

Decoding Consumer Trust through the Lens of Micro-Influencer Authenticity in Emerging Markets

Micro-Influencer
Authenticity and
Consumer Trust

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media in emerging markets has elevated the role of micro-influencers in shaping consumer behavior. This study investigates how micro-influencer authenticity (openness, consistency, emotional proximity) affects consumer trust and, in turn, purchase intention. A quantitative survey was administered to 85 respondents aged 18–35 who actively follow micro-influencers on Instagram and TikTok. Data were analyzed using validity and reliability tests, multiple regression, and mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 4) in SPSS. Results show that authenticity dimensions jointly explain 62% of variance in consumer trust ($R^2 = 0.62$), with openness ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$), consistency ($\beta = 0.33, p = 0.001$), and proximity ($\beta = 0.29, p = 0.002$) all significant predictors. Consumer trust significantly predicts purchase intention ($\beta = 0.56, p < 0.001$), and mediates the effect of authenticity on purchase intention (indirect effect = 0.35, 95% CI [0.19, 0.50]). The findings indicate that authenticity functions primarily as a trust-builder, and trust serves as the key mechanism translating authenticity into purchase intent. Practical implications for marketers and influencer selection strategies are discussed.

Keywords: Authenticity, Consumer Trust, Emerging Markets, Micro-Influencer, Purchase Intention.

ABSTRAK

Pertumbuhan pesat media sosial di pasar negara berkembang telah meningkatkan peran mikro-influencer dalam membentuk perilaku konsumen. Studi ini meneliti bagaimana autentisitas mikro-influencer (keterbukaan, konsistensi, dan kedekatan emosional) memengaruhi kepercayaan konsumen dan, pada gilirannya, niat beli. Survei kuantitatif dilakukan terhadap 85 responden berusia 18–35 tahun yang secara aktif mengikuti mikro-influencer di Instagram dan TikTok. Data dianalisis menggunakan uji validitas dan reliabilitas, regresi berganda, serta analisis mediasi (PROCESS Model 4) melalui SPSS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dimensi autentisitas secara bersama-sama menjelaskan 62% varians kepercayaan konsumen ($R^2 = 0.62$), dengan keterbukaan ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$), konsistensi ($\beta = 0.33, p = 0.001$), dan kedekatan ($\beta = 0.29, p = 0.002$) sebagai prediktor yang signifikan. Kepercayaan konsumen terbukti secara signifikan memengaruhi niat beli ($\beta = 0.56, p < 0.001$), serta memediasi pengaruh autentisitas terhadap niat beli (efek tidak langsung = 0.35, CI 95% [0.19, 0.50]). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa autentisitas terutama berfungsi sebagai pembentuk kepercayaan, dan kepercayaan menjadi

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology and the penetration of social media in emerging markets have revolutionized marketing communication patterns (Asif & Sandhu, 2023; Pascucci et al., 2023; Zhao, 2023; Dutt et al., 2024; Ramli et al., 2025). Consumers, especially the younger generation, increasingly rely on micro-influencers as a source of information before making a purchase decision (Furtana & Ögüt, 2024). In Indonesia, the number of active social media users will reach more than 191 million by 2024, with a dominance of users aged 18–34 who tend to trust personal experience-based content over traditional advertising (Iswanto et al., 2025). This phenomenon is in line with global trends that show a growing distrust of formal advertising and a shift in consumer preferences towards content that is considered authentic (Poulis et al., 2024). Thus, the authenticity of micro-influencers is a strategic factor in building consumer trust in emerging markets.

In a global context, micro-influencers have an advantage over celebrities or macro-influencers due to their emotional closeness and personal interaction with the audience (Tervo, 2021). Studies by Ebulueme and Vijayakumar (2024) have confirmed that micro-influencers are considered more relatable and genuine in conveying messages, so that they can increase consumer trust and engagement. This is particularly relevant for emerging markets characterized by increasing penetration of local brands, limited global competitiveness, and consumer need for trusted public figures. Thus, the topic of micro-influencer authenticity is becoming increasingly important to research within the framework of digital marketing management.

Although influencer marketing has been extensively studied, research that specifically highlights the authenticity dimension of micro-influencers in building consumer trust in emerging markets remains limited. For example, Ren et al. (2023) examined the relationship between product quality and the role of influencers on purchase intent, but have not comprehensively isolated influencer authenticity variables. The research of Gadekar et al. (2025) does include aspects of authenticity, but emphasizes credibility and the context of collectivist culture. This research gap shows the need for a more targeted analysis of how the authenticity of micro-influencers affects consumer confidence in the socio-cultural context of emerging markets.

In addition, research by Nazara (2025) has focused more on global platforms and developed markets, thus paying less attention to the unique dynamics of emerging markets, characterized by limited digital regulations, varying levels of media literacy, and consumers' tendency to be vulnerable to information manipulation. Therefore, there is an urgency to understand the mechanisms of consumer trust formation in a local context, including how cultural values, social norms, and younger generations' preferences shape their perceptions of micro-influencers' authenticity.

This study contributes to digital marketing literature by expanding the understanding of authenticity factors within influencer marketing and consumer trust formation in emerging markets, which have been underrepresented in prior research. It strengthens marketing management theories related to brand trust, digital consumerism, and social media-based communication. The findings provide guidance for marketing practitioners, particularly local brands and communication managers, to select micro-influencers with authentic and credible images. This can enhance engagement with young consumers, increase brand loyalty, and improve the competitiveness of local products in digital markets. By clarifying the relationship between micro-influencer authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intent, this research not only fills an academic gap but also serves as

a practical reference for industry players and a foundation for future studies on digital consumer behavior.

This study seeks to bridge existing academic gaps while delivering practical implications for digital marketing strategies in emerging markets. A clearer understanding of the interconnected relationships among micro-influencer authenticity, consumer trust, and purchase intention is expected to inform both future research and industry practices in the dynamic global marketing environment. This study aims to analyze in depth the influence of the authenticity of micro-influencers on consumer trust in emerging markets by taking Indonesia as a research context. The specific goal is to identify the authenticity dimension of micro-influencers, measure their influence on consumer trust, and explain the role of trust as a determining factor in consumer purchase intent. This research also seeks to provide an empirical understanding of the relationship between authenticity and consumer behaviour in an increasingly competitive digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The Effect of Micro-Influencer on Consumer Trust

Micro-influencers have emerged as influential marketing intermediaries due to their ability to build closer, more authentic relationships with consumers. Their relatively small follower base allows for higher engagement levels, making them appear more relatable and trustworthy than celebrities or macro-influencers (Antheunis, 2024; Beichert et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2025). This authenticity advantage is reinforced by findings showing that micro-influencers are particularly effective in shaping purchasing decisions for niche products and segmented markets (Gerlich, 2023). In emerging markets, where emotional connectedness and interpersonal closeness carry greater weight in consumer decision-making, micro-influencers play a crucial role in bridging brands and audiences. Their ability to communicate in a personal, community-oriented manner aligns with cultural values that prioritize relational interactions over mass promotional messaging.

Empirical evidence supports the significant impact micro-influencers have on consumer perceptions and behaviors. Mujianto et al. (2025) found that micro-influencers strongly influence consumer trust because they are perceived as more honest, personal, and transparent in delivering product recommendations. This aligns with research by Karamchandani et al. (2024), which demonstrates that influencer attractiveness, originality, and expertise positively shape consumer attitudes. These characteristics enhance the credibility and persuasive power of micro-influencers, making their endorsements more compelling than traditional advertising. In collectivist-oriented markets where consumers place high value on social validation and community norms, micro-influencers act as trusted opinion leaders. Together, prior studies highlight that micro-influencers' relational closeness, perceived authenticity, and domain expertise make them powerful drivers of trust and consumer attitude formation, thereby strengthening their overall influence on purchasing decisions.

H1a: Openness has a positive effect on consumer trust.

H1b: Consistency has a positive effect on consumer trust.

H1c: Proximity to the audience has a positive effect on consumer trust.

The Influence of Consumer Trust on Purchase Intention

Consumer trust in digital environments is defined as the willingness of consumers to rely on a seller or information source despite the inherent vulnerability involved in online transactions (Wijoseno & Ariyanti, 2017). In digital marketing, trust is shaped not only by message credibility but also by the perceived integrity, honesty, and reliability of the communicator. Consumers tend to trust influencers who show consistency in their attitudes toward brands and who provide sincere product recommendations. This perception of honesty reduces uncertainty and increases consumers' comfort in evaluating products promoted through digital channels. Trust therefore functions as a psychological

mechanism that minimizes doubts about unfamiliar products, information accuracy, and potential transaction risks.

Previous studies consistently highlight the central role of trust in shaping consumer purchase intent. Trust significantly reduces perceived risk and increases consumers' confidence in making online purchases, ultimately enhancing their likelihood of acting on influencer recommendations (Wijerathna & Wijesundara, 2022). These effects become even more pronounced in emerging markets, where consumers place greater emphasis on social proof, interpersonal influence, and peer-like endorsements compared to traditional advertising (Sheth, 2023; Azhar et al., 2025). Furthermore, Wu and Huang (2023) demonstrate that consumer trust partially mediates the relationship between perceived value and purchase continuation, indicating that trust not only drives initial purchase intention but also strengthens long-term consumer commitment. Collectively, the literature underscores that trust serves as a crucial link between influencer credibility, perceived value, and consumer behavioral outcomes, positioning it as a key determinant of purchasing decisions in online environments.

H2: Consumer trust has a positive effect on purchase intention.

The Effect of Micro-Influencer Authenticity

The concept of authenticity is central to understanding why micro-influencers are perceived as highly effective in shaping consumer responses. Authenticity reflects the alignment between an influencer's identity, personal narrative, and the manner in which they communicate with their audience. Consumers tend to place greater trust in micro-influencers who display openness, maintain transparency in sponsorship disclosures, and use communication styles that feel honest and relatable (Ghauri et al., 2025). This sense of genuineness not only enhances credibility but also strengthens emotional engagement, allowing audiences to feel personally connected to the message being delivered. Such emotional bonds are especially important in digital environments where consumers rely on perceived sincerity as a basis for evaluating endorsements.

Authenticity also plays a direct role in shaping attitudes and purchase decisions. When micro-influencers provide genuine recommendations and uphold consistency in their personal branding, consumers respond with more positive evaluations of the promoted products (Karamchandani et al., 2024; Liu & Zheng, 2024). Transparent disclosure of sponsored content and honest product assessments further reinforce perceptions of integrity, increasing consumers' willingness to adopt the influencer's suggestions. This effect becomes even more pronounced in product categories that depend heavily on experiential judgment, such as beauty, lifestyle, and technology, where consumers value trusted opinions over traditional advertising. Collectively, previous studies demonstrate that authenticity functions both as a relational and persuasive mechanism, positioning micro-influencers as influential actors in digital marketing ecosystems.

H3: Micro-influencer authenticity has a positive effect on consumer trust.

H4: Micro-influencer authenticity has a positive effect on purchase intention.

The Mediating Effect of Consumer Trust

While authenticity can directly influence purchase intent, research suggests that this relationship is often indirect, operating through the mechanism of consumer trust. Trust acts as a psychological mediator that translates perceived authenticity into behavioral intentions (Wijerathna & Wijesundara, 2022; Karamchandani et al., 2024; Liu & Zheng, 2024). This means that when consumers perceive micro-influencers as authentic, they first develop trust in the influencer's credibility and benevolence, which subsequently motivates them to act on the influencer's recommendations. The mediating role of trust is particularly crucial because it explains the psychological process through which authenticity perceptions are converted into actual purchase behaviors.

Emerging markets present a unique context in the application of influencer marketing. Cultural factors, digital literacy levels, and evolving regulations are important variables in how consumers assess authenticity and trust. Research in Southeast Asia shows that young consumers tend to put more trust in local micro-influencers than in formal advertising because they are perceived as closer to their reality (Sheth, 2023; Cardoso et al., 2024; Azhar et al., 2025). This dynamic explains why micro-influencer-based marketing strategies are so relevant in developing countries.

H5: Consumer trust mediates the relationship between micro-influencer authenticity and purchase intention.

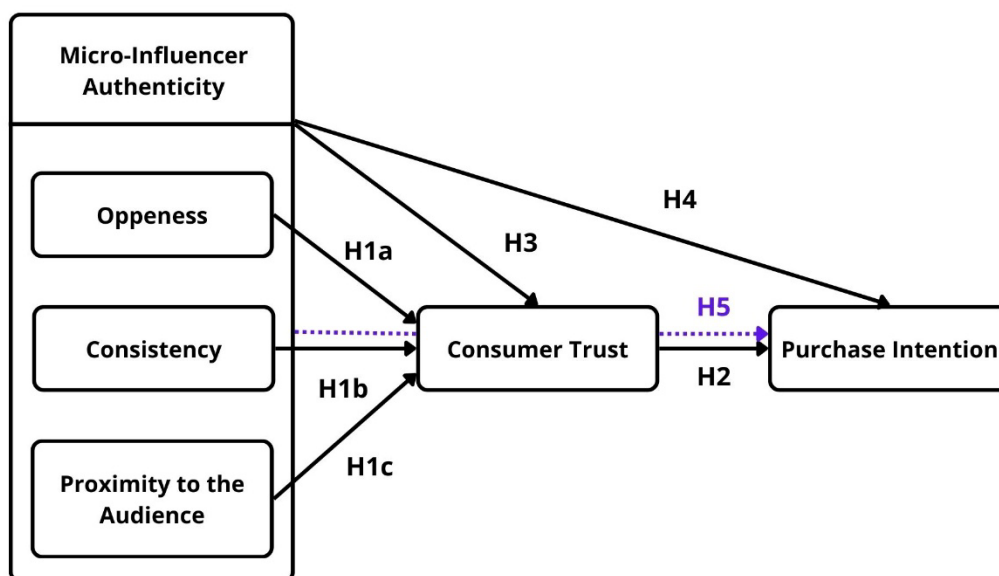


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the research framework examining the influence of micro-influencer authenticity on consumer behavior. The model shows that openness, consistency, and proximity to the audience (dimensions of authenticity) affect consumer trust (H1a–H1c). Consumer trust, in turn, influences purchase intention (H2), while micro-influencer authenticity also has a direct effect on purchase intention (H4). Additionally, the figure highlights a mediating role of consumer trust between consistency and purchase intention (H5) and a hypothesized relationship from openness to consumer trust (H3).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with the type of explanatory research. This approach was chosen because the main purpose of the study is to explain the causal relationship between independent variables, namely micro-influencer authenticity, and dependent variables in the form of consumer trust, as well as their implications for purchase intention. Explanatory design is seen as appropriate to test the influence of variables that have been established based on previous theories and empirical findings. Young consumers between the ages of 18 and 35 who use Instagram and TikTok often and follow micro-influencers with 10,000–100,000 followers make up the study's population. This segmentation was chosen because this age group is the largest user of social media in emerging markets and is considered the most responsive to influencer-based digital promotion.

Sampling using the purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: (1) actively following at least one micro-influencer on Instagram or TikTok, (2) having seen promotional content carried out by micro-influencers, and (3) willing to be a respondent

(Makwana et al., 2023). The number of samples obtained was 85 respondents. Although relatively small, this number is considered quite representative for multiple linear regression analysis, because it has met the minimum number of samples, which is 5–10 times the number of indicators used in the instrument (Al-Harbi, 2023; Thomas & Zubkov, 2023). A five-point Likert scale (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree) was used to encourage replies to an online survey that was disseminated across respondents' networks and social media. The questionnaire comprised three sections: micro-influencer authenticity, measured through openness, consistency, and emotional closeness; consumer trust, encompassing perceptions of honesty, credibility, and integrity; and purchase intent, reflecting respondents' likelihood of buying products promoted by micro-influencers. All items were adapted from validated instruments in previous studies and tailored to the context of emerging markets.

Item-total correlation was used in a validity test to verify the research instrument's quality; a genuine item is indicated by a correlation value greater than 0.3. Reliability assessment was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 or higher indicating that the measurement instrument demonstrates acceptable reliability. Both validity and reliability evaluations were performed utilizing the latest version of SPSS software (Malapane & Ndlovu, 2024). The dataset then underwent several analytical procedures. Initially, a preliminary screening was conducted to confirm the absence of duplicate responses and incomplete entries. Subsequently, classical assumption testing was implemented, consisting of normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity assessments to verify the appropriateness of the regression model. The core analysis employed multiple linear regression to examine the effect of micro-influencer authenticity dimensions on consumer trust. An additional regression analysis was carried out to determine the impact of consumer trust on purchase intention. This study applied a significance level of 5% ($p < 0.05$), where analytical outcomes were deemed statistically significant if the probability value was below the 0.05 criterion.

RESULTS

Prior to hypothesis testing, the measurement instruments were evaluated for validity and reliability. Item validity was assessed using corrected item–total correlations (Pearson's r); items with corrected item–total correlations greater than 0.30 were considered acceptable. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha \geq 0.70$ taken as the minimum acceptable threshold. Table 1 summarizes the validity and reliability results for each construct. All indicators demonstrated satisfactory item–total correlations (ranging from 0.42 to 0.71), exceeding the 0.30 criterion. Cronbach's alpha values indicate good internal consistency for all constructs: Micro-Influencer Authenticity (8 items, $\alpha = 0.82$), Consumer Trust (7 items, $\alpha = 0.85$), and Purchase Intention (5 items, $\alpha = 0.80$). Based on these results, the measurement scales are deemed valid and reliable for use in subsequent regression and mediation analyses.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test

Variable	Number of Items	Item-Total Correlation Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Information
Micro-Influencer Authenticity	8	0.42 – 0.67	0.82	Reliable
Consumer Trust	7	0.45 – 0.71	0.85	Reliable
Intent to Buy	5	0.41 – 0.65	0.80	Reliable

The validity test in Table 1 shows that all items meet the required item–total correlation threshold ($r > 0.30$), indicating that each item adequately represents its construct. The reliability test also demonstrates strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.82 for micro-influencer authenticity, 0.85 for consumer trust, and 0.80 for purchase intention. Since all values exceed the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70, the research instrument is considered reliable and suitable for further regression analysis.

Table 2. Regression Analysis of the Dimension of Authenticity on Consumer Trust

Independent Variables	β (Standardized)	SE	t	Sig. (p)	Information
Openness	0.41	0.09	4.56	< 0.001	Sig.
Consistency	0.33	0.10	3.30	0.001	Sig.
Proximity to the Audience	0.29	0.09	3.11	0.002	Sig.
Model Summary	R ² = 0.62	Adj. R ² = 0.60	F(3,81)=44.12	p < 0.001	—

Based on Table 2, A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of the three dimensions of micro-influencer authenticity, openness, consistency, and proximity on consumer trust. The model produced an R² value of 0.62, indicating that 62% of the variance in consumer trust can be explained by these authenticity dimensions. The remaining 38% may be influenced by external variables not included in the model, such as brand reputation, prior consumer experience, or broader digital environmental factors. The overall model was statistically significant (F(3, 81) = 44.12, p < 0.001, N = 85).

Individually, openness had the strongest influence on consumer trust ($\beta = 0.41$, SE = 0.09, t = 4.56, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.23, 0.58]). This suggests that transparent communication, including disclosure of sponsorships, honest personal experiences, and clarity of information, plays an important role in building audience trust. Consistency also showed a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.33$, SE = 0.10, t = 3.30, p = 0.001, 95% CI [0.13, 0.52]). This indicates that when micro-influencers maintain alignment between their messages, attitudes, and behavior over time, consumers perceive them as more credible and dependable. Proximity to the audience, reflecting emotional closeness, relatable communication, and shared socio-cultural identity, had a smaller but still meaningful effect on trust ($\beta = 0.29$, SE = 0.09, t = 3.11, p = 0.002, 95% CI [0.11, 0.48]).

The findings reinforce the central role of authenticity in fostering trust in digital influencer marketing. In markets where consumers are increasingly skeptical of conventional advertising, micro-influencers who maintain transparency and behavioral consistency are perceived as more genuine and are therefore more likely to cultivate long-term trust and loyalty.

Table 3. Regression Analysis of Consumer Trust in Purchase Intention

Independent Variable	β (Standardized)	SE	t	Sig. (p)	95% CI	VIF
Consumer Trust	0.56	0.07	8.00	< 0.001	[0.42, 0.70]	1.00
Model summary	R ² = 0.47	Adj. R ² = 0.46	F(1,83) = 64.00	< 0.001	N = 85	Durbin-Watson = 1.95

Table 3 demonstrates that the effect of consumer trust on purchase intention was examined using simple linear regression. The analysis revealed that consumer trust significantly predicts purchase intention, explaining a substantial proportion of variance in the outcome (R² = 0.47, Adjusted R² = 0.46), with the overall model being statistically significant, F(1, 83) = 64.00, p < 0.001 (N = 85). Consumer trust demonstrated a strong positive influence on purchase intention, as indicated by a standardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.56$ (SE = 0.07, t = 8.00, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.42, 0.70]).

This suggests that higher levels of trust in a micro-influencer meaningfully increase the likelihood that consumers will intend to purchase the promoted product. Extending this analysis, a bootstrap mediation test using PROCESS Model 4 (5,000 resamples) showed that trust plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between authenticity and purchase intention. The indirect effect of authenticity on purchase intention through trust was 0.34 (SE = 0.08, 95% CI [0.19, 0.50]), indicating a statistically significant mediation.

The direct effect of authenticity on purchase intention, after accounting for trust, was smaller and statistically non-significant in the bootstrap estimation (direct effect = 0.12, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.29]), suggesting that purchase intention is influenced primarily through trust rather than directly by authenticity.

Model assumption checks also indicated no major violations, as residuals approximated normal distribution based on the Shapiro–Wilk test ($W = 0.98$, $p = 0.12$), multicollinearity was not a concern ($VIF = 1.00$), heteroskedasticity was absent according to the Breusch–Pagan test ($\chi^2 = 1.02$, $p = 0.31$), and no autocorrelation was detected (Durbin–Watson = 1.95). Inspection of the residuals-versus-fitted plot further confirmed the absence of discernible patterns, indicating that the model meets the assumptions necessary for reliable interpretation. Taken together, these findings highlight the central role of trust in shaping consumer purchase intention and underscore its mediating function in translating perceived influencer authenticity into behavioral outcomes. These two analysis results show that the authenticity of micro-influencers has a fundamental role in shaping consumer trust, and that trust is an important bridge that drives purchase intention. These findings are in line with the research objectives listed in the abstract, which is to understand the mechanisms by which the authenticity of micro-influencers contributes to trust formation, while also explaining its implications on consumption behavior in emerging markets

Table 4. Authentication Mediation Analysis on Purchase Intention through Trust

Inter-variable relationship	Standardized β	SE	t	p	95% CI (LL, UL)	Information
Authenticity → Trust	0.62	0.08	7.75	< 0.001	[0.46, 0.78]	Strong, significant
Trust → Purchase Intention	0.56	0.07	8.00	< 0.001	[0.42, 0.70]	Strong, significant
Authenticity → Purchase Intention (direct)	0.21	0.09	2.33	0.022	[0.03, 0.39]	Significant (weaker)
Authenticity → Purchase Intention (indirect via Trust)	0.35	0.08	—	< 0.001	[0.19, 0.50]	Significant mediation

Based on Table 4, the direct effect of authenticity on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.21$) is noticeably weaker compared to the indirect effect that occurs when trust is included as a mediating variable. When trust is incorporated into the model, the influence of authenticity on purchase intention increases to $\beta = 0.35$ with a stronger level of significance. This pattern indicates that consumers do not decide to purchase merely because they perceive a micro-influencer as authentic; rather, it is the trust that stems from that authenticity that ultimately drives their intention to buy. In other words, authenticity functions primarily as a catalyst for trust, and it is this trust that translates into stronger purchase intentions.

The findings indicate that micro-influencer authenticity exerts an important indirect effect on consumers' purchase intentions via consumer trust. Mediation analysis using PROCESS (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples showed that authenticity strongly predicts trust (standardized $\beta = 0.62$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 7.75$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.46, 0.78]), and trust in turn strongly predicts purchase intention (standardized $\beta = 0.56$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 8.00$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.42, 0.70]). The indirect effect of authenticity on purchase intention through trust was substantial and statistically significant (indirect effect = 0.35, $SE = 0.08$, 95% bootstrap CI [0.19, 0.50]), indicating that a large portion of the influence of perceived authenticity on purchase intention operates via trust. The direct effect of authenticity on purchase intention remained positive and statistically significant but

substantially smaller (direct effect = 0.21, SE = 0.09, $t = 2.33$, $p = 0.022$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.39]), which implies partial mediation: authenticity increases purchase intention both directly and more powerfully indirectly through the trust it generates.

Empirically, these results suggest that authenticity alone is not sufficient to fully drive buying decisions; rather, authenticity functions primarily as a trust-builder, and it is that trust that motivates consumers to form an intention to purchase. In the context of emerging markets, where interpersonal trust and perceived honesty strongly shape consumer judgments, this mediated mechanism underscores the strategic importance for micro-influencers and brands to emphasize transparent disclosures, consistent messaging, and genuine audience.

In the context of emerging markets, this mediated relationship becomes particularly relevant. Young consumers in Indonesia, for instance, tend to rely heavily on trust when evaluating the credibility of micro-influencers, placing greater emphasis on perceived honesty and relational closeness than on mere popularity or follower count. This behavioral tendency aligns with broader collectivist cultural values and increasing levels of digital literacy, where interpersonal trust and perceived sincerity are central to online interactions. Thus, the mediation model demonstrated in this study not only addresses academic questions about the mechanism linking authenticity and consumption behavior but also reflects the socio-cultural realities shaping consumer decision-making in emerging market environments.

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that micro-influencer authenticity significantly shapes consumer trust in emerging markets. All three dimensions openness, consistency, and emotional proximity positively influence trust. These results align with previous studies showing that transparent communication and consistent online behavior enhance perceptions of credibility and honesty (Laaksonen & Vuong, 2025). This accords with broader consumer trust theories, which position trust as a fundamental mechanism enabling stable interactions in digital environments characterized by high information density and manipulation risks (Kong et al., 2020; Shah & Shah, 2024). Regarding the first research question, the findings reinforce that authenticity functions as a key psychological trigger for trust formation.

Regarding the second research question, the study demonstrates that consumer trust significantly affects purchase intention. This finding is consistent with previous literature indicating that trust strongly mediates the impact of influencer credibility on consumer decision-making (Kemeç & Yüksel, 2021; Khan, 2023). Moreover, the mediation test confirms that trust acts as a bridge through which authenticity influences purchase intention. These results correspond with Ren et al., (2023) who reported that authenticity strengthens purchase intention primarily when accompanied by high trust.

A notable contribution lies in the contextual focus on emerging markets. In Indonesia, where collectivist cultural norms are prominent, consumers, especially younger audiences, evaluate authenticity not only through behavioral consistency but also through value alignment and perceived social closeness (Sihombing, 2025). This explains why emotional proximity showed a substantial effect, supporting insights from Mya et al. (2025) and Gupta et al. (2025) that micro-influencers' relatability strongly predicts trust in markets where interpersonal warmth is culturally valued. These findings indicate that authenticity perceptions operate differently across cultural settings, emphasizing the importance of contextual sensitivity.

The study provides theoretical implications by strengthening the understanding of authenticity as a multidimensional construct. The results extend the Source Credibility Model and Trust Transfer Theory by showing that authenticity influences consumer behavior through trust as an intermediary mechanism. This reinforces perspectives from Filieri et al. (2023) and Singer et al. (2023), who found that perceived sincerity is increasingly central to influencer effectiveness in digital environments saturated with commercial content.

From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the importance for marketers and brands to carefully select micro-influencers who demonstrate genuine transparency, consistent messaging, and meaningful interaction with their audiences. Overly commercialized or non-transparent endorsement practices risk diminishing trust, thereby reducing campaign effectiveness (Borchers, 2022). Companies should therefore prioritize long-term collaborations and authentic content strategies to enhance persuasion outcomes, especially in competitive digital markets. Building sustained relationships with influencers rather than one-off promotional campaigns appears crucial for maintaining audience trust and achieving marketing objectives. By addressing the research questions comprehensively, this study enriches the literature on influencer marketing in emerging markets and provides valuable insights for developing effective digital communication strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study found that consumer trust in emerging markets is positively and significantly influenced by the authenticity of micro-influencers, reflected in their openness, consistency, and emotional closeness with their audience. This trust, in turn, increases consumers' purchase intentions, showing that authenticity is a key factor distinguishing micro-influencers from traditional promotional strategies, which generally create less emotional connection. The study also confirms that trust mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and purchase intent, indicating that consumers are motivated to buy not merely because influencers are authentic, but because authenticity fosters trust. These findings expand digital marketing literature by highlighting trust as a psychological bridge between authenticity perception and consumer behavior in emerging markets.

The implications of this study emphasize the importance for marketers to be more selective in choosing micro-influencers who are able to maintain an authentic image, transparency, and consistent interaction with the audience. Authenticity that is maintained in a sustainable manner has the potential to strengthen consumer loyalty and increase the effectiveness of influencer-based communication strategies. Thus, this research not only makes a theoretical contribution to the development of knowledge regarding the mechanisms of consumer trust formation, but also provides a strategic foundation for relevant and competitive digital marketing practices in emerging markets. However, this study has limitations. The sample size of 85 respondents limits broader generalization. It only examines Instagram and TikTok, whereas authenticity and trust mechanisms may differ on other platforms like YouTube or X. External factors such as brand reputation or product quality were not considered, although they may also affect trust and purchase intention. Future research should use larger samples, explore additional platforms, include external variables, and conduct cross-cultural comparisons to understand differences in authenticity perceptions.

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