI tools to analyse consumer data, identify influencers with high engagement rates, and measure campaign success. However, they must balance automation with human oversight to ensure that campaigns maintain a personal, authentic touch. Data analytics should be used to optimise influencer selection, ensuring that influencers match the brand's values and resonate with the target audience.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Sarah Aida Azhar was responsible for conducting the research and drafting the article. Zatul Fahany Harun conceptualized the study and provided supervision throughout the research process. Yuslina Liza Mohd Yusof supervised the critical review and revisions and granted approval for the final article submission.

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