

The Effect of Content Quality and Influencer Credibility on Product Perception and its Impact on Gen Z's Buying Interest in TikTok Shop (Case Study on Students of the Faculty of Economics, State University of Jakarta)

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Abstract. The development of digital technology and the increasing use of social media, particularly TikTok, have changed the way Generation Z accesses information and makes purchasing decisions. This study aims to analyze the influence of content quality and influencer credibility on Generation Z's product perception and purchasing interest on the TikTok Shop platform. The method used is quantitative with a survey approach through an online questionnaire distributed to 100 active students from the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Jakarta who are TikTok users and have shopped on TikTok Shop. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS to test validity, reliability, and relationships between variables. The results of the study indicate that digital content quality has a significant influence on product perception and purchase intent. Influencer credibility also significantly influences purchase intent but does not affect product perception. Meanwhile, product perception does not significantly influence purchase intent, and the indirect influence of content quality and influencer credibility through product perception on purchase intent is also not significant. These findings confirm that Generation Z's purchasing behavior is more directly influenced by the appeal of content and influencer credibility, reflecting the tendency toward impulse buying in the social media era.

Keywords: TikTok Shop, Generation Z, content quality, influencer credibility, product perception, purchase interest, social media, digital marketing.

Introduction

Background

The development of information and communication technology has changed various aspects of human life, including in the fields of economics and business. Digital transformation was further accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, where mobility restriction policies encouraged people to switch to digital activities. The internet has now become a basic necessity in modern life, as well as the main driver of progress in various sectors, including marketing and trade. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Finance shows that Indonesia's digital economy is projected to continue growing, from USD 77 billion in 2022 to USD 99 billion in 2025. This growth reflects the increasing penetration of digitalization in the national economy. One of the main drivers of consumer behavior change in the digital era is social media. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2024), the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 221.5 million people, or 79.5% of the total population, with Generation Z (those born between the mid-1990s and 2010) as the most dominant users. This generation grew up in the digital age, making them highly tech-savvy and reliant on social media as a source of information, including in purchasing decisions.

Among various social media platforms, TikTok stands out as one of the most influential. Launched in 2016, TikTok has grown rapidly thanks to its advanced algorithm that delivers personalized content, interactive features (such as duets, stitches, and creative effects), and ease for ordinary users to become content creators. According to sources taken from GoodStats quoting from Jakpat, it is stated that the

majority of gen z uses the TikTok application 24% as a source of information in their lives and spends more than an hour in one access. The platform's success lies not only in its ability to entertain but also in its role as an effective digital marketing tool. TikTok has become a platform for digital influencers to build emotional connections with their audience through authentic content, such as product reviews, tutorials, storytelling, and live shopping. A Populix survey (2023) revealed that 86% of respondents use TikTok as an online shopping platform, highlighting the significant influence of content creators in shaping consumer purchasing interests. Generation Z, as the primary users of TikTok, tend to trust recommendations from influencers they follow more than traditional advertisements. This is because influencers often present content in a more personal style, based on real experiences, and aligned with trends favored by Gen Z.

The influence of digital influencers on Gen Z's purchasing interest is influenced by two main factors: content quality and influencer credibility. Content quality encompasses appeal, relevance, and the informational value conveyed, while influencer credibility includes trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. These two factors shape consumers' perceptions of a product, ultimately influencing their purchasing interest. Preliminary findings suggest that Gen Z is more likely to purchase products recommended by influencers they trust, especially if the content is presented in an engaging and transparent manner. This study aims to analyze in greater depth the influence of content quality and influencer credibility on Gen Z's purchasing interest on TikTok Shop, with product perception as a mediating variable.

Based on the background description, the objectives that the researcher wants to raise in this study include:

1. To analyze the influence of the quality of digital influencer content on product perception on TikTok Shop
2. To measure the extent to which the trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of digital influencers influence product perception on TikTok Shop
3. To investigate the influence of product perception on Gen Z's purchasing interest
4. To analyze the indirect influence of content quality and influencer credibility on Gen Z's purchasing interest through product perception.

Literature review

Digital content

Digital content is one of the main components in the modern digital communication and marketing ecosystem. According to Pulizzi (2013) in Zanlex & Sijinjak (2023) "Content is any word, image, or pixel that can be engaged with by another human being, content is compelling content that informs, engages, or amuses" which explains that content includes all forms of information that can be accessed and interacted with by others which can be text, images, or visual elements such as pixels that can be seen and understood. Digital content is developed to actively engage audiences and support business goals such as increasing brand awareness and sales conversions according to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019). The indicators of digital content to determine the effectiveness and quality of content in achieving digital marketing goals are: Relevance, Quality, Freshness, Engagement. Previous research shows that content quality has a significant role in influencing consumer perceptions of products and brands. Hollebeek et al. (2021) found that high-quality content can increase engagement rates, build consumer trust, and ultimately influence purchasing decisions. In the current digital era, especially on the TikTok platform which is dominated by short video content, creativity and originality of content are key to attracting the attention of generation Z, which has a relatively short attention span but is sensitive to authentic and quality content (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Influencer credibility

Influencer credibility can be defined as the audience's perception of an influencer's reliability, competence and trustworthiness in delivering information or product and service recommendations. This concept is rooted in the Source Credibility Theory developed by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley in 1953, which explains that the effectiveness of persuasive communication depends on the credibility of the message source. This theory states that message recipients will be more easily influenced by

communicators who have high credibility. In the context of influencer marketing, this theory explains why some influencers are more effective than others in influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors. Based on an extensive literature review, influencer credibility is generally conceptualized through three main dimensions that are interrelated and contribute to the overall perception of credibility.

The first dimension is trustworthiness, which refers to the audience's perception of the influencer's honesty, integrity and reliability. This dimension includes honesty in conveying information, transparency in endorsements, consistency in behavior and communication, and openness about paid collaborations with brands. The second dimension is expertise, which refers to the knowledge, skills and competence that audiences perceive influencers to have in a particular field. The expertise component includes in-depth knowledge of the product or category, relevant experience in the field, ability to provide accurate information, and reputation as an expert in the field. The third dimension is attractiveness, which not only refers to physical attractiveness but also includes the overall attractiveness of the influencer's personality. The components of attractiveness include physical attractiveness, similarity with the audience, likability and charisma, and aspirational lifestyle. According to research conducted by Zhao et al. (2024) in their study found that influencers who have high credibility tend to be more effective in influencing consumer attitudes and behavior because the messages they convey are considered more trustworthy and convincing. In the context of TikTok Shop, influencer credibility is becoming increasingly important as the platform enables direct transactions, so consumer trust in influencer recommendations largely determines purchasing decisions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Product Perception

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2019) Product perception is how consumers understand and evaluate a product based on the information they get. This process includes the stages of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information related to the product. Indicators of product perception according to Kotler and Armstrong (2019), which include: Product Diversity, Product Quality, Price, and Brand Image. In the context of this research, content quality and influencer credibility act as a stimulus that affects product perception (organism), which in turn will affect consumer purchase intention. A positive perception of the product will increase the likelihood of consumers to make a purchase, conversely a negative perception will reduce buying interest. Perception theory in consumer psychology explains that perceptions are not only influenced by the objective characteristics of the product, but also by external factors such as presentation context, information sources, and consumer expectations (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Product perception acts as a moderating variable that connects external stimuli (content quality and influencer credibility) with consumer behavioral responses (purchase intention).

Purchase Intention

Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) define purchase intention as an opportunity for a consumer to make a purchase of a product or service that is influenced by attitudes, preferences, and patterns of purchasing behavior that have been done before. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) in Wardhana (2024) indicators of buying interest consist of: interest in finding out more about the product, interest in trying the product, consideration in making a purchase, and a very strong desire to buy the product. Generation Z, which is the focus of this research, has unique characteristics in online shopping behavior. They are digital natives who have grown up with technology, have easy access to information, and tend to be skeptical of traditional advertising. The research shows that Generation Z consumer behavior in the context of influencer marketing has complex dynamics, where they trust recommendations from influencers who are considered authentic and relatable more than traditional celebrity endorsements. Generation Z's purchase intention is also influenced by factors such as social proof, fear of missing out (FOMO), and the desire to express self-identity through the purchased product. In the TikTok Shop platform, the ease of access and integrated social commerce features enable the conversion from purchase intent to actual purchase to happen faster than conventional e-commerce platforms.

The Effect of Content Quality on Purchase Intention

The study by Sonni Rahmat Saleh and Jajang Suherman (2024) found that good Instagram content increases the purchase interest of Rio Home Studio customers. According to the results of multiple linear regression analysis, the content quality variable (X1) has a t value of 6.822 with a significance of 0.000, far below the 0.05 threshold. In addition, there is evidence that the regression coefficient value of 0.399 indicates that better content quality directly increases consumer purchase intention. In line with research conducted by Ika Muflichah and Istyakara Muslichah (2022), content quality has a positive and significant impact on purchase intention, both directly and through mediating variables such as consumer involvement, hedonic motivation, and utilitarian motivation. According to the results of statistical tests conducted with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), content quality has a significant impact on consumer motivation, which in turn leads to greater purchase intentions.

According to research conducted by Fitri Fathia Firdausi (2024), content quality, or content creation, demonstrated by influencer Cut Rizki, has a positive and significant effect on Skintific's decision to purchase products. The results of hypothesis testing on the path of content creation to purchasing decisions show a path coefficient value of 0.487, a T-statistic of 2.714, and a p-value of 0.007, which indicates that the effect is statistically significant.

H1 = Content Quality Positively Affects Purchase Intention

The Effect of Content Quality on Product Perception

The study by Usadi, Prayoga, and Dwinata (2024) showed that product perceptions or consumer value perceptions are directly influenced by the quality of content in short marketing videos. The results of statistical analysis show that the influence of each content dimension on perceived value is significant; with a coefficient value of 0.322 for entertainment content, 0.314 for informative content, and 0.277 for interactive content, this model can explain almost 78% of the variation in perceived value caused by content quality.

In line with these findings, research conducted by Rosita and Darlin (2024) also found a positive and significant relationship between TikTok content quality and user perception, which in this study was measured through user engagement. The results show that the quality of content on TikTok which includes informative, creative, audio and visual quality, entertainment, and emotional value elements plays a major role in shaping customer perceptions of products displayed on social media.

Likewise, research conducted by Fadji and Silitonga (2019) provides empirical support regarding the direct impact of content quality as the quality of this study, due to consumer perceptions as measured by customer satisfaction. Regression tests show that the product quality variable with a determination coefficient of 3.42% makes a real contribution to customer satisfaction. Although this contribution is relatively low, the relationship between product quality and satisfaction is statistically important, and this is documented by the significant value of $0.009 > 0.05$ in the t test. In the context of marketing theory, customer satisfaction can be understood as a form of consumer perception of the value and benefits of the product after experiencing direct interaction with the product. Therefore, this finding strengthens the theoretical position that content quality (both the physical form and digital representation of a product) directly influences the way consumers form product perceptions.

H2= Content Quality Positively Affects Product Perception

The Influence of Influencer Credibility on Purchase Intention

Research conducted by Mewengkang and Hidayah (2023) shows that influencer credibility, as measured through three main indicators of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness, has a direct, positive, and significant effect on consumer buying interest in Somethinc products. With a path coefficient value of 0.379 and a p-value of 0.001, influencer credibility has a direct influence on purchase intention,

According to research conducted by Kirana, Damayanti, Tumanggor, and Purnamasari (2025), influencer credibility has a significant influence on customer decisions to buy goods on the TikTok e-commerce platform. The dimensions of trust and authority possessed by an influencer in the eyes of his or her followers define influencer credibility, which determines the basis for the acceptance of

promotional messages by the audience. The results of the analysis show that the more credible an influencer is, the greater the influence on consumers' propensity to purchase the promoted products.

There is a positive and significant influence between influence credibility on consumer purchase intention, according to empirical research conducted by Nurazizah and Seto (2025). With a t-statistic value of 4.057 and a p-value of 0.000, the path coefficient test shows that influence credibility has a direct effect on purchase intention. This result meets the criteria for significance ($t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$). This suggests that a customer's propensity to purchase a suggested item is positively correlated with the credibility of an influencer.

H3= Influencer Credibility Positively Affects Purchase Intention

The Influence of Influencer Credibility on Product Perception

According to research conducted by Fadilla and Rimadiaz (2024), influencer credibility has a positive and significant effect on online engagement. In the discussion of the study, it is explained that audiences who feel that the influencer is credible will find it easier to absorb information about the product, build trust, and build the assumption that the product delivered is of good quality.

In line with Octaviani and Selamat (2023) who conducted empirical research and found that influencer credibility has a positive and significant effect on brand trust in this study defined as a form of product perception. With a path coefficient value of 0.733 and a t-statistic value of 13.033 ($p\text{-value} = 0.000$), these findings indicate that the more credible the influencer, the higher the consumer trust in the brand they are promoting. These results are in line with previous research which states that the credibility of the communicator or endorser plays an important role in consumer perceptions of the product, because the information provided is considered more accurate, honest, and convincing.

Likewise, Pashaei's (2020) study explored user perceptions of Instagram influencer credibility and its impact on purchase intentions based on Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility theory. According to Pashaei, the influence of influencer credibility is not only limited to increasing purchase intentions, but also forming positive perceptions of the product itself because consumers judge the quality and benefits of the product based on their trust in the messenger, who is considered credible. Thus, influencer credibility serves as an entry point to form consumers' initial assessment of the product

H4= Influencer Credibility Positively Affects Product Perception

The Effect of Product Perception on Purchase Intention

According to Bayu Prawira and Ni Nyoman Kerti Yasa (2014) in their research, it shows that product quality on buying interest in Samsung smartphone products in Denpasar city has a positive and significant effect. These results support the idea that consumers will have a greater interest in buying a product when they evaluate it positively in terms of its features, performance, and brand reputation. Product quality serves as a key indicator of consumer perceptions of the value they will get, which directly shapes purchase intentions.

Julia Retnowulan (2017) also conducted research showing that smartphone vendors, especially Xiaomi, use marketing strategies that involve the use of influencers and brand ambassadors in addition to conventional advertising to create a positive image and perception in the minds of customers. Retnowulan discusses how Xiaomi's strategy succeeded in removing the negative stigma against Chinese products and creating a perception of good quality in the eyes of consumers. This shows that people trusted by the public, such as influencers or brand representatives, have the ability to influence how customers perceive the quality of an item.

In line with research conducted by Laraswati and Harti (2022) investigating the effect of perceived quality and brand image on purchase intention of Somethinc skincare products. The results show that perceived quality and brand image have a significant influence on purchase intention, with brand image acting as an important factor that increases customer confidence in the product. In the discussion, it was explained that consumers' confidence in product quality and image is shaped by digital

communication channels including recommendations from influencers who actively promote Somethinc products. In this study, consumers are said to form perceptions of products based on reviews, recommendations and ratings from others, especially on social media. This shows that the credibility of information sources, especially influencers, is very important in forming positive perceptions of product quality

H5= Product Perception Positively Affects Purchase Intention

Indirect Effect of Content Quality on Purchase Intention through Product Perception

According to Poturak and Softić (2019), social media communications created by companies significantly influence consumers' brand value perceptions. They found that both company-generated content and user-generated content have a positive influence on electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which in turn increases brand equity. Therefore, good social media content has an indirect but significant impact on customers' desire to buy a product through their perception of the product.

A study conducted by Susanto and Sholahuddin (2024) found that digital content displayed on social media has a significant impact on consumers' desire to buy goods, especially in the Muslim fashion industry. This suggests that it is not only the quality of physical goods that determines positive perceptions of products, but also how digital content is communicated. High quality content will increase consumers' perception of the product's image and value, which in turn increases purchase intention.

In line with research from Nurijayanti, Sukamdiani, and Perdana (2023) who found that content marketing has a significant and dominant influence on decisions made by consumers about what they buy. The results of this study's regression analysis show that content quality affects consumer purchasing decisions directly and indirectly through price perceptions and product benefits that consumers capture from the content.

H6 = Digital Content Quality Positively Affects Purchase Intention through Product Perception

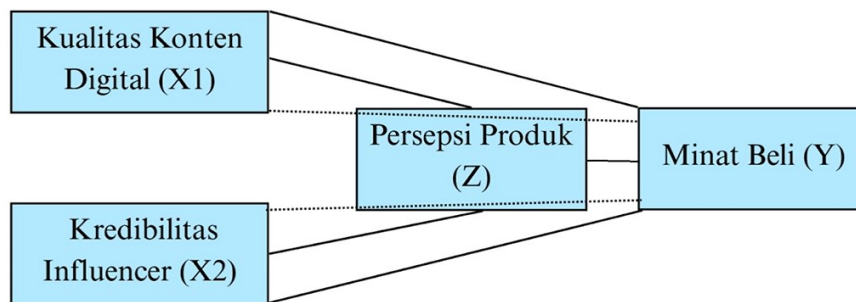
Indirect Influencer Credibility on Purchase Intention through Product Perception

According to research conducted by Suryati, Bahtiar, and Rohimah (2024), influencer credibility, which consists of the dimensions of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness, is able to form trust and a positive image of the product being promoted. This is in line with the results of research showing that brand awareness is the factor with the greatest influence on purchase intention.

Based on research conducted by Cahyadiningrum and Rahardjo (2023), influence credibility does not have a direct influence on purchase intention, but has an indirect influence through product perception variables, which in this study are represented by brand trust and brand image. When consumers see an influencer as competent and trustworthy, they are more likely to have a positive perception of the product or brand being promoted, according to these findings. These perceptions lead to increased trust and interest in the product, which in turn leads to a desire to buy.

According to research conducted by Fadilla and Rimadiaz (2024), the credibility of influencer Sarah Ayu has a positive and significant effect on online engagement, with a path coefficient value of 0.567, a t-statistic of 6.358, and a p-value of 0.000. The results of the discussion indicate that online engagement generated by influencer credibility increases trust and interest in the product, which ultimately leads to the intention to purchase the product.

H7= Influencer Credibility Positively Affects Purchase Intention through Product Perception



Images 1. theoretical framework
Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)

Methods

The research method is a method used by researchers to analyze data with the aim of examining research problems methodically and objectively (Sugiyono, 2017). This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method to examine the influence of digital content quality and influencer credibility on product perception and purchasing interest among Generation Z on TikTok Shop. This approach was chosen because it provides an objective, systematic, and measurable picture of the relationship between the variables under study. The research was conducted over a period of five months, from February to June 2025. The research procedure began with the development of instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

The subjects in this study were active students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Jakarta State University, class of 2023 and 2024. They were selected because they belonged to Generation Z (aged 18–26 years), were active users of the TikTok app, and had experience making purchases through TikTok Shop. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with a sample size of 100 respondents, determined using the Lemeshow formula for an unknown population.

The instrument used in this study was a closed-ended questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, covering four main variables: digital content quality, influencer credibility (including dimensions of trust, expertise, and appeal), product perception, and purchase interest. The questionnaire was designed in a digital format using Google Forms and distributed online via the WhatsApp app to reach respondents more effectively. After distribution, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability to ensure that the data obtained was accurate and reliable.

After the data was collected, the analysis stage was carried out using SmartPLS software with a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. Data analysis included construct validity testing (outer loading and AVE), reliability testing (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), discriminant validity testing (using the Fornell-Larcker criterion), and multicollinearity testing (through the Variance Inflation Factor/VIF value). Furthermore, hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping technique to examine the significance of the relationships between variables.

Result and Discussion

This chapter presents the research findings obtained from data processing using a quantitative approach with the help of SmartPLS software. The main objective of this analysis is to examine the relationship between content quality, influencer credibility, product perception, and Gen Z's purchasing interest on the TikTok Shop platform. All data were collected through a closed-ended questionnaire and underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure they were suitable for further analysis. The analysis was conducted in two main stages: first, testing the measurement model (outer model) to ensure that the indicators in each construct met the validity and reliability criteria; and second, testing the structural model (inner model) to determine the direction and strength of the relationships between variables and to test the previously formulated hypotheses. Before testing the

hypotheses, the first step in the analysis was to test the measurement model to ensure that all indicators used were valid and reliable in representing the latent constructs.

Table 1 Outer Loadings

	X1	X2	Y	Z
X1.1	0.897			
X1.2	0.918			
X1.3	0.887			
X1.4	0.866			
X1.5	0.911			
X2.1		0.899		
X2.2		0.715		
X2.3		0.785		
X2.4		0.822		
X2.5		0.713		
Y1			0.851	
Y2			0.831	
Y3			0.881	
Y4			0.913	
Y5			0.890	
Z1				0.892
Z2				0.796
Z3				0.846
Z4				0.882
Z5				0.898

Based on the outer loading test results presented in table 1, it can be seen that all indicators in each variable in this study have a loading value above the minimum threshold of 0.70. This indicates that each indicator has good convergent validity and is able to accurately represent the latent construct being measured.

Table 2 Cronbach's alpha & Composite reliability

Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
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X1	0.939	0.940	0.953	0.803
X2	0.849	0.885	0.892	0.624
Y	0.922	0.926	0.942	0.763
Z	0.921	1.055	0.936	0.803

Overall, it can be concluded that the four variables in this study have met the criteria of reliability and convergent validity and the instruments used are reliable and suitable for use in testing the relationship between variables in the designed research model.

Table 3 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	X1	X2	Y	Z
X1	0.896			
X2	0.394	0.790		
Y	0.814	0.467	0.874	
Z	0.311	0.213	0.310	0.863

Based on the results presented in table 3, it shows that the four variables in this study meet the criteria for discriminant validity, namely with a value of 0.896 for digital content quality (X1), 0.790 for influencer credibility (X2), 0.874 for purchase intention (Y), and 0.863 for product perception (Z).

Table 4 Multicontinental

	VIF
X1.1	4.708
X1.2	5.299
X1.3	4.772
X1.4	3.012
X1.5	5.957
X2.1	3.050
X2.2	1.636
X2.3	2.180
X2.4	1.782
X2.5	1.611
Y1	2.533

Y2	2.388
Y3	2.902
Y4	3.746
Y5	3.248
Z1	2.262
Z2	3.078
Z3	2.516
Z4	3.922
Z5	4.934

The test results presented in table 4 most of the indicators in each variable have VIF values below 5. This shows that in general there is no indication of multicollinearity in this research model. However, not all show results below 5, there are two indicators that have VIF values above 5. These two indicators indicate the presence of moderate multicollinearity symptoms in these indicators, but are still within the tolerance threshold.

Tabel 5 Hasil R-Square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Y	0.690	0.681
Z	0.106	0.088

Based on the results of table 5, the model developed in this study is quite good at explaining purchase intention, but less strong in explaining product perception.

Tabel 6 F-Square

	X1	X2	Y	Z
X1			1.373	0.068
X2			0.077	0.011
Y				
Z			0.006	

The quality of digital content is the dominant factor influencing purchase intention, while the influence of influencer credibility and product perception on purchase intention as well as on each other is relatively small.

Tabel 7 Path Coefficient (Variabel Direct)

Path	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation	T -Statistics	P values	Decision
X1 -> Y	0.733	0.069	10.613	0.000	Accepted
X1 -> Z	0.268	0.088	3.057	0.002	Accepted
X2 -> Y	0.169	0.062	2.739	0.006	Accepted
X2 -> Z	0.107	0.116	0.926	0.354	Rejected
Z -> Y	0.047	0.059	0.794	0.427	Rejected

Tabel 8 *Path Coefficient* (Variabel Indirect)

Path	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation	T -Statistics	P values	Decision
X1 -> Z -> Y	0.012	0.018	0.710	0.478	Rejected
X2 -> Z -> Y	0.005	0.011	0.450	0.653	Rejected

The structural model was evaluated through path coefficient analysis to test the hypothesized relationships among digital content quality (X1), influencer credibility (X2), product perception (Z), and purchase intention (Y). Table 2 presents the direct effects, while Table 3 summarizes the indirect effects mediated by product perception.

The first and most salient finding is the strong and statistically significant direct effect of content quality (X1) on purchase intention (Y), with a path coefficient of 0.733 ($t = 10.613$, $p < 0.001$). This result suggests that high quality digital content defined by clarity, engagement, and relevance is a primary driver of consumer intention to purchase in the TikTok Shop environment. This aligns with existing observations about Generation Z's preferences for immersive and aesthetically pleasing content.

Content quality also showed a significant and positive effect on product perception ($X1 \rightarrow Z = 0.268$; $t = 3.057$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that audiences tend to perceive products more favorably when they are presented in well produced, persuasive content formats. However, this enhanced perception did not translate into higher purchase intention via mediation, as further explained below.

Influencer credibility (X2) exhibited a statistically significant direct effect on purchase intention ($X2 \rightarrow Y = 0.169$; $t = 2.739$, $p = 0.006$), affirming that trust, expertise, and relatability of influencers contribute to consumers' willingness to engage in transactional behavior. Nonetheless, the impact of influencer credibility on product perception was non-significant ($X2 \rightarrow Z = 0.107$; $t = 0.926$, $p = 0.354$), suggesting that while influencers can emotionally persuade followers, their presence alone may not substantively alter how the product is cognitively evaluated.

Surprisingly, product perception itself did not significantly predict purchase intention ($Z \rightarrow Y = 0.047$; $t = 0.794$, $p = 0.427$). This implies that in fast-paced, content-heavy platforms such as TikTok, the path from perception to intention may be weakened or even bypassed. Consumers appear to form impressions rapidly and act impulsively, prioritizing affective engagement over rational assessment.

The indirect effect analysis reinforces these findings. As shown in Table 3, neither content quality nor influencer credibility had a significant indirect effect on purchase intention through product perception

($X1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y = 0.012, p = 0.478$; $X2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y = 0.005, p = 0.653$). Both mediation paths were statistically insignificant, which further supports the idea that product perception does not serve as a critical bridge between content/influencer attributes and buying intentions in this context.

Taken together, these results illustrate a compelling pattern: for Gen Z consumers in social commerce environments, particularly TikTok Shop, affective and surface-level stimuli are more influential than cognitive elaboration in shaping purchase decisions. The presence of well designed content and trusted influencers directly fosters intention to buy, even in the absence of strong product cognition.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the influence of digital content quality and influencer credibility on product perception and its impact on purchase intention among Generation Z consumers on TikTok Shop. Using a quantitative approach and structural equation modeling, the findings reveal that content quality has a significant and direct effect on both product perception and purchase intention. This suggests that visually appealing, relevant, and engaging content plays a critical role in shaping consumer behavior in digital commerce environments.

Furthermore, the credibility of influencers defined by trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness was found to have a significant direct effect on purchase intention but not on product perception. This indicates that while influencer credibility stimulates emotional engagement and consumer trust, it does not necessarily enhance rational evaluations of product quality. Interestingly, product perception did not mediate the relationship between content quality and influencer credibility on purchase intention. This outcome highlights the impulsive nature of Generation Z's purchasing behavior, which is often influenced more by content appeal and influencer presence than by cognitive appraisal of product features.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of emotional and interactive elements in social commerce, particularly for digital-native consumers, and provides empirical support for integrating content strategies and influencer marketing in shaping online consumer decisions.

Recommendations

Based on the results and analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. For digital marketers and brand managers, prioritizing content authenticity and emotional engagement is essential. Content that resonates with the lifestyle and preferences of Generation Z is more likely to influence purchase decisions than traditional promotional formats.
2. For influencers and content creators, maintaining a consistent personal brand and transparent communication is crucial in sustaining audience trust. Building long-term credibility will have a stronger impact on purchase intentions than superficial promotional endorsements.
3. For platform developers like TikTok, it is recommended to enhance algorithmic support for high credibility creators and integrate trust based metrics into content recommendation systems, thereby improving the quality and conversion potential of social commerce.
4. For consumers, especially Generation Z, cultivating critical digital literacy is necessary to navigate persuasive marketing. Being mindful of emotional influence and evaluating products based on both content and functionality can lead to more informed purchase behavior.

For future researchers, it is suggested to expand the model by incorporating additional variables such as emotional attachment, brand loyalty, or peer influence. Cross demographic or cross cultural comparisons may also yield deeper insights into consumer responses in various social commerce contexts.

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