

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND BRAND LOYALTY: ANALYZING THE DYNAMICS OF TRUST AND CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

INFLUENCER MEDIA SOSIAL DAN LOYALITAS MEREK: MENGANALISIS DINAMIKA KEPERCAYAAN DAN PENGAMBILAN KEPUTUSAN KONSUMEN

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ABSTRACT

The role of social media influencers (SMI) has undergone a significant transformation in digital marketing, shifting from mere product endorsers to opinion leaders who shape consumer perception and loyalty. However, there is a void in the literature that systematically integrates the role of trust as a mediator between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty. This research aims to examine how trust in social media influencers mediates the relationship between influencer characteristics—including credibility, attractiveness, and expertise—and brand loyalty. This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method with the PRISMA approach to identify and synthesize 41 peer-reviewed articles from Scopus, Web of Science, and Springer databases published between 2015–2024. Data analysis was carried out through thematic analysis based on the Source Credibility Theory and Trust Mediation Model. Findings suggest that trust serves as a key mediator linking influencer characteristics with brand loyalty. Trust is formed through aspects of trustworthiness, authenticity, and parasocial relationships which strengthen consumers' emotional ties and commitment to the brand. Parasocial interactions in particular increase repurchase intentions and brand advocacy. The study also confirms the importance of an influencer's credibility, social appeal, and expertise in building audience trust. Trust is a strategic element that must be managed explicitly in influencer-based marketing campaigns to increase brand loyalty. This research enriches the digital marketing literature by integrating consumer psychology theory and providing practical guidance for brand managers in selecting and managing authentic and credible influencers.

Keywords: Social media influencers, brand loyalty, trust mediation, influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, digital marketing strategies

ABSTRAK

Peran influencer media sosial (SMI) telah mengalami transformasi signifikan dalam pemasaran digital, beralih dari sekadar endorsers produk menjadi opinion leaders yang membentuk persepsi dan loyalitas konsumen. Namun, terdapat kekosongan literatur yang mengintegrasikan peran kepercayaan sebagai mediator antara karakteristik influencer dan loyalitas merek secara sistematis. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana kepercayaan terhadap influencer media sosial memediasi hubungan antara karakteristik influencer—termasuk kredibilitas, daya tarik, dan keahlian—dengan loyalitas merek. Studi ini menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dengan pendekatan PRISMA untuk mengidentifikasi dan mensintesis 41 artikel peer-reviewed dari basis data Scopus, Web of Science, dan Springer yang dipublikasikan antara 2015–2024. Analisis data dilakukan melalui thematic analysis dengan landasan teori Source Credibility Theory dan Trust Mediation Model. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepercayaan berperan sebagai mediator utama yang menghubungkan karakteristik influencer dengan loyalitas merek. Kepercayaan terbentuk melalui aspek trustworthiness, authenticity, dan parasocial relationships yang memperkuat ikatan emosional dan komitmen konsumen terhadap merek. Interaksi parasosial khususnya meningkatkan intensi pembelian ulang dan advokasi merek. Studi ini juga menegaskan pentingnya kredibilitas, daya tarik sosial, dan keahlian influencer dalam membangun kepercayaan audiens. Kepercayaan merupakan elemen strategis yang harus dikelola secara eksplisit dalam kampanye pemasaran berbasis influencer untuk meningkatkan loyalitas merek. Penelitian ini memperkaya literatur pemasaran digital dengan mengintegrasikan teori psikologi konsumen dan

memberikan panduan praktis bagi brand manager dalam memilih dan mengelola influencer yang autentik dan kredibel.

Kata Kunci: *Influencer media sosial, loyalitas merek, mediasi kepercayaan, kredibilitas influencer, hubungan parasosial, strategi pemasaran digital*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the role of social media influencers (SMIs) has experienced profound transformations, particularly within the realm of digital marketing. SMIs are now acknowledged not only as product endorsers but also as opinion leaders capable of shaping their followers' perceptions, preferences, and lifestyles (Chang et al., 2020). This shift is indicative of a broader movement away from traditional marketing strategies toward more personalized and community-driven approaches (Angraini, 2023). Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube exemplify this trend, where influencers cultivate long-lasting relationships with their audiences through authentic and relatable content, moving beyond mere promotional posts (Kim & Kim, 2022). The emotional connection and trust established between influencers and their followers significantly determine the success of marketing efforts (Lim et al., 2017).

Brand loyalty emerges as a crucial metric in assessing the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies. Loyalty, defined as the consumer's inclination for repeat purchase behaviors despite numerous alternatives, underscores the importance of sustained engagement in an increasingly competitive market (Pinto & Paramita, 2021). The challenge for brands is no longer merely to capture initial interest but to foster ongoing loyalty amidst myriad options available to consumers. There is a growing recognition that interactions between influencers and their audiences can substantially reinforce brand loyalty (Reinikainen et al., 2020). Engaged consumers who feel connected to an influencer are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the brands they endorse, reflecting a psychological dimension that influences consumer decision-making (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Furthermore, psychological factors play a pivotal role in consumer choices influenced by SMIs. Trust and perceived credibility shape how followers perceive brands and affect purchasing decisions, often beyond rational data (Lacap et al., 2023). Social media influencers can cultivate what is termed parasocial relationships—where followers perceive a one-sided, social relationship with the influencer—thereby enhancing brand credibility and fostering deeper connections (Kwon et al., 2020). Research supports the idea that these relationships can lead to increased brand loyalty as followers become emotionally invested in the influencer's content and the brands they promote (Smith et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the evolving dynamics between influencer characteristics, audience trust, and brand loyalty are essential for developing effective marketing strategies in today's digital landscape. Brands must leverage the unique relationships SMIs have with their audiences to not only drive initial interest but also cultivate enduring loyalty through trust and authentic engagement.

Although there have been many studies discussing the effectiveness of influencers in influencing purchasing decisions, there is literature that integrates roles of trust as a mediating variable systematically between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty. Most studies only focus on the direct relationship between an influencer's credibility or attractiveness and consumer behavior, without delving deeper into how trust is formed and mediates this relationship (Casaló et al., 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In fact, trust is a complex and dynamic psychological aspect, which is formed through repeated interactions and perceptions of the influencer's authenticity and consistency.

Furthermore, until now there is still limited research systematic literature review (SLR) which holistically synthesizes research results regarding the role of trust in the context of the relationship between influencers and brand loyalty. Previous studies tend to be fragmented

and narrative in nature, so they do not provide a comprehensive picture of trends, patterns of findings, or existing research gaps. Therefore, a systematic approach is needed that not only collects, but also analyzes and groups important findings thematically to produce a more comprehensive understanding.

Based on the background description and identification of gaps in the literature, this research starts from the main question: **"How does trust in social media influencers mediate the relationship between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty?"** This question was designed to dig deeper into the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty, with a particular focus on the role of trust as a mediating variable. Trust is a crucial aspect in consumer interactions with influencers, because it can create emotional closeness and perceptions of credibility that strengthen consumers' attachment to a brand. This research also aims to identify influencer characteristics—such as credibility, attractiveness, and expertise—that most contribute to shaping audience trust. With this approach, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological dynamics involved in influencer-based marketing strategies can be gained, as well as providing a theoretical and practical basis for the use of trust as a lever for brand loyalty in an increasingly competitive digital marketing landscape.

This research is expected to provide significant theoretical and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study will provide a mapping of the current literature regarding the relationship between influencer characteristics, trust, and brand loyalty, which will help integrate various previous findings to deepen understanding of the dynamics that occur in influencer-based marketing. In addition, this research will also propose a conceptual framework that explains the role of trust as a mediator in the relationship between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty. It is hoped that this framework can serve as a guide for further research and provide a strong theoretical basis regarding the mechanisms of influence of influencers on brand loyalty. Furthermore, this research will examine how theories such as Source Credibility Theory, Trust Transfer Theory, and Parasocial Interaction Theory can be applied to explain this phenomenon more thoroughly, thereby providing a more comprehensive basis for understanding how trust is built and how it plays a role in creating loyalty. From a practical perspective, the findings of this research can serve as a guide for companies and marketing practitioners to develop strategies for selecting and managing influencers based on trust-building. By building strong, authentic relationships between influencers and their audiences, companies can design more effective digital campaigns, which focus not only on exposure, but also on the quality of the emotional and psychological connections formed. Thus, it is hoped that this research can enrich the influencer-based digital marketing literature while providing applicable insights for companies to increase consumer loyalty through trust-based marketing strategies.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This research uses the method Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with the PRISMA approach (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). The SLR method was chosen because it is able to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the research topic by synthesizing various findings from previous studies in a systematic, transparent and replicable manner. This approach not only allows the identification of patterns and trends in the literature, but also facilitates the mapping of conceptual relationships among the variables studied, namely influencer characteristics, trust, and brand loyalty.

The use of PRISMA guidelines ensures that the process of literature identification, selection, and synthesis is conducted with a high degree of methodological integrity. In addition, this approach also supports achieving the research objective, namely exploring the

mediating role of trust in the relationship between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty, by prioritizing transparency in reporting the selection and filtering process of relevant studies.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This study applied strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the quality and relevance of the analyzed literature data. Inclusion criteria include:

- Articles published in indexed scientific journals have gone through a process of peer-review, to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.
- Studies that explicitly examine topics regarding social media influencers, trust, and brand loyalty.
- Publication within the time span (2015–2024), to ensure relevance to the latest dynamics in the field of digital marketing and consumer behavior.

Meanwhile, exclusion criteria are applied to filter out studies that do not meet academic standards or are not relevant to the research focus. Excluded studies include:

- Non-academic articles such as opinions, editorials, blog articles, and popular news that do not have a strong methodological basis.
- Studies that only touch on one of the three main variables without explicitly elaborating on their relationship.

The application of these criteria is intended to strengthen the consistency and focus of thematic analysis in the literature synthesis process.

2.3 Data Sources

The main data sources used in this research come from three leading academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, and Springer. These databases were chosen because all three are indexed global scientific literature repositories and have high quality journal coverage from various scientific disciplines. The use of these various sources aims to broaden the scope of the literature reviewed, while increasing the possibility of finding studies with diverse approaches and contexts.

2.4 Search and Selection Process

The literature search process was carried out systematically using Boolean search techniques with the main keywords: (**“social media influencer” AND “brand loyalty” AND “trust”**). Searches were conducted in all three databases by adjusting the filter settings (publication year, document type, and research area) on each platform. The article selection process follows the PRISMA flow, which consists of four main stages: identification, screening, feasibility test (eligibility), and inclusion. A PRISMA flow chart was used to document the number of articles found, screened, and ultimately included in the analysis, including reasons for excluding articles at each stage. This approach ensures transparency of the process and allows replication by other researchers in the future.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using an approach thematic analysis, which allows the identification and grouping of the main themes of the reviewed literature. This process begins with coding manually through selected articles to find recurring patterns and concepts. To support a more in-depth analysis, this research uses two theoretical frameworks as a conceptual basis:

1. Source Credibility Theory, which explains how the perception of the credibility of the communicator (in this case, the influencer) influences the reception of the message by the audience.

2. Trust Mediation Model, which highlights the role of trust as a mediating variable in a variety of social and marketing relationships, including in the context of consumer loyalty to brands.

These two theories are used as interpretive lenses in evaluating and synthesizing the results of previous studies, as well as in developing the conceptual framework proposed in this research.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 Characteristics of the Studies Reviewed

Based on a selection process that follows the PRISMA protocol, 41 scientific articles were successfully identified and selected for further analysis in this study. These articles reflect significant research developments in the topic social media influencers, trust, And brand loyalty over the last decade.

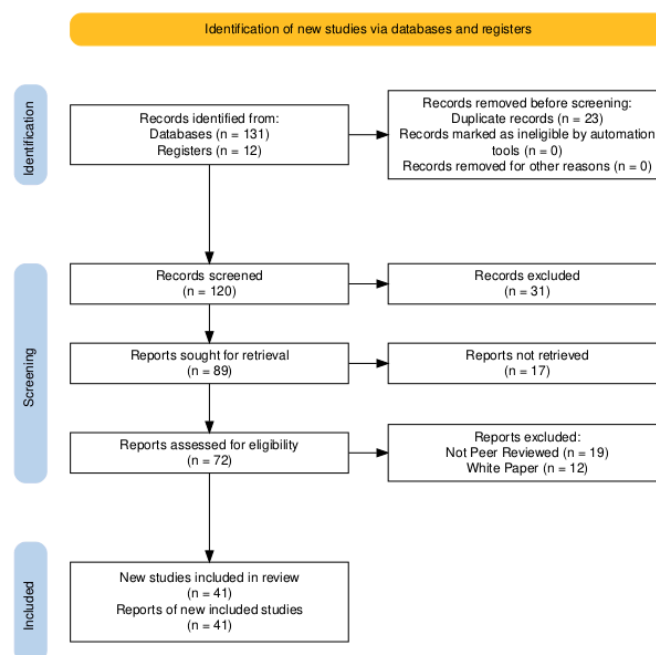


Figure 1. Diagram Prisma
Source: Processed Data, 2025

The study identification process began with a search from various sources, namely a database of 131 records and a registry of 12 records, for a total of 143 records. Of these, 23 records were removed because they were duplicates, while no records were removed by automated tools or for other reasons. After removing duplicates, a total of 120 records remained and then filtering was carried out.

At the screening stage, 31 records were excluded because they did not meet the initial criteria. Furthermore, 89 reports were selected for data collection, but 17 reports could not be obtained. Thus, 72 reports were evaluated for eligibility.

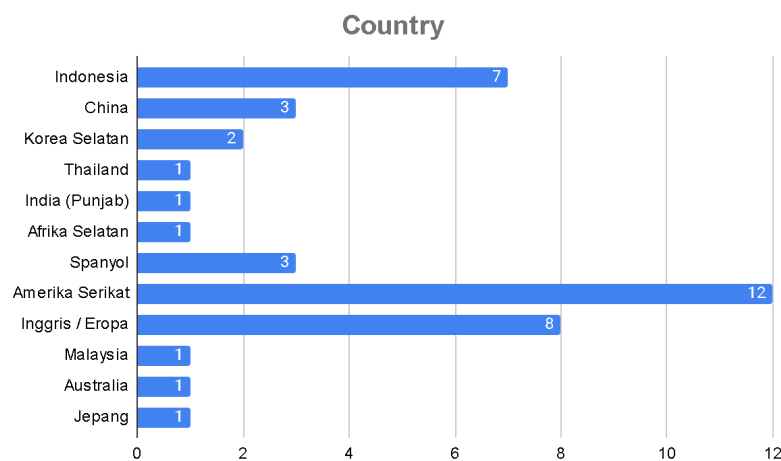
In the eligibility assessment, there were 31 reports that were removed from the survey for the following reasons: 19 reports were not peer-reviewed articles and 12 reports were white papers. Finally, a total of 41 new studies were included in the review and all 41 reports were used for further analysis.



Figure 2. Article Distribution

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Geographically, the studies analyzed cover a wide range of regions, with the largest concentration coming from countries with rapidly growing e-commerce industries such as the United States, South Korea, India, and Indonesia. Apart from that, there are also contributions from European countries such as Germany, England and the Netherlands, which shows that the influencer marketing phenomenon has global appeal.

**Figure 3. Geography of Previous Research**

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Based on the geographical distribution of the 41 references analyzed, research on influencer marketing and brand loyalty shows broad coverage in various countries with different concentrations. The United States is the country with the highest number of articles, namely 12 articles, which reflects this country's important role as a research and development center in the field of digital marketing and influencer marketing. The UK and European countries collectively contributed 8 articles, indicating significant attention to this topic in the region.

Indonesia also showed a significant contribution with 7 articles, indicating the increasing interest of academics and practitioners in the Southeast Asia region towards the phenomenon of marketing via social media and the influence of influencers. China and Spain each had 3 articles, while South Korea contributed 2 articles, all of which show that these countries are active in examining digital marketing dynamics in their local contexts.

Other countries such as Thailand, India (Punjab), South Africa, Malaysia, Australia, and Japan each have one article, indicating that there is widespread and diverse research globally, although in more limited numbers. This distribution reflects that influencer marketing and brand loyalty are relevant topics and attract the attention of researchers in various parts of the world, with developed countries still having a strong dominance and several developing countries starting to show research growth in this field.

Overall, this geographic distribution confirms that the study of influencer marketing and brand loyalty is a global field with a wide variety of cultural and market contexts, providing opportunities for cross-national research to enrich understanding and practice in this area.

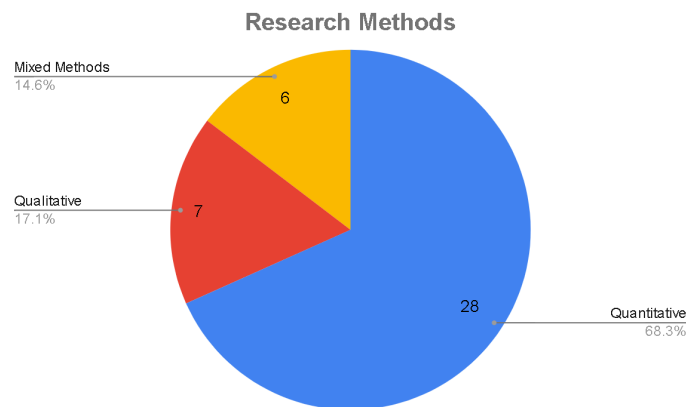


Figure 4. Research Methods

Source: Processed Data, 2025

Based on an analysis of 41 reference articles, the research methodology used in previous studies can be classified into three main categories, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. The majority of research, totaling 28 articles, used a quantitative approach that generally involved surveys, questionnaires, and statistical analysis to examine relationships between variables such as the influence of influencers on brand loyalty, purchase intentions, and consumer behavior. This approach allows researchers to generalize results and test hypotheses empirically. In addition, there are 7 articles that use qualitative methods, which usually rely on in-depth interviews, case studies, or content analysis to understand consumer perceptions, motivations, and experiences as well as influencer marketing strategies in a more contextual and in-depth way. Meanwhile, 6 articles apply mixed methods, namely a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding. This mixed methods approach allows researchers not only to test hypotheses statistically, but also to explore contextually rich qualitative insights. This methodological distribution shows that although quantitative approaches still dominate research in the field of influencer marketing and brand loyalty, the use of qualitative and mixed methods is increasingly recognized as important for capturing the complexity of the phenomenon in a holistic and in-depth manner.

3.2 Main Findings

The results of the literature synthesis revealed three main clusters that were the focus of the research, namely influencer characteristics, the role of trust as a mediator, and brand loyalty dimensions.

3.2.1. Characteristics Influencer

Influencer marketing has emerged as a crucial element in contemporary advertising strategies, particularly due to the characteristics of influencers that affect their ability to shape

audience perceptions and drive purchasing decisions. Three attributes are critical in this regard: credibility, attractiveness, and expertise.

Credibility is the foundation upon which influencer effectiveness is built. Influencers perceived as credible often demonstrate integrity and honesty, which enhances audience trust and fosters the likelihood of behavioral influence, including purchasing intentions. This notion is supported by research indicating that the perceived credibility of influencers significantly correlates with audience trust and engagement (Fitriani et al., 2023). Furthermore, credibility also encompasses expertise in the relevant field, reinforcing the message that influencers must not only be trustworthy but also knowledgeable (Masuda et al., 2022).

Attractiveness plays a dual role in influencer marketing: both as a physical attribute and as a component of social attractiveness or relatability. Research indicates that social attractiveness is a strong predictor of audience engagement, often outweighing mere physical appeal (Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020). For instance, influencers who resonate on a personal value level with their followers tend to be more effective in creating emotional connections, which can lead to increased audience engagement (Fitriani et al., 2023), Lee & Watkins, 2016). The influence of visual appeal extends to the psychological impact it has on the audience, fostering a sense of relatability that is crucial in building a strong influencer-follower relationship (Wang et al., 2022; .

Expertise has emerged as a defining attribute that significantly influences audience trust and perception. Influencers possessing specialized knowledge in niches such as technology, health, or fashion are often regarded as more credible and reliable sources of information (Roy & Mehendale, 2021). This expertise enhances the influencer's potential to affect consumer behavior positively, as followers tend to place greater trust in those who demonstrate authoritative knowledge in relevant fields (Fitriani et al., 2023). As highlighted in various studies, an influencer's expertise serves as a critical intermediary that connects credibility and attractiveness to consumer engagement and purchasing intentions (Wang et al., 2022; , Wiedmann & Mettenheim, 2020).

In summary, the synthesis of these three characteristics—credibility, attractiveness, and expertise—paints a comprehensive picture of an effective influencer. Understanding how these attributes interact and the role they play in shaping audience perceptions is vital for marketers aiming to leverage influencer marketing to enhance brand visibility and drive sales.

3.2.2. Trust as Mediator

Trust plays a fundamental role as a mediator between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty, incorporating various facets such as trustworthiness, authenticity, and parasocial relationships.

The first aspect, trustworthiness, is crucial as it shapes consumer perceptions about the intentions behind an influencer's promotion of products. Lusianti et al. highlight that brand trust positively correlates with brand equity, suggesting that trust forms a cornerstone for deeper consumer-emotional engagements with brands (Lucianti et al., 2024). This indicates that when influencers are viewed as trustworthy, they can enhance consumer connections with a brand, ultimately fostering loyalty. Similarly, Moulard et al. demonstrate that authenticity influences trust, acting as a bridge that affects perceived quality and customer loyalty (Moulard et al., 2016).

Moving to authenticity, influencers perceived as genuine and consistent in their personal branding resonate better with their audience, enhancing trust and promoting brand loyalty. Research by Wijerathna and Wijesundara demonstrates that perceived authenticity is linked to purchasing intentions in micro-influencer marketing, reinforcing the notion that authenticity enhances trust and mediates a consumer's decision to engage with a brand (Wijerathna & Wijesundara, 2022). Furthermore, Mardani et al. underscore that maintaining high levels of authentic communication cultivates trust, which is essential for fostering

long-term consumer relationships (Mardani et al., 2024). This relationship is echoed by Kaur, who notes that brand authenticity influences consumer trust and attachment, thus solidifying loyalty (Kaur, 2024).

Finally, parasocial relationships represent a unique element of influencer dynamics. These relationships reflect a one-sided emotional bond where followers feel an attachment to influencers, reminiscent of personal connections. Research by Putra and Wulandari illustrates the effects of such relationships on purchase intentions, confirming that parasocial interactions significantly contribute to establishing trust (Putra & Wulandari, 2023). This aligns with findings from Bari et al., which elaborate on how authenticity in influencers bolsters trust and ultimately amplifies both influencer and brand loyalty (Bari et al., 2024).

In summary, trust emerges as a crucial mediator in translating influencer characteristics, namely trustworthiness, authenticity, and parasocial relationships, into tangible brand loyalty. Each of these elements contributes uniquely to the perception and act of trust, influencing consumer behaviors toward brands effectively.

3.3.3. Dimensions of Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a multifaceted concept influenced by various dimensions, particularly trust and emotional commitment toward a brand. The influence of trust on brand loyalty is manifested in three crucial dimensions: affective commitment, repurchase intention, and brand advocacy.

Affective commitment refers to the emotional bond consumers develop with a brand due to positive experiences and perceptions. Research indicates that consumer perceptions shaped by influential endorsements can enhance emotional connections with a brand, thereby strengthening loyalty (Awad & Fatah, 2015). Additionally, multimedia content shared by influencers that effectively demonstrates product benefits can cultivate a trusting relationship that fosters affective commitment (Kumgliang & Khamwon, 2023).

Repurchase intention is another critical aspect of brand loyalty, reflecting the likelihood that consumers will return to purchase a product again. Studies have shown that when a consumer's experience aligns with their expectations set by influencer content, their likelihood of repurchase increases (Yahya et al., 2024). The correlation between brand trust and repurchase intentions is further highlighted by the finding that satisfied customers are more inclined to exhibit favorable purchase behaviors based on prior successful interactions with the brand (Apriansyah & Muhmin, 2023; Schepers & Nijssen, 2018).

Lastly, brand advocacy is a strong indicator of loyalty, where satisfied consumers actively endorse the brand, contributing to the online word-of-mouth phenomenon. This behavior is rooted in trust and satisfaction; consumers who trust a brand not only repurchase but also share their positive experiences, which increases brand visibility and enhances its reputation (Qayyum & Saeed, 2019). Furthermore, brand advocacy is bolstered when consumers feel a communal connection through shared experiences, improving their relationship with the brand (Daragarti et al., 2020). The alignment of consumer expectations with brand promises is critical in boosting advocacy behaviors (Bismo et al., 2023).

These dimensions emphasize the interconnectedness of emotional attachment, purchasing behaviors, and advocacy, outlining a comprehensive framework of brand loyalty shaped by trust and positive consumer experiences. Literature supports that brands focusing on building trust through transparent and engaging communication strategies can effectively enhance consumer loyalty and advocacy.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Synthesis of Results

Systematic results show that Trust serves as a crucial bridge between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty, mediated primarily by the emotions and connections

established during parasocial interactions. Research indicates that traits such as attractiveness and credibility of influencers are fundamental, and their influence on consumer loyalty is significantly augmented through the intermediary of trust that audiences perceive towards these figures. Studies have shown that perceived credibility enhances purchase intentions and fosters emotional connections leading to loyalty toward endorsed brands (Aldi & Adisaputra, 2024; , Garg & Bakshi, 2024), Rather et al., 2022).

The mechanism of parasocial interaction is essential in elucidating how consumers develop this trust. It creates a strong emotional bond despite being fundamentally one-sided, where the audience perceives a personal relationship with the influencer. This phenomenon allows deeper trust to flourish, subsequently leading to affective commitment and intentions to repurchase brands associated with these influencers. Research emphasizes that such connections are not merely incidental; parasocial interactions significantly enhance the emotional trust consumers place in influencers (Meng et al., 2024; , Maharani & Suprayogo, 2024).

Moreover, it has been shown that these interactions contribute to shaping consumer behavior. In particular, the influence of social media celebrities and their ability to engage with audiences through tailored messages can lead to increased feelings of loyalty and engagement with brands (Chiu & Ho, 2023; , Kim et al., 2024). The dynamic interplay between trust built through parasocial interaction and influencer characteristics is pivotal in consumer decision-making processes related to brand loyalty. Effective management of these relationships is crucial for brands to maintain consumer loyalty (Aldi & Adisaputra, 2024; , Garg & Bakshi, 2024).

To summarize, trust is a significant mediating factor influenced by the attractiveness and perceived credibility of influencers. The interactions between consumers and these influencers are critical to building brand loyalty, as they provide the foundation upon which deeper emotional connections are established, ultimately enhancing repurchase intentions towards the endorsed brands.

Thus, this synthesis confirms that trust is not just an intermediate variable, but a strategic element that must be managed explicitly in influencer-based marketing campaigns.

4.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

4.2.1. Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the results of this study contribute to understanding in the domain consumer psychology, especially in relation to mediation models. This study strengthens the validity of Source Credibility Theory and expands it by adding an emotional component through parasocial relationship as a form of trust mechanism. Thus, this research not only replicates the previous model, but also improves it through a contextual approach in the digital era.

4.2.2. Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, these results have important implications for digital marketing practitioners and brand managers. An influencer selection strategy should not only consider the number of followers or popularity, but also credibility, authenticity, and suitability of values to the target audience. Apart from that, it is important for brands to develop collaborative content that encourages trust, for example through personal narratives, authentic testimonials, or telling of the influencer's real experiences with the product being promoted.

4.3 Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this research are in line with several previous studies which stated that In examining the role of trust as a mediator between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty, recent research presents a complex landscape. There is evidence suggesting that trust

may act as either a full or partial mediator, depending on various influencing factors such as perceived usefulness and emotional engagement.

Firstly, the influence of trust on brand loyalty is well-documented, with studies indicating that brand trust significantly impacts loyalty intentions. For instance, Jun and Yi argue that brand trust mediates the relationship between emotional attachment and loyalty to the influencer brand, illustrating that consumers' feelings of attachment to an influencer can enhance their trust and subsequently their loyalty (Jun & Yi, 2020). This highlights the positive feedback loop created by emotional engagement and trust, thus supporting the notion of trust as a mediator.

Conversely, some research suggests that trust operates as a partial mediator. Huang's work on brand experiences indicates that emotional dimensions, such as brand love, also mediate the relationship between brand experiences and loyalty. This suggests that trust, while vital, is not the sole mediator influencing brand loyalty (Huang, 2017). This is further supported by studies showing that emotional engagement plays a direct role in fostering loyalty, alongside trust (Jun & Yi, 2020; Huang, 2017).

Additionally, factors such as perceived usefulness and community engagement complicate the mediating landscape. For instance, Loureiro et al. discuss how brand attitude mediates the relationship between brand coolness and brand loyalty. This illustrates that brand perception can significantly influence loyalty outcomes (Loureiro et al., 2024). This implies that trust, while significant, must work in conjunction with other cognitive and affective factors to foster brand loyalty.

A comprehensive analysis reveals that while brand trust is indeed a critical facilitator of brand loyalty, it does not operate in isolation. The interplay of trust with other mediating variables such as emotional engagement and perceived usefulness illustrates the multidimensional nature of brand loyalty formation. This complexity reinforces the notion that practitioners should adopt holistic strategies, integrating trust-building activities with efforts to enhance emotional connections and brand perception (Jun & Yi, 2020; Huang, 2017; Loureiro et al., 2024).

In conclusion, trust functions as a multifaceted mediator between influencer characteristics and brand loyalty, often working alongside emotional engagement and perceived usefulness. This foundational understanding can guide brands in leveraging influencer relationships to cultivate consumer loyalty effectively.

These differences may be due to differences in cultural context, social media platforms used, or product categories studied. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings, and local context and audience characteristics should be considered in their application.

4.4 Study Limitations

This research has several limitations. First, it covers only literature in English, which can lead to linguistic bias and ignore the contributions of local language studies in developing countries, especially in Asia and Latin America. Second, the analysis period is limited to the last decade (2013–2023), which may not be enough to capture long-term dynamics, especially in the context of brand loyalty that takes time to develop.

4.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Based on these limitations, several recommendations can be proposed for future research:

1. Longitudinal studies It is necessary to observe how trust built through influencers impacts brand loyalty in the longer term. This is important considering that true loyalty does not happen instantly, but requires a process and consistency in perception.

2. Quantitative experiments can be done to directly test the strength of the mediating effect of trust by controlling other variables. For example, testing through an experimental design on two groups of audiences who are exposed to influencer content with different levels of authenticity, then measuring the effect on trust and loyalty.

With these steps, it is hoped that the academic and practical contributions of influencer marketing research can be stronger, more contextual and applicable in various industrial sectors.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study confirms that trust is the main mediator in the relationship between characteristic influence—such as credibility, attractiveness, and expertise—and brand loyalty. Through systematic literature review Based on scientific articles from the last decade, it was found that trust plays an important role in forming emotional bonds between audiences and influencers, which ultimately drives brand commitment, repeat purchase intentions, and brand advocacy (brand advocacy).

5.2 Contribution to the Literature

This research provides significant contribution to the digital marketing and consumer psychology literature by:

- Provide a new conceptual framework that integrates theory source credibility, trust mediation, And parasocial interaction in the context of social media.
- Brings together various conceptual approaches previously scattered in the literature, and presents them in the form of a comprehensive thematic synthesis.

This framework can be a basis for future empirical studies as well as a reference for practitioners in designing influencer-based marketing campaign strategies.

5.3 Study Limitations

Although systematic selection and synthesis efforts have been carried out, this research has several limitations:

- Limited access and article selection, especially on certain platforms and language limitations, which may lead to biased representation of the literature.
- Not all articles were reviewed measuring trust explicitly as a mediating variable, so interpretation of causal relationships requires caution and triangulation of findings.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Based on existing findings and limitations, several suggestions for future research include:

- Experimental study which directly tests the causal relationship between influencer characteristics, trust, and brand loyalty.
- Cross-cultural research to identify how cultural context influences trust formation and loyalty behavior.
- Expansion of the study object to new social media platforms, such as TikTok, YouTube Shorts and other short video-based media, which are increasingly popular among the younger generation and have unique engagement dynamics.

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