



# The Role of Influencer Interactivity and Authenticity in Forming Brand Trust

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**Abstract.** This research aims to explore the influence of interactivity and authenticity of influencers on social media on the formation of emotional bonds and trust in followers, especially in generation Z who have technosavvy characteristics. Influencers who are trusted still need deeper research in forming their followers to believe in the products being promoted. However, recent trends indicate an important shift in marketing strategy, especially in the use of key opinion leaders (KOL) on social media, especially on the micro and medium scale. There is not much research that focuses on micro and medium scale influencers, on the other hand, these influencers have potential by engaging directly with their followers through the content they create. Quantitative research methods were used to collect data from samples selected representatively from the generation Z population. A total of 110 respondents were involved in the research using the purposive sampling method. The research results show the importance of influencers in forming trust in brands.

**Keywords:** Interactivity, Authenticity, Generation Z, Influencers

## 1 Introduction

Brand trust has an important role in establishing trust through effective communication [1]. Brand trust is an essential aspect for a brand in the long term. Brand trust not only aims to build a positive image of a company, but also ensures that people have strong confidence in the brand. One important reason for companies to increase brand trust is because consumers tend to choose brands they trust [2]. In the era of digital communication, consumers are full of choices and information is easily accessible, consumers tend to make purchasing decisions based on brand reputation. Brand trust also plays an important role in building consumer loyalty [3]. Consumers who trust a brand tend to become loyal customers who make repeat purchases. Consumers not only choose the brand for current purchases, but also recommend it to their friends and family (reference group). When a brand builds a solid relationship with consumers, it can create a strong market share [4].

Young consumers, especially generation Z, currently use social media communication channels a lot. Research results Nisa et al., (2020) shows that Generation Z relies on social media as the main source for looking for information about a product to buy.

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Generation Z as social media users utilize these platforms to search for news, tutorials, product reviews and other information. Interactions that occur through social media are used to communicate with peers, follow public figures, and engage in online communities [6]. Social media facilitates quick and easy access to information, provides space for the exchange of ideas, and expands social networks. Intense use of social media gives rise to interactions between influencers as public figures and users. Influencers aim to build large communities to continuously engage with content. Influencers provide information, entertainment, or inspiration to followers or social media users [7]. Social media users can interact with influencers in various ways, such as liking, commenting, or sharing content. These interactions encourage followers to feel more connected to the influencer. Influencers leverage interactions with social media users to better understand their audience and influence trends, behavior or opinions [8].

User interactions are able to form a sense of trust because influencers can influence the opinions and trends of social media users. One aspect that can form trust in influencers (influencer trust) is influencer interactivity. Interactions carried out on social media to communicate increase understanding between followers and influencers [9]. Interaction is the dominant factor in increasing trust in influencers. Perceptions of interactivity in virtual communities, such as connectedness and giving, influence member trust, duration, and retention, which have implications for member loyalty (Wang, 2013). Interactions built in virtual spaces encourage confidence in influencers and communication aims to increase understanding of the information conveyed.

Research Lou & Yuan (2019) shows the association between influencer trust and the brand being promoted. One of the factors that forms brand trust is influencer trust. Interactivity increases communication both directly and indirectly in forming brand trust. (Lucia-Palacios). Previous findings show the importance of influencer trust as a factor in forming brand trust, which is a positive perception and consumer confidence in the quality, integrity and reputation of a brand. However, there is still limited research showing the influence of influencer trust on brand trust, some previous research is still correlational. The novelty of the research lies in research that connects influencers personally and brands as organizations, thereby strengthening the association between influencers and the brands being promoted.

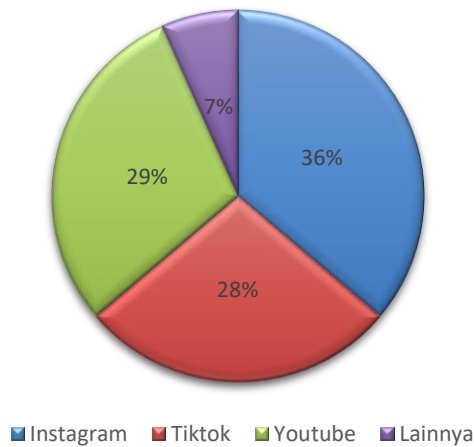
## 2 Method

This research uses a quantitative approach in analyzing the influencer phenomenon in forming brand trust. The research aims to test the variables influencer interactivity, influencer trust, and brand trust. Table 1 shows the variables, questionnaire sources, and statements to measure respondents' answers. This research focuses on generation Z who are familiar and rely on social media to search for information about products or services, so the role of influencers in influencing consumer choices is very important. The population of this study is not known with certainty, so the Yamane formula is used. The confidence level is 95%, the margin of error is 5%, and the population proportion is 89%, so the sample size is 151 respondents. Sampling was carried out using

a non-probability sampling technique, namely purposive sampling using several criteria, namely that the respondent followed an influencer who was promoting a product and the respondent had interacted with the influencer via social media. Sampling used a questionnaire distributed to respondents. Questionnaire measurements used a Likert scale.

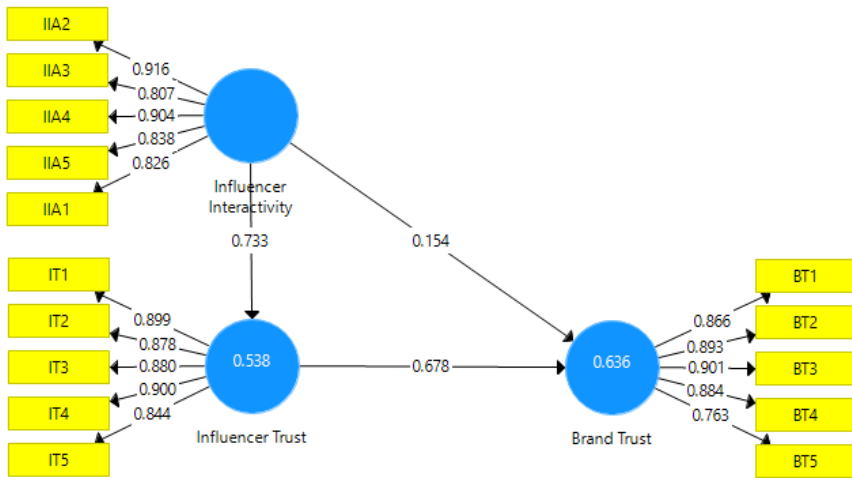
### 3 Result and Analysis

This research obtained data from 151 Generation Z samples who were involved in communication with influencers. Based on research data, descriptive data appears in Figure 1 which shows social media for interacting with influencers.



**Figure. 1.** Descriptive Statistics of User Social Media

In Figure 1, you can see the social media used by users to interact and watch content delivered by influencers. Users can choose more than one social media, so the data obtained is that the majority of users use Instagram, followed by YouTube and TikTok. Users also use other social media, with an insignificant percentage including Twitter (X) and Facebook. The diversity of social media indicates that many influencers communicate and influence users via Instagram. The research also tested the validity of the research indicators as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Validity Test Results

Validity testing was carried out with a maximum iteration of 300 and a stop criterion of 7, as shown in Figure 2, indicating that all research indicators met the rules, with an overall loading factor value of  $\geq 0.7$ . The results of validity testing are continued with reliability analysis as in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Reliability Test Results

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability</b>
<b>Brand trust</b>	0.914	0.936
<b>Influencer interactivity</b>	0.911	0.934
<b>Influencer trust</b>	0.928	0.945

Table 1 indicates that Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability for each variable have met the rules, namely with a value of  $\geq 0.7$ . The test continues by analyzing the direct influence between variables as in Table 2 and the indirect influence in Table 3.

**Table 2.** Direct Effect Between Variables

	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T Statistics ((O/STDEV))</b>	<b>P Values</b>

<i>Influencer interactivity</i> → <b>Brand trust</b>	0.154	0.064	2,405	0.017
<i>Influencer interactivity</i> → <b>Influencer trust</b>	0.733	0.042	17.57	0,000
<i>Influencer trust</i> → <b>Brand trust</b>	0.678	0.061	11,052	0,000

**Table 3.** Indirect Effect Between Variables

	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</b>	<b>T Statistics ([O/STDEV])</b>	<b>P Val- ues</b>
<i>Influencer interactivity</i> → <b>Influencer trust</b> → <b>Brand trust</b>	0.497	0.055	9,053	0,000

The direct test results in Table 3 show that influencer interactivity has an effect on *influencer trust* and brand image, which is characterized by a T statistics value  $\geq 1.96$  and a P value  $\leq 0.05$ . Apart from that, influencer trust has a positive and significant effect on brand trust. Table 4 shows that *influencer trust* partially mediate the influence of influencer interactivity on *brand trust*.

### 3.1 Discussion

The research results show that there is a positive influence of influencer interactivity on influencer trust. Influencer interactivity which includes various forms of direct interaction between influencers and their followers, such as responses to comments, user-shared content, and collaboration on content [11], has been shown to be a significant factor in building trust. The research results are which shows that direct interactions allow influencers to strengthen emotional closeness with their followers. The research results confirmed the findings that followers tend to feel closer and more personally connected to influencers who interact actively. Additionally, interactivity also allows influencers to demonstrate their credibility in the relevant field. Communication that is built interactively increases followers' trust in influencers as a reliable source of information, especially in generation Z which has techno-savvy characteristics.

The use of social media is currently increasingly diverse, thus strengthening the role of influencers in influencing user attitudes and behavior. The research results show that there is a positive influence between the level of influencer interactivity and the level of trust that users have in the brand promoted by the influencer. Influencer interactivity, which involves various forms of direct interaction between influencers and their followers on social media platforms, such as responses to comments, question and answer sessions during livestreaming, or creating collaborative content. The research results strengthen the findings that interaction activities between influencers and followers are key in building and strengthening brand trust. Interactions on social media, influencers form more personal relationships with their followers, thereby creating a stronger emotional bond between consumers and the brand represented by the influencer. Apart from that, influencer interactivity also makes it possible to strengthen brand image and in-

crease consumer trust in the brand's credibility. By providing relevant information, answering consumer questions, or providing authentic testimonials, influencers can prove the brand's value and superiority to their followers. This helps strengthen consumers' positive perception of the brand and increases their level of trust in the products or services offered.

The research results show that the trust that influencers build in their followers can significantly influence trust in recommended brands. When an influencer is perceived as a credible and reliable source of information by their followers, it tends to increase followers' trust in the brand promoted by the influencer. The research results confirm that factors such as consistency in recommending brands, transparency in the relationship between influencers and brands, and congruence of values between influencers and brands contribute to increasing brand trust. In addition, the influence of influencer trust on brand trust can be seen through interactions between influencers and their followers on social media platforms.

The research results show that direct interactions between influencers and their followers not only influence direct trust in influencers, but have a significant role in brand trust. Influencer interactions open closer lines of communication between the influencer and their followers, this allows followers to experience a more direct and personalized engagement with the influencer [10], [14]. The trust built in the influencer becomes a mediating factor that facilitates the transfer of that trust to the brand promoted by the influencer. When followers trust an influencer as a reliable and credible source of information, they are more likely to be receptive to the influencer's brand recommendations and promotions [15].

## 4 Conclusion

This research aims to examine the direct and indirect influence of influencer interactivity on influencer trust and brand trust. The research focuses on generation Z who use social media as a source of information. The test results show that influencer interactivity has a positive and significant effect on influencer trust and brand trust. In addition, influencer trust partially mediates the influence of influencer interactivity on brand trust. This research confirms that in persuasive communication theory a message is able to modify other people's attitudes and behavior. The implication of this research is that influencers have an important role in communicating a message on social media. The use of influencers by emphasizing interaction on social media for interested parties, for example companies, will encourage trust in a brand. The research results confirm that interaction encourages emotional closeness between influencers and their followers, so it is an important focus for influencers to implement in establishing close communication.

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