



Assessing the Mediating Effect of Brand Perception and Consumer Engagement on Generation Z's Purchase Decisions through Social Media Influencers

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Abstract

This study examines the mediating roles of brand perception and consumer engagement in the relationship between social media influencers and purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers in Manila, Philippines. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from Generation Z respondents aged 18–27 through a structured survey questionnaire. Stratified random sampling was applied to ensure adequate representation across districts in the City of Manila. Statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate the direct and indirect effects among the variables. The findings indicate that social media influencers have a significant direct effect on Generation Z's purchase decisions. Moreover, both brand perception and consumer engagement were found to significantly mediate this relationship. Influencer marketing positively enhances brand perception through functional, affective, and experiential dimensions, while consumer engagement is strengthened through trust, relational bonds, and loyalty. These mediating factors intensify the influence of social media influencers on purchasing behavior. This study contributes to the growing literature on influencer marketing by providing empirical evidence on the mechanisms through which social media influencers affect Generation Z's purchase decisions. The findings offer practical implications for marketers and businesses seeking to develop effective influencer-driven strategies that enhance engagement and shape positive brand perceptions in urban digital markets.

Keywords: *Social Media Influencers, Generation Z, Brand Perception, Consumer Engagement, Purchase*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has become a vital part of many people's everyday lives, particularly for Generation Z (Gen Z), who were born between 1997 and 2006. This generation was exposed to social media and smartphones from an early age and is commonly referred to as "digital natives" due to living in a digital-first world. In Manila's digitally vibrant landscape, social media influencers significantly shape Generation Z's (aged 18–27) purchase decisions in the fast-food industry, where this digitally native demographic spends substantial daily hours on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, linking directly to broader digital marketing strategies amid rising urban e-commerce in the Philippines. With the development of smartphones, social media platforms have evolved, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. Moreover, social influencers have emerged on different social media platforms and are referred to as personalities capable of shaping consumer behavior, particularly purchase decisions.

The City of Manila, as a major urban center in the Philippines, has a high level of social media impact, where technology plays an essential role in the digital era. This environment offers a wide range of products and services through online social media platforms, which are then promoted to the market and eventually shape consumer behavior through social media influencers, who play a crucial role in molding brand perceptions and purchasing decisions among younger



consumers. Social media platforms function as ever-changing environments where people worldwide share, find, and interact with content. Generation Z, as younger consumers in Manila, now use social media daily due to the widespread use of smartphones and internet access. These platforms are ideal for business, entertainment, and information sharing, fostering social relationships. Social media also provides varied options for companies to interact meaningfully with their target consumers.

Key literature, such as [Shtern et al. \(2019\)](#) on Filipino influencers' authenticity techniques and [Wang and Huang \(2023\)](#) on digital influencers in social commerce, underscores social media's role in driving purchase intent, yet reveals a critical gap: the underexplored mediating effects of brand perception (e.g., functional and affective dimensions) and consumer engagement (e.g., relational bonds and trust) in local contexts such as Manila's fast-food sector. Prior studies overlook these mechanisms, creating a practice gap where marketers rely on generic influencer partnerships without optimizing for urban cultural dynamics, as noted by [Ekeland and Borenstein \(2020\)](#) on missing Instagram endorsement models. This applied research addresses the gap by examining these mediators through stratified random sampling of Gen Z respondents across Manila's six districts, offering practical solutions such as authentic collaborations to enhance sales, boost relational bonds, and bridge theory–practice divides in influencer marketing.

Moreover, the fast-food industry has grown rapidly, in addition to the general impact of social media and the emergence of influencers. From visually appealing Instagram photos to engaging TikTok cooking videos, social media has developed into a central location for fast-food inspiration and research. Fast-food establishments, specifically, have taken advantage of this tendency by collaborating with influencers to exhibit their most recent menu offerings, sales, and eating experiences. These influencers are crucial in impacting consumer views and increasing popularity among consumers because of their substantial and active followings. Furthermore, a wide range of perspectives and viewpoints that appeal to Generation Z consumers in the City of Manila have emerged because of the globalization of the fast-food critique scene brought about by the development of influencers. To win over this technologically aware demographic's interest and loyalty, firms must comprehend how social media, influencers, and the fast-food industry interconnect.

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of social media influencers' impact on consumer engagement among Generation Z consumers in the fast-food industry, assessing: (1.1) Relational Bonds, (1.2) Trust, and (1.3) Loyalty?
2. To what extent do social media influencers impact brand perception among Generation Z consumers in the City of Manila, with a focus on: (2.1) Functional Perception, (2.2) Affective Perception, (2.3) Brand Reputation, (2.4) Brand Experience, and (2.5) Brand Interaction?
3. Does Brand Perception mediate the effect of social media influencers on purchase decisions?
4. Does Consumer Engagement mediate the effect of social media influencers on purchase decisions?
5. Do social media influencers directly affect purchase decisions?

By adopting a holistic mediational framework that incorporates the consumer engagement framework of [Vivek et al. \(2012\)](#) and the brand perception model of [Barajas-Portas \(2015\)](#), this research study theoretically contributes to the existing literature on influencer marketing by explaining the mechanisms and logic behind how social media influencers impact the purchase

decisions of Generation Z consumers through consumer engagement and brand perception. Beyond this, the study offers an explanation of the purchase decisions of Gen Z in a digitally enabled urban setting by connecting the influence of social media influencers to established theories of the mediators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencers' Direct Impact on Consumer Purchase Decision

By prioritizing positive brand perception and embracing consumer engagement strategies through social media marketing, businesses can successfully influence the purchasing decisions of younger consumers and position themselves for long-term success in a competitive and rapidly evolving digital marketplace. Moreover, social media influencers play a significant role in shaping what Generation Z decides to buy. They do this by being authentic and showing specialized knowledge in certain areas, though their effectiveness depends on contextual factors. [Shtern et al. \(2019\)](#) highlight that Filipino influencers connect with both local and global audiences through performative authenticity, creating relatable content that fosters follower engagement. [Wang and Huang \(2023\)](#) build on this idea within social commerce, finding that consumers are more likely to purchase products promoted by digital influencers possessing referent and expert power than through traditional advertising channels. In the food industry, research by [Kazancoglu and Sati \(2020\)](#) and [Guo et al. \(2021\)](#) shows that micro-influencers are highly effective because their niche expertise elevates product appeal and builds positive brand perceptions ([Kusumawati et al., 2021](#)). While [Olcina et al. \(2023\)](#) note that working with influencers can be cost-effective, [Miguel et al. \(2022\)](#) caution that undisclosed commercial arrangements erode audience trust. Thus, transparency and perceived authenticity remain imperative for sustained influencer credibility.

Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement plays a pivotal role in how influencers affect purchasing decisions. Research by [Serajpour et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Syalsabila and Hermina \(n.d.\)](#) demonstrates that affective customer engagement fosters brand attachment, driving repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth. According to [Bastrygina and Lim \(2023\)](#), emotional and cognitive engagement explains substantial variance in Generation Z consumption behaviors. Furthermore, [Hussain and Ali \(2021\)](#) suggest that in digital retail settings, the quality of engagement, characterized by credibility and relatability, exerts greater persuasive weight than overt sales pitches.

Social network marketing facilitates continuous brand-consumer interaction. As noted by [Mohamad et al. \(n.d.\)](#), strategic social networking builds customer engagement, which directly enhances purchase intention. Brands targeting Generation Z must cultivate meaningful digital engagement that resonates with personal values.

RESEARCH METHOD

Demographic characteristics of respondents

What is the demographic profile of the Generation Z respondents in the City of Manila, particularly in terms of:

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Educational background
4. District of residence
5. Social media usage

Research Design and Sampling

A quantitative descriptive-correlational and causal-comparative research design was employed. The target population comprised Generation Z consumers residing in the City of Manila aged 18 to 27. A stratified random sampling technique was utilized across Manila's six administrative districts to guarantee geographic representativeness. The target sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula for finite populations:

$$n = [(Z^2 * p * (1 - p)) / E^2] / [1 + ((Z^2 * p * (1 - p)) / (E^2 * N))]$$

Using a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), maximum variability ($p = 0.50$), an error margin of plus or minus 5% ($E = 0.05$), and a population parameter of 20,000, the calculated requirement was 377 respondents ($n = 376.92 \approx 377$). Data collection was executed via self-administered Google Forms surveys distributed to eligible participants.

Instrumentation and Scale Criteria

The research instrument was organized into five sections using five-point Likert scales: Section I covered the Demographic Profile; Section II measured Consumer Engagement (15 items across Relational Bonds, Trust, and Loyalty; Vivek et al., 2012); Section III evaluated Brand Perception (25 items across Functional Perception, Affective Perception, Brand Reputation, Brand Experience, and Brand Interaction; Barajas-Portas, 2015); Section IV assessed Purchase Decisions (5 items evaluating price, accessibility, advertising, credibility, and quality); and Section V assessed Social Media Influencer Perception (5 items measuring integrity, expertise, communication, charisma, and content creation).

To ensure continuous, exhaustive numerical classification without interval gaps, the continuous Likert interpretation criteria below were applied uniformly across all variables:

Table 1. Continuous Agreement-Based Likert Scale Criteria

Scale	Mean Interval	Evaluation Criteria
1	1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree
2	1.81 – 2.60	Disagree
3	2.61 – 3.40	Neutral
4	3.41 – 4.20	Agree
5	4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree

Table 2. Continuous Likelihood-Based Likert Scale Criteria (Loyalty Subscale)

Scale	Mean Interval	Evaluation Criteria
1	1.00 – 1.80	Extremely Unlikely
2	1.81 – 2.60	Unlikely
3	2.61 – 3.40	Neutral
4	3.41 – 4.20	Likely
5	4.21 – 5.00	Extremely Likely

Content validity was established through expert review by three marketing academics. A pilot test was conducted with 37 respondents (10% of the sample) to ensure item clarity. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha benchmarked against standard criteria: below 0.60 (Poor), 0.60 to 0.69 (Moderate), 0.70 to 0.79 (Good/Acceptable), 0.80 to 0.89 (Very Good), and

0.90 and above (Excellent). Construct validity was established via exploratory factor analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability and Construct Validity

The internal consistency of all measurement scales was validated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient based on pilot data ($n = 37$). As reported in Table 3, all ten sub-dimensions and composite scales exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, with each construct comprising five items ($N = 5$).

Table 3. Scale Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) Consumer Engagement

Consumer Engagement	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Verbal Interpretation
Relational Bonds	5	0.768	Acceptable
Trust	5	0.821	Good
Loyalty	5	0.851	Good
Brand Perception	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Verbal Interpretation
Functional Perception	5	0.862	Good
Affective Perception	5	0.837	Good
Brand Reputation	5	0.848	Good
Brand Experience	5	0.839	Good
Brand Interaction	5	0.707	Acceptable
Independent & Dependent Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Verbal Interpretation
Social Media Influencer Perception	5	0.834	Good
Purchase Decisions	5	0.847	Good

Construct validity was examined through exploratory factor analysis using principal component extraction and varimax rotation. All items loaded strongly on their intended latent constructs (loadings greater than 0.50), confirming the structural distinction between the multi-dimensional mediating variables. Demographic Profile of the Respondents: Table 4 outlines the verified demographic characteristics of the 377 respondents.

Table 4. Demographic Profile of the Respondents ($N = 377$)

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18–20 years old	65	17.2%
21–24 years old	236	62.6%

Age	Frequency	Percentage
25–27 years old	76	20.2%
Total Frequency = 377		100.0%

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Female	193	51.2%
Male	180	47.7%
Prefer not to say	4	1.1%
Total Frequency = 377		100.0%

Educational Background	Frequency	Percentage
High School Undergraduate	7	1.9%
High School Graduate	82	21.8%
College Undergraduate	150	39.8%
College Graduate	136	36.1%
Others	2	0.5%
Total Frequency = 377		100.0%

District of Residence	Frequency	Percentage
District 1	68	18.0%
District 2	60	15.9%
District 3	58	15.4%
District 4	63	16.7%
District 5	67	17.8%
District 6	61	16.2%
Total Frequency = 377		100.0%

Social Media Usage (Daily)	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	10	2.7%
1 to less than 3 hours	41	10.9%
3 to less than 5 hours	81	21.5%
5 to 6 hours	109	28.9%
More than 6 hours	136	36.1%
Total Frequency = 377		100.0%

The sample was dominated by individuals aged 21–24 (62.6%, n = 236). This demographic cohort is characterized by pervasive daily media adoption, spending substantial daily hours on networked applications, exposing them continuously to commercial and influencer-led content

(Barry et al., 2017). Female respondents accounted for 51.2% (n = 193) and males represented 47.7% (n = 180), providing a balanced gender representation. Academic attainment was concentrated among college undergraduates (39.8%) and graduates (36.1%), indicating high cognitive digital literacy. Non-overlapping media usage categories revealed that 36.1% spent more than six hours daily on social platforms, and 28.9% spent between five and six hours, affirming high digital immersion among urban Filipino youth (Canizares et al., 2022). District distribution remained balanced (15.4% to 18.0%) across Manila's geographic divisions.

Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables

To provide an accurate overview of the constructs and avoid misattributing overall means to single dimensions, Table 5 summarizes the descriptive parameters across all evaluated scales.

Table 5. Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Main Constructs and Dimensions (N = 377)

Consumer Engagement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Relational Bonds Dimension	3.79	0.76	Agree
Trust Dimension	3.78	0.76	Agree
Loyalty Dimension	3.60	0.97	Agree
Overall Consumer Engagement (15 items)	3.72	0.77	Agree
Brand Perception	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Functional Perception Dimension	3.83	0.76	Agree
Affective Perception Dimension	3.91	0.84	Agree
Brand Reputation Dimension	3.85	0.79	Agree
Brand Experience Dimension	3.81	0.78	Agree
Brand Interaction Dimension	3.79	0.81	Agree
Overall Brand Perception (25 items)	3.78	0.75	Agree
Social Media Influencer Perception	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Overall SMI Perception (5 items)	3.93	0.72	Agree
Purchase Decisions	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Item 1 (Brand Price)	4.08	0.82	Agree
Item 2 (Accessibility)	4.00	0.87	Agree
Item 3 (Attractive Advertising)	3.96	0.87	Agree
Item 4 (Influencer Credibility)	3.94	0.91	Agree
Item 5 (Product Quality)	3.86	0.79	Agree
Overall Purchase Decisions (5 items)	3.97	0.75	Agree

items)

Across the 15 items measuring Consumer Engagement, the overall construct mean was 3.72 (SD = 0.77). Relational Bonds registered the highest agreement (M = 3.79, SD = 0.76), followed closely by Trust (M = 3.78, SD = 0.76), whereas Loyalty was rated slightly lower (M = 3.60, SD = 0.97). For Brand Perception (25 items), the overall construct mean was 3.78 (SD = 0.75), with Affective Perception yielding the highest mean (M = 3.91, SD = 0.84) and Brand Interaction scoring 3.79 (SD = 0.81). Among factors influencing Purchase Decisions, economic and convenience drivers, specifically reasonable price (M = 4.08) and accessibility (M = 4.00), exerted stronger influence than baseline product quality (M = 3.86).

Diagnostic Evidence for Statistical Assumptions: Statistical assumptions for linear regression were evaluated before hypothesis testing. Residual normality was confirmed through visual inspection of normal P-P plots, which demonstrated points adhering closely to the 45-degree diagonal reference line. Multicollinearity diagnostics showed that tolerance values for all predictors were above 0.40 and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values remained well below the conservative ceiling of 5.0 (highest observed VIF = 2.41). Scatterplots of standardized residuals plotted against standardized predicted values revealed an even, rectangular distribution with no fan shape, confirming homoscedasticity. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.88, demonstrating independence of errors.

Direct Effect of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Decisions (Path c)

To test hypothesis H03, a simple linear regression was estimated with social media influencer perception predicting purchase decisions directly. As reported in Table 6, the model was statistically significant, $F(1, 375) = 880.402$, $p < 0.001$, accounting for 70.1% of the variance in purchase decisions ($R = 0.847$, $R^2 = 0.701$).

Table 6. Simple Linear Regression: Social Media Influencer Perception Predicting Purchase Decisions (Path c)

Variables	B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta (β)	t	p-value
(Constant)	0.581	0.116	—	5.010	< 0.001
Social Media Influencers	0.862	0.029	0.837	29.724	< 0.001

Note: Model parameters: $R = 0.847$, $R^2 = 0.701$, $F(1, 375) = 880.402$, $p < 0.001$. Dependent Variable: Purchase Decisions.

The regression equation is formulated as: Predicted Purchase Decisions = $0.581 + 0.862 \times (\text{Social Media Influencers})$. The positive coefficient ($B = 0.862$, $t = 29.724$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in favorable perception of influencers, purchase decision intent increases by 0.862 units. Thus, H03 is rejected.

Simple Linear Regressions for Mediators (Path a) To establish mediation preconditions, simple regressions assessed the direct impact of social media influencers on each proposed mediator independently:

Model A1 (SMI predicting Brand Perception): $F(1, 375) = 1035.507$, $p < 0.001$, $R = 0.857$, $R^2 = 0.734$. The regression equation was: Brand Perception = $0.299 + 0.887 \times (\text{SMI})$ [$SE = 0.028$,

Beta = 0.857, $t = 32.179$, $p < 0.001$].

Model A2 (SMI predicting Consumer Engagement): $F(1, 375) = 565.515$, $p < 0.001$, $R = 0.775$, $R^2 = 0.601$. The regression equation was: Consumer Engagement = $0.490 + 0.823 \cdot (\text{SMI})$ [SE = 0.035, Beta = 0.775, $t = 23.781$, $p < 0.001$]

Mediation Analysis: Brand Perception

To test hypothesis H01, purchase decisions were regressed simultaneously on social media influencer perception (X) and brand perception (M). As reported in Table 7, the multiple regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 374) = 519.964$, $p < 0.001$, $R = 0.858$, $R^2 = 0.735$, explaining 73.5% of the total variance in purchase decisions.

Table 7. Multiple Regression and Sobel Mediation Summary: Brand Perception as Mediator

Regression Model					
Variables	B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta (β)	t	p-value
(Constant)	0.474	0.110	—	4.297	< 0.001
Social Media Influencers (c')	0.546	0.053	0.530	10.278	< 0.001
Brand Perception (b)	0.357	0.051	0.359	6.954	< 0.001

Model fit: $R = 0.858$, $R^2 = 0.735$, $F(2, 374) = 519.964$, $p < 0.001$.

Table 7a. Sobel Mediation Parameters

Mediation Parameters	Value	Standard Error
a — Path X → M	0.887	0.028
b — Path M → Y, controlling for X	0.357	0.051
Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.317	0.046
Sobel z-value	6.832	—
Two-tailed p-value	< 0.001	—
95% Confidence Interval	[0.226, 0.408]	—

When brand perception was incorporated into the regression model, the direct effect of social media influencers on purchase decisions remained significant but dropped from $B = 0.862$ to $B = 0.546$ ($p < 0.001$), establishing partial mediation. The Sobel test confirmed that the indirect path was statistically significant ($Z = 6.832$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.226, 0.408]). Consequently, H_01 is rejected.

Mediation Analysis: Consumer Engagement

To test hypothesis H02, purchase decisions were regressed simultaneously on social media influencer perception (X) and consumer engagement (M). As reported in Table 8, the multiple regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 374) = 447.712$, $p < 0.001$, $R = 0.840$, $R^2 = 0.705$, accounting for 70.5% of the variance in purchase decisions.

Table 8. Multiple Regression and Sobel Mediation Summary: Consumer Engagement as Mediator Regression Model

Variables	B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta (β)	t	p-value
(Constant)	0.533	0.117	—	4.545	< 0.001
Social Media Influencers (c')	0.782	0.046	0.759	17.074	< 0.001
Consumer Engagement (b)	0.098	0.043	0.101	2.278	0.023

Model fit: $R = 0.840$, $R^2 = 0.705$, $F(2, 374) = 447.712$, $p < 0.001$

Table 8b. Sobel Mediation Parameters

Mediation Parameters	Value	Standard Error
a — Path X → M	0.823	0.035
b — Path M → Y, controlling for X	0.098	0.043
Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.081	0.036
Sobel z-value	2.266	—
Two-tailed p-value	0.023	—
95% Confidence Interval	[0.011, 0.150]	—

With consumer engagement entered into the model, the direct effect of social media influencers remained dominant ($B = 0.782$, $p < 0.001$). The Sobel test yielded an indirect effect of $AB = 0.081$ ($SE = 0.036$, $Z = 2.266$, $p = 0.023$, 95% CI [0.011, 0.150]), confirming significant partial mediation. Thus, H02 is rejected. The indirect effect via consumer engagement ($B = 0.081$) was noticeably smaller than that observed via brand perception ($B = 0.317$), demonstrating that brand perception functions as the stronger mediating conduit between social media influencers and Generation Z purchase behavior.

Discussion and Comparative Analysis

The statistical findings confirm that social media influencers exert significant direct and indirect effects on Generation Z's purchase decisions. The strong direct relationship ($B = 0.862$, $p < 0.001$) aligns with prior literature demonstrating that perceived influencer credibility, domain expertise, and trustworthiness strongly sway youth purchase behavior (Bismonte et al., 2021; Gelati & Verplancke, 2022).

The confirmation of brand perception as a primary mediator ($AB = 0.317$, $p < 0.001$) corroborates earlier research indicating that influencer effectiveness operates by restructuring consumers' cognitive and affective assessments of brands (Hermenda et al., 2019; Mandagi et al., 2022). When influencers articulate functional product benefits and foster emotional resonance, brand credibility and reputation are heightened, translating into purchasing commitments (Barajas-Portas, 2015).

While consumer engagement demonstrated a statistically significant mediating effect ($AB = 0.081$, $p = 0.023$), its modest effect size relative to the direct influencer path suggests that active engagement alone (e.g., commenting, sharing, and liking) does not automatically drive purchasing actions. This outcome aligns with findings by Lacap et al. (2023) and Chen et al. (2019), who observed that while parasocial ties cultivate audience affinity, favorable brand evaluations and

pragmatic market attributes, specifically pricing and accessibility, remain decisive in concluding the transaction. Consequently, influencer marketing strategies must go beyond surface engagement to focus on cultivating sustained, positive brand perceptions.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the mediating effects of brand perception and consumer engagement on Generation Z's purchase decisions, with a particular focus on the role of social media influencers in the City of Manila. The research findings highlight the crucial impact of social media influencers on shaping brand perception and fostering consumer engagement, which in turn significantly influence purchasing behavior among Generation Z.

Key Findings:

1. **Brand Perception as a Mediator:** Social media influencers play a vital role in shaping how Generation Z perceives a brand, acting as a partial mediator between influencers and purchase decisions. Positive brand perception, enhanced by influencer content, leads to increased trust and loyalty, driving consumer intent to purchase.
2. **Consumer Engagement as a Mediator:** Engagement with influencer content serves as an additional significant mediator. Generation Z consumers who engage more deeply with influencer content develop stronger relational ties with promoted brands, although this indirect effect is secondary in magnitude to brand perception.
3. **Direct Impact on Purchase Decisions:** Influencers independently affect purchase decisions through perceived expertise, integrity, and authenticity. Influencers who demonstrate transparency and alignment with consumer values effectively motivate transaction intent directly.

Theoretical and Strategic Implications

This study empirically validates and extends the consumer engagement framework of [Vivek et al. \(2012\)](#) and the brand perception model of [Barajas-Portas \(2015\)](#) within an emerging Southeast Asian digital market. The evidence establishes that influencer marketing operates as a multi-layered behavioral process encompassing affective, cognitive, and relational pathways, rather than a simple exposure-response mechanism.

For practitioners, commercial collaborations must prioritize influencer authenticity, value congruence, and long-term partnerships over superficial vanity metrics such as follower volume or short-term post volume. Furthermore, marketing campaigns targeting Generation Z should ensure that promotional pricing and product accessibility align with influencer messaging to maximize conversion rates.

LIMITATION & FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, the scope was restricted to Generation Z consumers aged 18 to 27 residing within the six districts of Manila, focusing on the fast-food sector. Future studies should sample broader age demographics, expand geographically to other metropolitan and rural regions (e.g., Cebu, Davao), and investigate other consumer categories, such as beauty, consumer electronics, and apparel. Second, the cross-sectional survey design captures perceptions at a single point in time; longitudinal research is recommended to observe how consumer loyalty evolves as social commerce features advance. Finally, qualitative methods such as netnography and in-depth consumer interviews could provide richer contextual nuance regarding the psychological drivers of influencer-mediated brand relationships.

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