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Influencer Credibility as a Digital Advertising Strategy: Its Impact on Social Media Consumers' Purchase Intentions in Indonesia

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Abstract

In Indonesia's rapidly evolving digital ecosystem, social media influencers have become central actors in shaping brand–consumer communication and purchasing behavior. This qualitative descriptive study explores how perceptions of influencer credibility influence consumers' purchase intentions amid increasing media fatigue. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 40 purposively selected social media users who actively engage with influencer content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings. The findings reveal that influencer credibility is primarily constructed through perceived authenticity, honest communication, and congruence between the influencer's lifestyle and the audience's values. These elements foster stronger parasocial relationships, enhancing emotional trust and increasing the likelihood of purchase decisions. However, the study also finds that repetitive, overly commercial, or insincere promotional content contributes to media fatigue, which weakens perceived credibility and reduces persuasive effectiveness. Participants emphasized growing skepticism toward influencers who frequently endorse multiple brands without clear relevance or personal experience. Consequently, audiences become more selective and critical in interpreting influencer messages. The study suggests that brands should prioritize value alignment, narrative authenticity, and long-term relationships over follower count or short-term exposure when selecting influencers. By situating influencer credibility and media fatigue within Indonesia's socio-digital context, this research contributes empirically to influencer marketing literature and provides practical insights for marketers seeking sustainable and trust-based digital advertising strategies.

Keywords: Influencer Credibility; Purchase Intention; Parasocial Relationship; Media Fatigue; Social Media Marketing

1. Introduction

The following are instructions for writing a manuscript in the RIGGS Journal (Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Business) published by the department of digital business, Universitas Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai. The authors are fully responsible for the contents of the manuscripts written and the manuscripts are writings that have never been published [1]. The reference list is made sequentially starting from 1, 2, 3 and so on.

The rapid growth of digital technology and widespread internet access have fundamentally transformed how brands communicate with consumers, particularly through social media platforms. In Indonesia, digital connectivity has reached unprecedented levels—according to *DataReportal* (2024), over 191 million Indonesians are active social media users, representing 69% of the total population. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are not only entertainment hubs but have also become critical tools for digital advertising and brand engagement. With users spending an average of 3 hours and 8 minutes daily on social media, these platforms offer a powerful environment for influencing purchasing behavior.

Media fatigue refers to a psychological state of exhaustion, disengagement, and reduced attention experienced by audiences due to prolonged exposure to repetitive and overly commercial media content. In the context of social media, media fatigue commonly arises from overexposure to promotional messages, frequent sponsored posts, and excessive influencer endorsements that lack variation or personal relevance. As social media feeds become saturated with similar advertising narratives, users may experience cognitive overload, leading to avoidance behaviors such as skipping content, unfollowing influencers, or developing skepticism toward promotional messages. Previous studies suggest that media fatigue negatively affects consumer trust, weakens emotional engagement, and reduces message persuasiveness, particularly when audiences perceive influencer content as

Influencer Credibility as a Digital Advertising Strategy: Its Impact on Social Media Consumers' Purchase Intentions in Indonesia

inauthentic or purely profit-driven. Consequently, media fatigue not only diminishes the effectiveness of digital advertising but also threatens the perceived credibility of influencers, which is a critical determinant of consumer attitudes and purchase intentions.

The post-pandemic era has also seen a shift in consumer psychology. Consumers are no longer passive recipients of promotional content; instead, they critically assess the authenticity, transparency, and social relevance of marketing messages. This aligns with McKinsey's (2023) findings that Indonesian consumers increasingly prefer brands that demonstrate social values and authenticity. Simultaneously, the phenomenon of media fatigue—a psychological state of exhaustion from repetitive, insincere, or overly commercial content—has become more prevalent, leading to consumer disengagement from traditional promotional tactics.

In this context, social media influencers have emerged as strategic intermediaries between brands and consumers. Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers often cultivate niche communities based on trust, relatability, and consistent content engagement. Their perceived credibility—encompassing *trustworthiness*, *expertise*, and *attractiveness*—makes them effective in shaping consumer perceptions, attitudes, and ultimately, purchase intentions (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019). However, the success of influencer marketing depends largely on whether followers perceive the influencer as a credible and authentic figure.

Although influencer marketing has been widely examined in existing literature, several critical gaps remain. Most previous studies on influencer credibility and purchase intention have predominantly employed quantitative approaches, focusing on measurable variables such as trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise (Jin et al., 2019; Weismueller et al., 2020). While these studies provide statistical generalizations, they offer limited insight into how consumers subjectively interpret credibility and emotionally respond to influencer content. Moreover, the majority of influencer marketing research has been conducted in Western or developed-country contexts, where cultural norms, consumer skepticism, and digital consumption patterns may differ significantly from those in emerging markets.

In addition, existing studies tend to examine influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and purchase intention as separate or linear constructs, with relatively little attention given to the role of media fatigue as a moderating or contextual factor. The growing phenomenon of audience exhaustion caused by repetitive and overly commercial influencer content remains underexplored, particularly from the consumer's lived experience perspective. Furthermore, there is a lack of qualitative research that captures the voices and personal experiences of Indonesian social media users, despite Indonesia being one of the largest and most active social media markets globally. Addressing these gaps, this study seeks to provide a contextualized and in-depth understanding of influencer credibility and media fatigue within Indonesia's unique socio-digital environment.

While existing studies on influencer marketing have largely relied on quantitative measurements to examine relationships between credibility and purchase intention, numerical indicators alone are insufficient to capture the complex emotional and interpretive processes underlying consumer responses to influencer content. Perceptions of credibility, feelings of media fatigue, and the formation of parasocial relationships are deeply subjective and context-dependent, shaped by personal experiences, values, and emotional engagement. Therefore, a qualitative approach, particularly through in-depth semi-structured interviews, is essential to explore how consumers make sense of influencer messages, how they emotionally negotiate trust and skepticism, and how prolonged exposure to promotional content generates feelings of fatigue or disengagement. By allowing participants to articulate their own experiences and meanings, qualitative inquiry provides richer insights into audience emotions, credibility judgments, and relational dynamics that cannot be adequately explained through statistical analysis alone.

Studies such as those by Audrezet et al. (2020) and Lim et al. (2017) emphasize that authenticity and parasocial relationships—the one-sided emotional bonds consumers form with public figures—are key mechanisms through which influencers impact behavior. Yet, most of these studies are situated in Western or global North contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics operate within culturally specific environments like Indonesia, where social norms, emotional expression, and digital behaviors may differ.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore how Indonesian consumers perceive influencer credibility within the framework of digital advertising, and how such perceptions shape their intention to purchase. It adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to provide a nuanced understanding of consumer interpretations, emotional responses, and lived experiences when engaging with influencer content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

By focusing on Indonesia's unique socio-digital landscape, this research aims to contribute new insights into digital consumer behavior, particularly in emerging markets where influencer culture is rapidly evolving but underexplored academically. The findings are expected to provide strategic implications for digital marketers in selecting and collaborating with influencers based on credibility and emotional resonance rather than mere popularity metrics.

This study offers a theoretical contribution by extending influencer marketing and parasocial interaction literature through a qualitative exploration of how credibility and media fatigue interact in shaping consumer purchase intention. By foregrounding audience interpretations and emotional responses, the research enriches existing models that have largely relied on quantitative and linear assumptions. From a practical perspective, the findings provide actionable insights for brands, digital marketers, and influencer agencies in selecting and managing influencers based on authenticity, value alignment, and audience trust rather than follower metrics alone. The study also informs the development of sustainable influencer strategies that minimize audience fatigue while maintaining long-term credibility and engagement.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how Indonesian social media users perceive influencer credibility and how these perceptions shape purchase intention in the presence of media fatigue. Specifically, this research focuses on the roles of authenticity, honest communication, and value alignment in forming credibility, as well as the influence of parasocial relationships on consumer trust and decision-making. By adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, this study seeks to capture consumers' lived experiences, emotional responses, and interpretive processes when engaging with influencer-generated content. Academically, this research contributes to the influencer marketing literature by integrating credibility, media fatigue, and parasocial interaction within an emerging-market context. Practically, the findings are expected to provide strategic insights for brands and digital marketers in designing sustainable influencer partnerships that prioritize authenticity, audience engagement, and long-term credibility over short-term promotional reach.

2. Research Methods

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design, aiming to explore in-depth consumer perceptions regarding influencer credibility in the context of digital advertising. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for capturing subjective interpretations, emotional experiences, and nuanced behavioral insights that are not easily quantifiable (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

1) Research Design

The research employed in-depth semi-structured interviews as the primary method for data collection. This allowed for flexibility in probing emergent themes while ensuring consistency in the core topics discussed across participants.

2) Participant Selection

Participants were selected through purposive sampling with clearly defined inclusion criteria to ensure relevance and information richness. The selection criteria were:

- a) Active users of Instagram and/or TikTok (daily or regular usage),
- b) Aged between 18 and 30 years old,
- c) Had made at least one purchase based on an influencer's recommendation,
- d) Were able to articulate their perceptions about influencer credibility and marketing messages.

A total of 20 participants were recruited. The sample size was deemed sufficient based on the principle of thematic saturation—where no new themes emerged from additional interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

3) Data Collection Procedures

Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or via video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom), depending on participant availability and preference. The interview protocol was designed to elicit participant views on:

- a) How they assess influencer credibility (trustworthiness, expertise, authenticity),
- b) Their emotional connection with influencers (parasocial interaction),
- c) Their purchase behavior influenced by influencer content,
- d) Their feelings of fatigue or skepticism toward promotional content.

All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

4) Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted following the six-phase process by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- a) Familiarization with the data – reading and re-reading transcripts,
- b) Generating initial codes – identifying meaningful units of data,
- c) Searching for themes – organizing codes into broader themes,
- d) Reviewing themes – refining and validating themes across the dataset,
- e) Defining and naming themes – clarifying the essence of each theme,
- f) Producing the report – integrating themes into a coherent narrative.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, peer debriefing was conducted with a second coder to validate themes and interpretations. Additionally, reflexive journaling was used by the researcher to monitor personal biases during analysis.

5) Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical guidelines for human subject research. All participants provided informed consent before data collection. Anonymity was maintained through pseudonyms, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

3. Results and Discussions

This section presents and discusses the findings derived from qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews with 20 Indonesian social media users who had previously made purchase decisions based on influencer recommendations. The analysis follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach and focuses on three interrelated themes: influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and media fatigue, as well as their implications for purchase intention within Indonesia's socio-digital context.

3.1 Influencer Credibility as a Central Determinant of Purchase Intention

The findings indicate that influencer credibility plays a pivotal role in shaping consumers' purchase intentions in the context of social media marketing. Participants consistently emphasized that credibility is not merely derived from numerical indicators such as popularity or follower count, but is primarily constructed through perceived authenticity, honest communication, and value alignment between influencers and their audiences. Influencers who openly share personal experiences, communicate transparently about products, and demonstrate consistency between their online persona and offline lifestyle are perceived as more trustworthy and persuasive. These attributes allow audiences to perceive influencer content as sincere and relatable rather than strategically manipulative.

Table 1 summarizes the key dimensions of influencer credibility identified by participants, highlighting the aspects most frequently mentioned during interviews.

Table 1. Dimensions of Influencer Credibility

Credibility Theme	Number of Informants (n = 20)
Authenticity of content	18
Honest communication style	16

Value and lifestyle alignment	14
Not overly commercial	12

The dominance of authenticity as the most cited credibility dimension suggests that audiences place greater importance on genuine self-expression and personal storytelling than on polished advertising messages. Participants frequently associated authenticity with influencers who provide balanced reviews, acknowledge product limitations, or integrate promotional content naturally into their daily routines. Such practices reduce perceptions of commercial intent and strengthen trust.

Most informants expressed a clear preference for micro-influencers who present relatable narratives and maintain closer interaction with their followers. Compared to celebrity influencers, micro-influencers were perceived as more approachable and less driven by financial motives. This perception enhances credibility by fostering a sense of similarity and social proximity between influencers and audiences. One participant (INF07) stated, *“I don’t feel like she’s selling, it’s more like she’s sharing. That’s why I trust her.”* This statement illustrates how credibility emerges through perceived sincerity and narrative realism rather than explicit persuasive techniques.

Furthermore, participants noted that excessive commercialization undermines influencer credibility. Influencers who frequently promote unrelated products or endorse multiple brands within a short period were perceived as opportunistic, leading to increased skepticism and reduced purchase intention. This finding indicates that credibility is not a static attribute but a fragile construct that can be weakened by inconsistent endorsement behavior.

These findings support previous studies asserting that authenticity and trustworthiness are core elements of source credibility that significantly influence purchase intention (Jin et al., 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). However, this study extends existing literature by demonstrating that credibility is subjectively constructed through everyday interpretations, emotional resonance, and cultural expectations among Indonesian audiences. In a highly saturated digital environment, credibility functions not only as a persuasive cue but also as a moral and relational judgment, shaping whether influencer recommendations are accepted or rejected.

3.2 Parasocial Relationships and Emotional Trust

Beyond influencer credibility, the findings reveal that parasocial relationships play a significant mediating role in the relationship between credibility and purchase intention. Participants frequently described influencers using relational terms such as *“friends,” “role models,”* or *“someone relatable,”* indicating the formation of one-sided yet emotionally meaningful bonds. These parasocial interactions enable followers to perceive influencers not merely as content creators, but as familiar and trustworthy figures within their everyday digital lives. As a result, influencer recommendations are interpreted as personal suggestions rather than conventional advertising messages.

Participants consistently reported that emotional connection enhances trust, particularly when influencers share personal stories, daily routines, or struggles that resonate with followers’ own experiences. This sense of emotional closeness encourages audiences to internalize influencer messages and evaluate recommendations more positively. When followers feel understood or represented by an influencer, they are more likely to accept product endorsements as sincere advice grounded in lived experience rather than paid promotion.

From a theoretical perspective, this process aligns with the central route of persuasion proposed by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Parasocial relationships motivate deeper cognitive processing of influencer messages, increasing message elaboration and reducing resistance to persuasion. In this context, emotional trust functions as a psychological bridge that transforms credibility into behavioral intention.

Importantly, the influence of parasocial relationships is further intensified within the Indonesian socio-cultural context, where collectivist values, interpersonal harmony, and relational closeness are strongly emphasized. Influencers who communicate warmly, respond to audience comments, and display humility are perceived as more approachable and emotionally present. This relational style strengthens parasocial bonds and reinforces trust, ultimately enhancing purchase intention. These findings extend parasocial interaction theory by demonstrating that

its persuasive power is not universal, but culturally embedded and context-dependent, particularly in digitally networked societies such as Indonesia.

3.3 Media Fatigue as a Disruptor of Credibility and Engagement

Despite the positive influence of influencer credibility and parasocial relationships, media fatigue emerged as a critical factor that disrupts influencer effectiveness and audience engagement. More than half of the informants expressed feelings of exhaustion resulting from prolonged exposure to repetitive sponsored content, frequent brand endorsements, and limited variation in influencer narratives. As social media feeds become saturated with similar promotional messages, participants reported a growing sense of boredom, irritation, and cognitive overload, which ultimately reduced their willingness to engage with influencer content.

Participants indicated that media fatigue gradually fosters skepticism and emotional distancing from influencers. When promotional content is perceived as excessive or inconsistent with an influencer's usual persona, audiences begin to question the sincerity of endorsements. One participant (INF13) stated, *"When they promote different products every week, I start doubting whether they really use them."* This statement illustrates how repetitive endorsements weaken perceived authenticity and undermine the trust that initially supported parasocial relationships.

As a consequence, media fatigue leads to various avoidance behaviors, including skipping sponsored posts, muting influencer stories, unfollowing accounts, or completely disregarding promotional messages. These behavioral responses signal a shift in audience processing, where followers no longer engage thoughtfully with content but instead develop resistance toward persuasive attempts. In this sense, media fatigue functions as a credibility disruptor, eroding both emotional connection and persuasive power.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings align with the Elaboration Likelihood Model, in which audience fatigue prompts a transition from central route processing to peripheral or avoidance-based evaluation. When audiences feel overwhelmed or manipulated, they reduce cognitive effort and rely on heuristic cues, or disengage altogether. Consistent with Audrezet et al. (2020), over-commercialization diminishes trust and persuasive effectiveness. However, this study extends prior research by providing qualitative insight into how media fatigue is emotionally experienced, interpreted, and acted upon by Indonesian social media users, highlighting its role as a dynamic and relational challenge in influencer marketing.

3.4 Integration with Theory and Previous Studies

The findings of this study both support and extend existing influencer marketing literature by integrating influencer credibility, parasocial interaction, and media fatigue into a cohesive interpretive framework. While many prior studies—largely quantitative in nature—have emphasized the direct and linear relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention (Jin et al., 2019; Weismueller et al., 2020), the present findings reveal a more dynamic and relational process. Consumers' responses are shaped not only by credibility attributes, but also by emotional bonds and the cumulative effects of prolonged exposure to promotional content.

Consistent with previous research, credible influencers were found to encourage deeper cognitive and emotional engagement, reinforcing trust and increasing receptivity to persuasive messages (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). However, this study demonstrates that such engagement is conditional and reversible. When influencer content becomes repetitive or excessively commercial, media fatigue emerges and weakens both parasocial relationships and perceived credibility, leading to skepticism and disengagement. This finding extends Audrezet et al. (2020) by illustrating how authenticity can deteriorate over time due to audience exhaustion.

From a theoretical standpoint, these results align with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which posits that persuasion operates through both central and peripheral routes depending on audience motivation and ability to process information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In this study, influencer credibility and parasocial trust facilitate central route processing, whereas media fatigue reduces motivation to elaborate, prompting resistance, heuristic evaluation, or message avoidance. This dual-process dynamic highlights the importance of emotional and contextual variables in digital persuasion, suggesting that influencer effectiveness is not static but continuously negotiated through audience experiences and perceptions.

3.5 Discussion Summary

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of influencer marketing is contingent upon a delicate balance between authenticity-driven credibility, emotional connection, and sustainable content strategies. Influencer credibility emerges as a relational and dynamic construct, strengthened through authentic self-presentation, honest communication, and value alignment, yet vulnerable to erosion when audiences experience media fatigue. In Indonesia's highly saturated social media environment, excessive or repetitive promotional content poses a significant threat to trust, parasocial bonds, and long-term audience engagement.

The study highlights that credibility alone is insufficient to sustain persuasive impact without careful management of content frequency and narrative consistency. Parasocial relationships enhance emotional trust and purchase intention, but these bonds can weaken when influencers are perceived as overly commercial or inconsistent. Consequently, influencer marketing should be understood not as a one-time persuasive tactic, but as an ongoing relational process that requires strategic balance between commercial objectives and audience well-being. By emphasizing credibility as a fragile and continuously negotiated resource, this study reinforces the importance of authenticity, emotional sensitivity, and sustainability in influencer-based digital advertising.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that influencer credibility—particularly reflected through authentic content, honest communication, and value alignment—plays a crucial role in shaping purchase intention among social media consumers in Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that credibility is strengthened through parasocial relationships, in which followers develop emotional connections and perceive influencers as relatable and trustworthy figures. However, the study also reveals that media fatigue poses a significant challenge to influencer marketing effectiveness, as repetitive and overly commercial content undermines perceived authenticity, weakens trust, and reduces persuasive impact. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that digital marketers and brands should move beyond follower-based metrics when selecting influencers and instead prioritize authenticity, value congruence, and established audience trust. Influencer collaborations are likely to be more effective when they emphasize relatable storytelling and meaningful engagement rather than direct or excessive promotion. Additionally, managing promotional frequency and balancing sponsored and organic content are essential strategies to prevent audience fatigue and maintain long-term credibility. Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The qualitative approach and relatively small number of informants limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the focus on Indonesian social media users restricts the applicability of results to other cultural or digital contexts, which may exhibit different patterns of influencer engagement and consumer behavior. Future research is encouraged to adopt mixed-method designs to quantitatively examine the strength and direction of relationships among influencer credibility, parasocial interaction, media fatigue, and purchase intention. Further studies may also integrate variables such as brand fit, persuasion knowledge, and digital skepticism as potential mediators or moderators. Comparative analyses across different social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, and emerging digital channels, would provide deeper insights into platform-specific dynamics and enhance the robustness of influencer marketing research.

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