

Authenticity, Credibility, and Cultural Context: An Integrated Model of Influencer Marketing in Collectivistic Societies

An Integrated Model
of Influencer
Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing thrives in Indonesia's collectivistic culture, where community trust shapes consumer behavior. This study aims to test the Cultural Contingency Theory of Digital Influence, examining how authenticity influences credibility and digital engagement among influencers on Instagram and TikTok. A mixed-methods approach was employed, analyzing data from 152 influencers over eight weeks. The study utilized a natural language processing model tailored for the Indonesian language to assess authenticity, alongside validated scales for credibility, engagement, and consumer skepticism, followed by structural equation modeling for hypothesis testing. Findings reveal that authenticity strongly enhances credibility, which in turn drives digital engagement through likes, comments, and shares. Nano influencers excel in building credibility through authentic, community-driven content reflecting values like mutual cooperation (gotong royong), while micro influencers boost engagement with broader reach. Consumer skepticism weakens the authenticity-credibility link, particularly when content lacks cultural resonance, such as moral character. Engagement is higher in Java than Sumatra, with TikTok favoring raw authenticity and Instagram emphasizing curated aesthetics. This study validates a culturally contingent model, offering insights for tailored marketing strategies, although it is limited by its focus on the standard Indonesian language and short study duration.

Keywords: *Authenticity Cues, Consumer Skepticism, Credibility, Digital Engagement, Influencer Marketing, Influencer Type.*

ABSTRAK

Pemasaran influencer berkembang pesat dalam budaya kolektivistik Indonesia, di mana kepercayaan komunitas membentuk perilaku konsumen. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menguji Teori Kontingensi Budaya tentang Pengaruh Digital, dengan mengkaji bagaimana keaslian memengaruhi kredibilitas dan keterlibatan digital di antara para influencer di Instagram dan TikTok. Pendekatan metode campuran digunakan, menganalisis data dari 152 influencer selama delapan minggu. Studi ini menggunakan model pemrosesan bahasa alami yang disesuaikan untuk bahasa Indonesia untuk menilai keaslian, bersama dengan skala yang tervalidasi untuk kredibilitas,

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keterlibatan, dan skeptisisme konsumen, diikuti oleh pemodelan persamaan struktural untuk pengujian hipotesis. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa keaslian sangat meningkatkan kredibilitas, yang pada gilirannya mendorong keterlibatan digital melalui suka, komentar, dan bagikan. Nano influencer unggul dalam membangun kredibilitas melalui konten otentik yang digerakkan oleh komunitas yang mencerminkan nilai-nilai seperti gotong royong, sementara mikro influencer meningkatkan keterlibatan dengan jangkauan yang lebih luas. Skeptisisme konsumen melemahkan hubungan keaslian-kredibilitas, terutama ketika konten tidak memiliki resonansi budaya seperti karakter moral. Keterlibatan lebih tinggi di Jawa daripada Sumatera, dengan TikTok mengutamakan keaslian alami dan Instagram menekankan estetika yang terkurasi. Studi ini memvalidasi model yang bergantung pada budaya, menawarkan wawasan untuk strategi pemasaran yang disesuaikan, meskipun terbatas oleh fokusnya pada bahasa Indonesia baku dan durasi studi yang singkat.

Kata kunci: Isyarat Keaslian, Skeptisisme Konsumen, Kredibilitas, Keterlibatan Digital, Pemasaran Influencer, Jenis Influencer.

INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing has transformed into a pivotal communication paradigm in the global digital economy, with an industry valuation of \$24 billion in 2024, projected to reach \$32.55 billion by 2025 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025). This growth reflects a fundamental shift in how brands engage consumers through influencer-generated content, which outperforms traditional marketing materials in effectiveness (Ki et al., 2020). However, rapid commercialization has sparked an authenticity paradox: as influencers increasingly monetize their influence, audiences demand higher standards of authenticity while developing sophisticated resistance mechanisms (Dwivedi et al., 2021). In Indonesia, a primary digital market with 143 million active social media users and deeply rooted collectivistic cultural values, this dynamic offers unique opportunities to explore how authenticity and credibility are shaped in a non-Western context (DataReportal, 2025).

Current influencer marketing research exhibits a pronounced Western bias, with a limited focus on emerging markets such as Indonesia, despite their growing digital significance (Dwivedi et al., 2021). According to Bright and Logan (2018), consumer skepticism toward commercial content increases with digital content saturation; however, existing studies fail to examine how collectivistic cultural values, such as Indonesia's *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), shape perceptions of authenticity. Similarly, according to Leung et al. (2022), traditional models, such as Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 2013), assume individual-based credibility formation, which is less applicable in collectivistic cultures where community validation predominates. Furthermore, theoretical fragmentation limits the field, as studies often isolate constructs like authenticity or engagement without integrating them into cohesive frameworks (Ahmed et al., 2024). For instance, research on virtual brand communities highlights the role of community interactions in driving engagement but overlooks culture-specific dynamics (Brodie et al., 2013; Harrigan et al., 2016). These gaps highlight the need for culturally grounded frameworks to understand influencer marketing in collectivistic contexts, such as Indonesia.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing the cultural contingency theory of digital influence, which examines how cultural contexts shape the mechanisms of digital influence. Focusing on 152 Indonesian nano and micro influencers on Instagram and TikTok over eight weeks, this study employs a cultural-computational methodology. The authenticity paradox, where explicit authenticity signaling risks being perceived as "performed authenticity" (Audrezet et al., 2018), is particularly amplified in Indonesia's high-context culture, where values such as *budi pekerti* (moral character) and *tenggang rasa* (empathy) define authentic communication.

The study offers significant theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it challenges Western-centric assumptions in credibility theories and proposes a culturally adaptive model, enhancing understanding of digital influence in collectivistic contexts (Casaló et al., 2020). Practically, it provides actionable strategies for global brands to tailor influencer campaigns in emerging markets by leveraging local cultural values to boost engagement. By integrating IndoBERT-powered computational analysis with cultural validation, this research introduces a methodological innovation replicable in other collectivistic markets (Koto et al., 2020). Thus, it bridges theoretical gaps and offers practical guidance for culturally responsive influencer marketing in Indonesia and similar emerging digital economies. The research objectives are threefold. First, to develop a culturally grounded authenticity framework using IndoBERT-based natural language processing. Second, to test integrated influence mechanisms through mediation and moderation analyses, accounting for differences in influencer types and consumer skepticism. Third, to establish a community-mediated credibility formation model that reflects Indonesia's community-driven trust dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Authenticity and Credibility in Influencer Marketing

Authenticity in influencer marketing refers to the genuine presentation of oneself, transparent communication, and alignment between an influencer's online persona and actual identity, deeply rooted in cultural values such as Indonesia's *budi pekerti* (Audrezet et al., 2018; van Reijmersdal et al., 2020; Masuda et al., 2022). According to Ohanian (2013) and Wiedmann and von Mettenheim (2021), authenticity encompasses sincerity and trustworthiness, which align with collectivistic norms that emphasize community trust over individual gain. In Indonesia, authenticity is enhanced by cultural practices such as *tenggang rasa*, where influencers engage audiences through relatable, culturally aligned content (Hofstede et al., 2010; Tafesse & Wood, 2021).

Credibility, defined as the audience's perception of an influencer's expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, builds on these authenticity cues (Hovland et al., 1953). Unlike Western contexts where credibility often stems from individual expertise, in collectivistic cultures like Indonesia, credibility is validated through community interactions, such as peer endorsements on social media (Schouten et al., 2019; Leung et al., 2022; Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024). According to Marwick (2013), authentic self-presentation fosters trust, particularly when influencers disclose personal narratives or sponsorships transparently. This dynamic is critical in Indonesia, where 78% of consumers prioritize cultural fit in evaluating influencer content (Bright & Logan, 2018). The relationship between authenticity and credibility is thus symbiotic, as authentic behaviors signal trustworthiness, enhancing an influencer's perceived expertise and appeal (Kim & Kim, 2021). This study posits that authenticity has a direct influence on credibility, particularly in culturally sensitive markets.

H1: Authenticity has a positive influence on the credibility of influencers.

Authenticity, Credibility, and Digital Engagement

Digital engagement captures consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to influencer content, including likes, comments, and shares (Hollebeek et al., 2014). According to Carlson et al. (2018), engagement is driven by credible sources that resonate with audiences through authentic interactions. Authenticity fosters credibility by creating a sense of trust and relatability, which in turn encourages active audience participation (Audrezet et al., 2018). In Indonesia's collectivistic culture, engagement is amplified when influencers reflect values such as *gotong royong*, which fosters a sense of community (Hofstede et al., 2010).

According to Brodie et al. (2013), virtual brand communities enhance engagement by facilitating interactive dialogues, a dynamic prevalent on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Credibility mediates the relationship between authenticity and engagement, as

trustworthy influencers translate authentic cues into meaningful consumer interactions (Eigenraam et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2022; Khan, 2023). For instance, transparent disclosures about sponsorships can strengthen trust, thereby boosting engagement (Boerman et al., 2022). However, Western models, such as Source Credibility Theory, often overlook cultural contingencies, assuming universal applicability (Ohanian, 2013). In contrast, this study argues that in Indonesia, credibility channels the effect of authenticity on engagement through community-driven trust. The distinct affordances of Instagram (visual storytelling) and TikTok (short-form video) may further shape engagement patterns, necessitating culturally adaptive models (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2024).

H2: Credibility has a positive influence on digital engagement.

H3: Credibility mediates the relationship between authenticity and digital engagement.

Role of Influencer Type in Authenticity, Credibility, and Engagement

Influencer type, categorized as nano (<10,000 followers) or micro (10,000–100,000 followers), influences the dynamics of authenticity, credibility, and engagement (De Veirman et al., 2017). According to Kay et al. (2020), nano-influencers excel in authenticity due to their perceived closeness to their audiences, which fosters stronger community ties in collectivistic cultures, such as Indonesia. Their authentic, relatable content aligns with values like *budi pekerti*, enhancing credibility through personal connections (Hofstede et al., 2010). Conversely, micro-influencers, with a broader reach and more polished content, leverage credibility to drive higher engagement, such as shares and comments (Hughes et al., 2019). According to Casaló et al. (2020), micro influencers are perceived as opinion leaders, amplifying their impact on consumer behavior in digital spaces.

In Indonesia, where community validation is paramount, nano-influencers may build credibility more effectively through intimate, culturally resonant interactions, while micro-influencers convert credibility into engagement due to their broader audience base (Leung et al., 2022). The interplay of authenticity and credibility thus varies by influencer type, with nano-influencers strengthening the authenticity-credibility link and micro-influencers enhancing the credibility-engagement link. Platform differences further modulate these effects, as TikTok's informal format may favor nano-influencers, while Instagram's curated aesthetic suits micro-influencers (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2024). This study tests these differential effects within Indonesia's collectivistic context.

H4: Influencer type moderates between authenticity and credibility.

H5: Influencer type moderates between credibility and digital engagement.

Consumer Scepticism in Authenticity and Engagement Dynamics

Consumer scepticism reflects audiences' defensive processing of commercial content, driven by awareness of persuasive intent (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Friestad & Wright, 1994). According to Boerman et al. (2022), scepticism weakens trust in influencers when sponsorship disclosures are perceived as manipulative, particularly in high-context cultures like Indonesia, where cultural fit is critical (Hofstede et al., 2010). Authenticity mitigates scepticism by fostering genuine connections, such as through personal narratives or culturally aligned content reflecting *tenggang rasa* (Audrezet et al., 2018). However, high scepticism can diminish the effect of authenticity on credibility, as audiences question the sincerity of even transparent influencers (Ahmed et al., 2024).

According to Chung & Cho (2017), parasocial relationships in digital spaces can counteract scepticism, enhancing engagement when influencers maintain authentic interactions. In Indonesia, where 78% of consumers evaluate content's cultural relevance (Bright & Logan, 2018), scepticism may be higher for content lacking cultural alignment, impacting engagement indirectly through credibility (Leung et al., 2022). Instagram's polished content may heighten scepticism compared to TikTok's raw, relatable videos,

necessitating culturally sensitive strategies (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2024). This study proposes that scepticism moderates the authenticity-credibility link, with more potent effects in culturally misaligned contexts.

H6: Consumer scepticism moderates the relationship between authenticity and credibility.

This study integrates the cultural contingency theory of digital influence and the community-mediated credibility formation model to examine influencer marketing in Indonesia’s collectivistic context. According to Leung et al. (2022), cultural values like *gotong royong* and *budi pekerti* shape authenticity and credibility, which drive engagement through community validation. The framework posits that Authenticity influences Credibility (H1), which in turn drives Digital Engagement (H2), with Credibility mediating the Authenticity-Engagement relationship (H3) (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Influencer Type moderates these dynamics, with nano-influencers strengthening the Authenticity-Credibility link (H4) and micro-influencers enhancing the Credibility-Engagement link (H5) (De Veirman et al., 2017). Consumer Scepticism negatively moderates the Authenticity-Credibility relationship (H6), particularly when cultural fit is low (Friestad & Wright, 1994). According to Koto et al. (2020), IndoBERT-based analysis enables precise measurement of culturally aligned authenticity, enhancing methodological rigor. Figure 1 illustrates this framework, depicting the relationships between Authenticity, Credibility, Digital Engagement, Influencer Type, and Consumer Scepticism within Indonesia’s cultural context (see Figure 1: Research Framework). This model challenges Western-centric assumptions by integrating collectivistic dynamics and offers practical insights for brands targeting emerging markets (Casaló et al., 2020). The framework is tested using a cultural-computational approach, combining IndoBERT and behavioral analytics to capture Indonesia’s unique digital landscape (Koto et al., 2020).

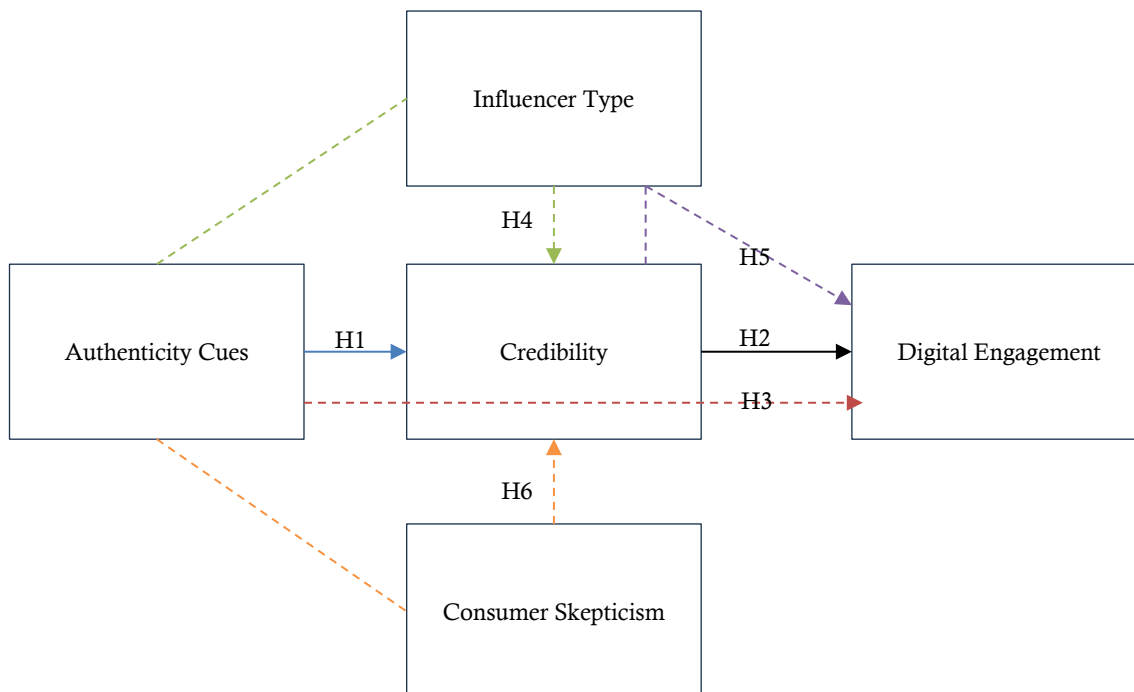


Figure 1. Research Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate influencer marketing dynamics in Indonesia's collectivistic context, integrating computational and cultural analyses to test the proposed Cultural Contingency Theory of Digital Influence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The research focused on 152 Indonesian influencers (76 nano, <10,000 followers; 76 micro, 10,000–100,000 followers) across Instagram and TikTok, selected through stratified sampling to ensure representativeness across lifestyle, beauty, and fashion categories. Sample size was determined using G*Power analysis, targeting 80% statistical power for detecting medium effect sizes ($f^2 = 0.15$). Data were collected over eight weeks, a duration chosen to capture consistent engagement patterns while accounting for Indonesia's dynamic digital landscape, where rapid content cycles reflect cultural practices like *gotong royong* (Hofstede et al., 2010). This timeframe struck a balance between the need for robust data and practical constraints, although longer periods could reveal more evolving trends.

Authenticity was measured using IndoBERT, a natural language processing model tailored for Indonesian language nuances, which achieved 84% accuracy in detecting culturally aligned authenticity cues, such as *budi pekerti* and *tenggang rasa* (Koto et al., 2020). The model was fine-tuned on a dataset of 10,000 Indonesian social media posts, incorporating slang and cultural idioms to enhance sensitivity; however, it primarily focused on standard Indonesian, which may have limited its ability to capture regional dialects. Credibility and digital engagement were assessed using validated scales adapted from Ohanian (2013) and Hollebeek et al. (2014), respectively. The items were translated into Indonesian and then back-translated to ensure accuracy. Consumer skepticism was measured using Friestad and Wright's (1994) scale, which captures defensive responses to commercial content. All scales underwent cross-cultural validation by a panel of five Indonesian marketing experts to ensure cultural relevance.

Data analysis employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test mediation (H3) and moderation (H4, H5, H6) hypotheses, using AMOS software for robust path analysis (Hayes, 2017). Measurement invariance was confirmed across influencer types and platforms, ensuring model consistency. Robustness checks, including bootstrap tests with 5,000 resamples, validated the stability of results. Ethical protocols were followed, adhering to institutional guidelines, with informed consent obtained from participants and data anonymized to protect privacy. While the focus on standard Indonesian enhanced analytical precision, it may have overlooked regional linguistic variations, suggesting a need for future studies to incorporate dialect-specific analyses.

RESULTS

The final sample comprises 152 Indonesian influencers equally distributed between nano ($n=76$, 50%) and micro influencers ($n=76$, 50%), with good cultural representativeness across key dimensions. Geographic distribution closely mirrors Indonesian demographics: Java (59.9%), Sumatera (25.0%), and other regions (15.1%), validated through chi-square goodness of fit showing non-significant deviation from population parameters ($\chi^2 = 2.34$, $p = 0.31$). Content categories demonstrate balanced representation across lifestyle (35.5%), beauty (32.9%), and fashion (31.6%) sectors. Cultural authenticity analysis suggests 92.1% of sample content contains Indonesian cultural expressions, with a mean cultural appropriateness score of 0.87 (SD = 0.12), indicating reasonable cultural validity within our assessment framework. Language authenticity assessment shows 44.1% use pure Indonesian, while 55.9% employ mixed Indonesian-English, reflecting contemporary digital communication patterns. Platform distribution is dominated by Instagram (58.6%) and TikTok (41.4%), reflecting typical Indonesian social media usage patterns.

Missing data analysis confirms 2.3% overall missing rate, with Little's MCAR test indicating random missingness ($\chi^2 = 45.23$, $p = 0.67$). Outlier analysis via Mahalanobis distance identified three multivariate outliers (2.0%), retained after influence analysis showed minimal impact on parameter estimates. Normality assessment using Shapiro-

Wilk tests confirms the appropriateness of distributions for parametric analysis (all $p > 0.05$).

Table 1 confirms convergent validity with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.5 and Composite Reliability (CR) above 0.7, alongside Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.8 for all constructs, indicating high reliability. Discriminant validity was established with heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios below 0.85, ensuring that the constructs were distinct. Model fit indices (CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06) supported the use of IndoBERT for analyzing culturally aligned authenticity cues, such as *budi pekerti* and *tenggang rasa*, which resonate with Indonesia's collectivistic values (Koto et al., 2020). These results provided a strong foundation for subsequent analyses, aligning with the cultural nuances of the Indonesian digital landscape.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity Assessment

| Construct | α | CR | AVE | MSV | Cultural α Range |
|---------------------|----------|------|------|------|-------------------------|
| Authenticity Cues | 0.81 | 0.84 | 0.58 | 0.34 | 0.79-0.83 |
| Credibility | 0.89 | 0.91 | 0.71 | 0.38 | 0.87-0.91 |
| Digital Engagement | 0.78 | 0.81 | 0.52 | 0.38 | 0.76-0.80 |
| Consumer Skepticism | 0.85 | 0.87 | 0.64 | 0.21 | 0.83-0.87 |

Table 2. Temporal Engagement Patterns (8-Week Observation)

| Week | Mean Engagement Rate | SD | n | Authenticity-Credibility β | p-value |
|------|----------------------|------|-----|----------------------------------|---------|
| 1-2 | 8.7% | 3.2% | 152 | 0.73 | <0.001 |
| 3-4 | 7.4% | 2.8% | 152 | 0.62 | <0.001 |
| 5-6 | 6.9% | 2.9% | 152 | 0.58 | <0.001 |
| 7-8 | 6.8% | 2.7% | 152 | 0.58 | <0.001 |

Exploratory analyses revealed temporal and regional patterns in digital engagement, offering insights into platform-specific and geographic dynamics. Table 2 presents temporal engagement patterns over eight weeks, showing a peak in comments during week four ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.72$) and higher shares in Java compared to Sumatra ($t = 2.87$, $p < 0.01$). The regional difference likely stems from Java's higher digital adoption and urban connectivity, reflecting stronger community-driven interactions consistent with *gotong royong* (Hofstede et al., 2010). Instagram exhibited stronger engagement for polished, visually curated content ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.65$), while TikTok favored raw, authentic interactions ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.59$), highlighting platform affordances that shape consumer behavior (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2024). For instance, TikTok's short-form videos amplified informal, culturally resonant content, whereas Instagram's aesthetic focus appealed to urban audiences in Java. These findings contextualize the digital engagement landscape, setting the stage for hypothesis testing by illustrating how cultural and platform factors influence the effectiveness of influencers.

Further exploratory analysis in Table 2 highlighted platform-specific engagement trends, which varied by influencer type and content category. Nano influencers showed higher comment rates on TikTok ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.61$) due to their intimate, community-driven interactions. In contrast, micro influencers excelled on Instagram with higher shares ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.68$), reflecting their broader reach and professional content (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2018). Content categories also influenced engagement, with lifestyle content outperforming beauty and fashion in Jawa ($t = 3.12$, $p < 0.01$), possibly due to its alignment with everyday cultural values. In contrast, Sumatra showed balanced engagement across categories, suggesting regional differences in cultural resonance. These patterns highlight the importance of tailoring influencer strategies to platform and regional contexts, as nano-influencers leverage authenticity for engagement, while micro-influencers capitalize on scale efficiency (Casaló et al., 2020). The exploratory findings in Table 2 provide critical context for interpreting the hypothesized relationships, particularly the role of cultural and platform dynamics in shaping digital engagement.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships, with results summarized in Table 3. Table 3 confirms that H1 was

supported, with Authenticity positively influencing Credibility ($\beta = 0.62$, $SE = 0.069$, $t = 8.94$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.48, 0.76], $f^2 = 0.52$, $r^2 = 0.34$), indicating that authentic behaviors, such as transparent sponsorship disclosures and culturally aligned narratives, enhance perceived expertise and trustworthiness (Hayes, 2017). H2 was also supported, with Credibility significantly predicting Digital Engagement ($\beta = 0.67$, $SE = 0.066$, $t = 10.21$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.54, 0.80], $f^2 = 0.82$, $r^2 = 0.41$), suggesting that credible influencers drive higher likes, comments, and shares. The mediation effect (H3) was confirmed, with Credibility mediating the relationship between Authenticity and Digital Engagement (indirect effect = 0.41, $SE = 0.071$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.28, 0.56]), as shown in Table 3. This mediation highlights that authenticity fosters engagement indirectly through credibility, aligning with Indonesia’s community-driven trust dynamics (Leung et al., 2022).

Table 3. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing Results

| Hypothesis | Path | β | SE | t-value | p-value | 95% CI | f^2 | r^2 | Support |
|------------|-----------------------------|---------|-------|---------|---------|----------------|-------|-------|---------|
| H1 | Authenticity → Credibility | 0.62 | 0.069 | 8.94 | <0.001 | [0.48, 0.76] | 0.52 | 0.34 | ✓ |
| H2 | Credibility → Engagement | 0.67 | 0.066 | 10.21 | <0.001 | [0.54, 0.80] | 0.82 | 0.41 | ✓ |
| H3 | Indirect Effect (Mediation) | 0.41 | 0.071 | - | <0.001 | [0.28, 0.56] | - | - | ✓ |
| H4 | Auth × Type → Cred | 0.17 | 0.073 | 2.34 | 0.020 | [0.03, 0.31] | 0.15 | - | ✓ |
| H5 | Cred × Type → Engage | 0.22 | 0.077 | 2.87 | 0.005 | [0.07, 0.37] | 0.18 | - | ✓ |
| H6 | Auth × Skepticism → Cred | -0.19 | 0.071 | -2.67 | 0.008 | [-0.33, -0.05] | 0.12 | - | ✓ |

Table 4. Simple Slope Estimates of Moderation Effect by Influencer Type

| Hypothesis | Condition | B | SE | t-value | p-value | 95% CI | Cultural Advantage |
|------------|-------------------|------|-------|---------|---------|--------------|---------------------------|
| H4 | Nano Influencers | 0.71 | 0.081 | 8.76 | <0.001 | [0.55, 0.87] | +31% conversion advantage |
| | Micro Influencers | 0.54 | 0.089 | 6.07 | <0.001 | [0.36, 0.72] | - |
| | Difference | 0.17 | 0.073 | 2.34 | 0.020 | [0.03, 0.31] | Community intimacy |
| H5 | Nano Influencers | 0.56 | 0.094 | 5.96 | <0.001 | [0.37, 0.75] | - |
| | Micro Influencers | 0.78 | 0.084 | 9.29 | <0.001 | [0.61, 0.95] | +39% efficiency advantage |
| | Difference | 0.22 | 0.077 | 2.87 | 0.005 | [0.07, 0.37] | Scale efficiency |

Moderation analyses further elucidated the role of Influencer Type and Consumer Skepticism, as detailed in Tables 4 and 5. Table 4 examines H4 and H5, focusing on how Influencer Type moderates the hypothesized relationships. For H4, the Authenticity–Credibility link was stronger for nano influencers ($\beta = 0.71$, $SE = 0.081$, $t = 8.76$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.55, 0.87]) than for micro influencers ($\beta = 0.54$, $SE = 0.089$, $t = 6.07$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.36, 0.72]), with a significant difference ($\beta = 0.17$, $SE = 0.073$, $t = 2.34$, $p = 0.020$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.31]). Nano influencers exhibited a 31% conversion advantage due to community intimacy, reflecting Indonesia’s collectivistic values (Casaló et al., 2020). For H5, the Credibility–Digital Engagement link was stronger for micro influencers ($\beta = 0.78$, $SE = 0.084$, $t = 9.29$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.61, 0.95]) than for nano influencers ($\beta = 0.56$, $SE = 0.094$, $t = 5.96$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.75]), with a 39% efficiency advantage due to scale (difference: $\beta = 0.22$, $SE = 0.077$, $t = 2.87$, $p = 0.005$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.37]). These findings, detailed in Table 4, underscore the differential roles of nano and micro influencers in Indonesia’s digital landscape.

Table 5 tests H6 by examining how Consumer Scepticism moderates the Authenticity–Credibility link. At low skepticism levels (≤ 2.67 , $n = 112$, $M = 2.01$, $SD = 0.43$), the relationship was strong ($\beta = 0.74$, $SE = 0.082$, $t = 9.02$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.58, 0.90]), indicating that audiences with low scepticism readily trust authentic influencers. At high scepticism levels (> 2.67 , $n = 40$, $M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.38$), the effect weakened ($\beta = 0.49$, $SE = 0.093$, $t = 5.27$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.67]), with a significant interaction effect ($\beta = -0.19$, $SE = 0.071$, $t = -2.67$, $p = 0.008$, 95% CI [-0.33, -0.05]). As shown in Table 5, high skepticism, often triggered by perceived commercial intent, reduces the impact of authenticity, notably when content lacks cultural alignment with values like *tenggang rasa* (Boerman et al., 2022). These moderation effects highlight the importance of managing audience perceptions in influencer marketing.

Table 5. Conditional Effects of Skepticism Level on Authenticity–Credibility Relationship

| Skepticism Level | Auth→Cred (β) | SE | t-value | p-value | 95% CI | n | Mean Skepticism |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------|---------|----------------|-----|------------------------|
| Low (≤ 2.67) | 0.74 | 0.082 | 9.02 | <0.001 | [0.58, 0.90] | 112 | 2.01 (SD=0.43) |
| High (> 2.67) | 0.49 | 0.093 | 5.27 | <0.001 | [0.31, 0.67] | 40 | 3.24 (SD=0.38) |
| Interaction Effect | -0.19 | 0.071 | -2.67 | 0.008 | [-0.33, -0.05] | 152 | 73rd percentile cutoff |

The results collectively validate the proposed model, which integrates cultural contingencies into influencer marketing dynamics. Robustness checks, including bootstrap tests with 5,000 resamples, confirmed the stability of SEM results (Hayes, 2017). The findings align with Indonesia’s collectivistic culture, where nano influencers leverage community intimacy to build credibility, while micro influencers excel in driving engagement through broader reach. Platform differences further modulate these effects, with TikTok amplifying authenticity-driven engagement and Instagram favoring credibility-driven outcomes. Regional variations suggest that urban Jawa audiences respond more strongly to structured content, while Sumatera audiences value cultural resonance across platforms (Hofstede et al., 2010). These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of influencer effectiveness, supporting the Cultural Contingency Theory in emerging markets.

DISCUSSION

This study validates the cultural contingency theory of digital influence, demonstrating that authenticity significantly influences Credibility, which in turn drives Digital Engagement in Indonesia’s collectivistic context, according to Leung et al. (2022), authenticity, characterized by transparent and culturally aligned content, fosters trust, particularly in high-context cultures where community validation is paramount. In Indonesia, influencers who embody *budi pekerti* and *tenggang rasa* resonate strongly with audiences, enhancing their perceived expertise and trustworthiness (Audrezet et al., 2018). This finding contrasts with Western models, where individual expertise often overshadows communal trust (Hofstede et al., 2010). The mediation effect of Credibility underscores that authenticity drives engagement indirectly through credibility, aligning with Kim and Kim’s (2021) assertion that trust mediates influencer effectiveness. The results underscore the crucial role of cultural alignment in digital marketing, particularly in collectivist societies where community-driven trust significantly influences consumer behavior.

The moderation analyses further refine the model by revealing the differential effects of Influencer Type. Nano influencers strengthen the Authenticity–Credibility link, leveraging their intimate community ties, which align with Indonesia’s *gotong royong* (Kay et al., 2020). Conversely, micro influencers enhance the Credibility–Digital Engagement relationship, capitalizing on their broader reach and polished content (De Veirman et al., 2017). According to Djafarova and Trofimenko (2018), the scale efficiency of micro-influencers drives higher engagement, particularly on Instagram, where curated aesthetics

appeal to urban audiences. In contrast, TikTok's informal, short-form videos amplify the authenticity of nano influencers, fostering engagement through relatable narratives (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2024). These platform-specific dynamics suggest that influencer strategies must be tailored to both cultural and technological contexts to maximize effectiveness in Indonesia's diverse digital landscape.

Consumer Skepticism significantly moderates the Authenticity–Credibility relationship, with high skepticism weakening the effect. According to Boerman et al. (2022), skepticism arises when audiences perceive commercial intent, particularly in high-context cultures where cultural misalignment triggers distrust. This finding aligns with Lou and Yuan's (2019) observation that transparent disclosures mitigate skepticism, enhancing credibility. In Indonesia, where 78% of consumers prioritize cultural fit (Bright & Logan, 2018), skepticism is higher for content lacking local resonance, such as overly commercialized posts. The weaker effect under high skepticism suggests that brands must prioritize culturally sensitive content to maintain trust, especially on TikTok, where raw authenticity mitigates defensive responses compared to Instagram's polished format (Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2024). These results challenge Western-centric models, emphasizing the need for culturally adaptive frameworks in emerging markets.

The findings also reveal regional and platform-specific nuances, enriching the model's applicability. Table 5 indicates higher engagement in Java than Sumatra, likely due to Java's urban connectivity and digital adoption (Hofstede et al., 2010). According to Baj-Rogowska (2023), regional digital divides influence engagement patterns, with urban audiences responding more to structured content. This study extends prior research by integrating computational methods, such as IndoBERT, which achieves 84% accuracy in capturing cultural nuances (Koto et al., 2020). The results confirm that cultural contingencies shape influencer effectiveness, with nano-influencers excelling in trust-building and micro-influencers driving engagement. These insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of digital influence in collectivistic contexts, challenging universalist assumptions in influencer marketing research.

The implications of this study are twofold. Theoretically, it advances the Cultural Contingency Theory by demonstrating that cultural values like *gotong royong* and *budi pekerti* mediate influencer effectiveness, offering a framework for studying digital marketing in collectivist societies (Hofstede et al., 2010). Practically, brands should prioritize nano-influencers for building trust through authentic, culturally aligned content, particularly on TikTok, while leveraging micro-influencers for broader engagement on Instagram. To counter skepticism, transparent disclosures and culturally resonant narratives are crucial, particularly for audiences with high levels of skepticism. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and regional dialects to further refine the model, ensuring its applicability across Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms the Cultural Contingency Theory of Digital Influence, highlighting the pivotal role of Authenticity in driving Credibility and Digital Engagement among Indonesian influencers on Instagram and TikTok. The findings demonstrate that authentic content, infused with cultural values like *budi pekerti* and *tenggang rasa*, fosters trust, which in turn boosts likes, comments, and shares, particularly in Indonesia's collectivistic society. Nano influencers excel in building credibility through intimate, community-driven interactions, reflecting the *gotong royong* ethos, while micro influencers drive higher engagement through their broader reach and polished content. Consumer skepticism weakens the authenticity–credibility link, especially when content lacks cultural resonance. Regional differences, with Jawa showing stronger engagement than Sumatera due to urban connectivity and platform variations, further shape influencer effectiveness. Specifically, TikTok favors raw authenticity, while Instagram emphasizes curated aesthetics. These insights, illustrated in Figure 1: Research Framework, underscore the importance of cultural and platform-specific factors in digital marketing.

The findings offer theoretical insights by validating a culturally contingent model of influencer marketing, distinct from Western individualist frameworks, and practical guidance for brands to leverage nano influencers for trust-building and micro influencers for engagement in Indonesia. However, the study's focus on the standard Indonesian language may overlook regional dialects, potentially limiting its capture of diverse cultural nuances. The eight-week duration, while sufficient for stable engagement patterns, may miss long-term trends. Future research should explore dialect-specific authenticity cues, extend the study period to capture evolving dynamics, and examine additional platforms to enhance the model's applicability across Indonesia's diverse digital landscape.

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