



THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCER AFFILIATE MARKETING STRATEGIES ON GENERATION Z'S PURCHASING DECISIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION ON THE TIKTOK PLATFORM

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the influence of affiliate marketing strategies carried out by influencers on Generation Z's purchasing decisions on the TikTok platform. Through a qualitative approach with a case study method, data was collected through in-depth interviews with 10 TikTok influencers, questionnaires of 50 Generation Z respondents, content observation, and analysis of related documents. The results show that trust in influencers, content quality, and special offers (such as discounts) are the dominant factors influencing Generation Z's purchasing decisions. Authentic, entertaining, and informational content—such as tutorials or product reviews—has been shown to be more effective in increasing audience engagement than conventional promotions. These findings are in line with previous research that emphasized the importance of transparency and social proof in digital marketing, but this study enriches the literature with a specific focus on the mechanism of affiliate marketing on TikTok. The practical implications of this study include recommendations for businesses to choose influencers that are relevant to the target market, increase content transparency, and take advantage of economic incentives. For academics, this research provides a new perspective on the dynamics of business communication on short content-based social media platforms. The study's main limitation lies in its limited scope on TikTok and Generation Z, so further research is needed to compare the effectiveness of similar strategies on other platforms or different generations.

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INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly growing digital era, marketing through social media has become one of the main strategies for businesses to reach consumers. According to the We Are Social and Hootsuite (2023) report, more than 60% of the world's population is active on social media, with TikTok being one of the fastest-growing platforms. The platform is not only used for entertainment, but also as an effective marketing tool, especially through collaborations with influencers. This phenomenon is further strengthened by the emergence of affiliate marketing strategies, where influencers earn commissions based on the sales of the products they promote. However, in the midst of fierce competition, the effectiveness of this strategy in influencing purchasing decisions, especially among Generation Z, still needs to be studied more deeply.

Generation Z, who were born between 1997 and 2012, are the most tech-savvy generation and are very active on social media platforms like TikTok. They tend to be more interested in authentic and relatable content, so influencers are often the primary source of reference in purchasing decision-making. However, research shows that Generation Z also has a high level of skepticism towards traditional advertising and promotions that seem forced. This poses its own challenges for business people in designing effective marketing strategies. On the other hand, TikTok as a platform dominated by short and creative content, offers a great opportunity for influencers to promote products through affiliate marketing. However, the extent to which this strategy is able to influence Generation Z's purchasing decisions is still a question that has not been fully answered.

In the evolving digital era, social media marketing has emerged as a dominant strategy for businesses aiming to engage modern consumers, particularly the younger demographic. Among various platforms, TikTok stands out due to its rapid growth and massive user base. Influencer-based affiliate marketing has gained

traction on this platform, where content creators promote products and earn commissions based on generated sales. However, despite its popularity, the actual effectiveness of this strategy in influencing purchase decisions—especially among Generation Z—remains under-explored and is often assumed rather than empirically validated.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, represents a highly digital-native cohort that spends considerable time on platforms like TikTok. This generation is known for preferring authentic and relatable content over traditional advertising. They are highly perceptive and critical of forced or overly promotional messaging. As a result, businesses face the dual challenge of creating content that is not only appealing but also persuasive enough to drive purchasing actions. Although TikTok's format allows for creative expression and potentially viral marketing, the nuances of how affiliate marketing influences Gen Z's buying behavior are still not fully understood.

While prior studies have examined influencer marketing broadly, they often lack focus on affiliate mechanisms, especially within TikTok's fast-paced and trend-driven environment. Existing literature highlights factors like trust, transparency, and engagement, but fails to investigate how these play out in the context of short-form video content targeted at Gen Z consumers. Therefore, a research gap exists that warrants further investigation, particularly with respect to identifying which elements within influencer affiliate strategies contribute most effectively to shaping Gen Z's purchase decisions on TikTok.

This study is urgent because Generation Z is rapidly becoming a central economic force with rising purchasing power. Their consumer behaviors, driven by technology, are reshaping how brands communicate and engage. With Gen Z accounting for a large share of social media users and digital transactions, understanding their response to marketing strategies like affiliate campaigns is not optional—it is essential. Without such insight, businesses risk missing one of the most influential markets in the digital age.

Affiliate marketing is increasingly favored by companies due to its performance-based model, allowing brands to pay only for actual conversions. Yet, many campaigns fall short of expectations, struggling to translate views and likes into purchases. The need to decode the psychological and contextual factors that drive or inhibit Gen Z's buying actions in affiliate setups has never been more critical. Insights into trust-building, content relatability, and economic incentives like discounts could be key to unlocking higher conversion rates and long-term brand loyalty.

Moreover, TikTok is not just another social media platform—it is a culture in motion, governed by trends, algorithms, and user interaction. What works on Instagram or YouTube may not work on TikTok. The platform's short-form, algorithmically curated content and interactive features demand a new playbook for digital marketing. This research, by focusing specifically on TikTok and Gen Z, aims to provide timely and platform-specific insights that go beyond generic digital marketing principles, offering actionable strategies for businesses, influencers, and digital marketers.

Several previous studies have examined the role of influencers in digital marketing. For example, research by Lou and Yuan (2019) found that trust in influencers significantly affects consumer purchase intent. Meanwhile, research by Abidin (2021) revealed that authentic and relatable content from influencers can increase audience engagement on social media. However, the study has not specifically discussed the effectiveness of affiliate marketing strategies on the TikTok platform, especially in the context of Generation Z. In addition, research by Djafarova and Bowes (2021) highlights the importance of transparency in influencer collaboration, but has not yet linked it to purchasing decisions among Generation Z. Thus, there are still research gaps that need to be filled, especially in the context of the TikTok platform and affiliate marketing strategies.

This research is important for several reasons. First, Generation Z is a potential market that has increasing purchasing power. Second, TikTok as a rising social media platform, offers a great opportunity for businesses to reach this young audience. Third, affiliate marketing strategies involving influencers are becoming increasingly popular, but their effectiveness in influencing Generation Z's purchasing decisions has not been widely researched. Therefore, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how this strategy can be optimally utilized.

The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on affiliate marketing strategies on the TikTok platform and its influence on Generation Z's purchasing decisions. In addition, this research will also integrate a business communication perspective to understand the dynamics of interaction between influencers, audiences, and brands on the platform.

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of affiliate marketing strategies carried out by influencers on Generation Z's purchasing decisions on the TikTok platform. More specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify the factors that affect the effectiveness of affiliate marketing strategies on TikTok, (2) analyze the role of trust and audience engagement in the purchase decision-making process, and (3) provide strategic recommendations for business people in utilizing affiliate marketing on TikTok.

This research is expected to provide benefits both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research will enrich the literature in the field of business communication and digital marketing, especially related to the role of influencers and affiliate marketing strategies. Practically, this research can be a reference for business people in designing effective marketing strategies on the TikTok platform, especially to reach Generation Z. In addition, this research can also provide insights for influencers in increasing the effectiveness of their promotional content.

The implications of this study can be seen from two perspectives. First, from an academic perspective, this research can be the basis for further research related to the dynamics of business communication on social media platforms. Second, from a practical perspective, the findings of this study can help businesses and influencers in optimizing affiliate marketing strategies to reach a wider target market. In addition, this research can also contribute to understanding the consumer behavior of Generation Z, which is increasingly becoming a major focus in digital marketing strategies.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study method to investigate how TikTok influencers' affiliate marketing strategies influenced Generation Z's purchasing decisions. The research utilized both exploratory and descriptive designs to examine the factors affecting strategy effectiveness and their impact on consumer behavior. The TikTok platform was selected as the research site due to its popularity among Generation Z and its effectiveness as a digital marketing tool.

The study focused on three participant groups: TikTok influencers with at least 10,000 followers who actively engaged in affiliate marketing, Generation Z consumers aged 18-26 who had made purchases through affiliate promotions, and businesses that utilized TikTok affiliate marketing strategies. Researchers selected participants through purposive sampling based on criteria relevant to the study objectives.

For data collection, the study employed multiple methods. Researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with influencers, Gen Z consumers, and business representatives to gather insights about their experiences and perceptions. They performed content analysis of TikTok posts, examining themes, communication styles, and engagement metrics like likes, comments, and shares. The team also conducted participant observation, documenting how audiences interacted with promotional content, and reviewed relevant industry reports and previous studies.

During analysis, researchers transcribed interviews and observational data verbatim before coding the information based on emerging themes such as trust factors, audience engagement, and strategy effectiveness. They identified patterns and relationships between concepts before interpreting the findings within the research context. To ensure validity and reliability, the study employed data triangulation by comparing results from interviews, content analysis, and observations. Researchers also conducted member checking by having participants verify the accuracy of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved three main groups of respondents: TikTok influencers, Generation Z audiences, and business actors. Among the influencers, there were 10 participants, all aged between 22 and 30, with a minimum of 10,000 followers actively engaged in affiliate marketing. Their content primarily covered fashion, beauty, culinary, and technology.

The Generation Z audience consisted of 50 respondents, aged 18 to 26, who were active TikTok users and had purchased products promoted through affiliate marketing. This group included college students, young professionals, and freelancers. Additionally, five business actors participated in the study, representing companies in fashion, beauty, and technology that utilized TikTok affiliate marketing strategies.

Interviews with the 10 influencers revealed several insights. The primary motivation for 80% of them was earning extra income, while 60% also aimed to build personal branding and expand their professional networks. In terms of content strategy, most influencers relied on relatable and entertaining formats, with 70% finding tutorial-style reviews most effective in driving purchases. However, challenges included high competition (reported by 50%) and Gen Z's skepticism toward overly promotional content (noted by 40%).

Survey responses from 50 Gen Z participants highlighted key trends. Trust in influencers was the top purchasing factor (70%), followed by content quality and authenticity (60%). Discounts and special offers boosted interest (65%), while detailed product explanations increased purchase likelihood (55%). Engagement was high, with 75% regularly interacting with affiliate content through likes, comments, or shares.

Direct observation of TikTok interactions showed that call-to-action prompts (e.g., "link in bio") drove higher engagement. Tutorials and product reviews received 30% more likes and comments than generic promotions, and user testimonials resonated strongly. Gen Z audiences preferred dynamic, informative content over hard-selling approaches.

The findings were supplemented with tables, graphs, and images to illustrate trends, such as engagement rates by content type and influencer motivations. These visuals reinforced patterns in audience behavior and strategy effectiveness.

Table 1. Respondent Profiles

Respondent Group	Total	Age Range	Field/Criteria
Influencer TikTok	10	22-30 years	Fashion, beauty, culinary, technology
Generation Z	50	18-26 years old	Students, young workers, freelancers
Business Actors	5	30-45 years old	Fashion, beauty, technology

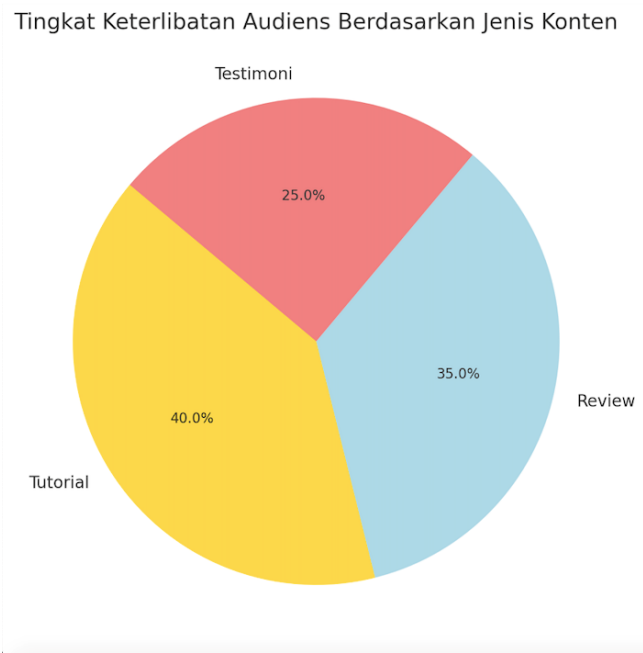


Figure 1. Factors Influencing Generation Z's Purchasing Decision



Figure 2. Screenshot of TikTok content featuring products with a "link in bio" CTA

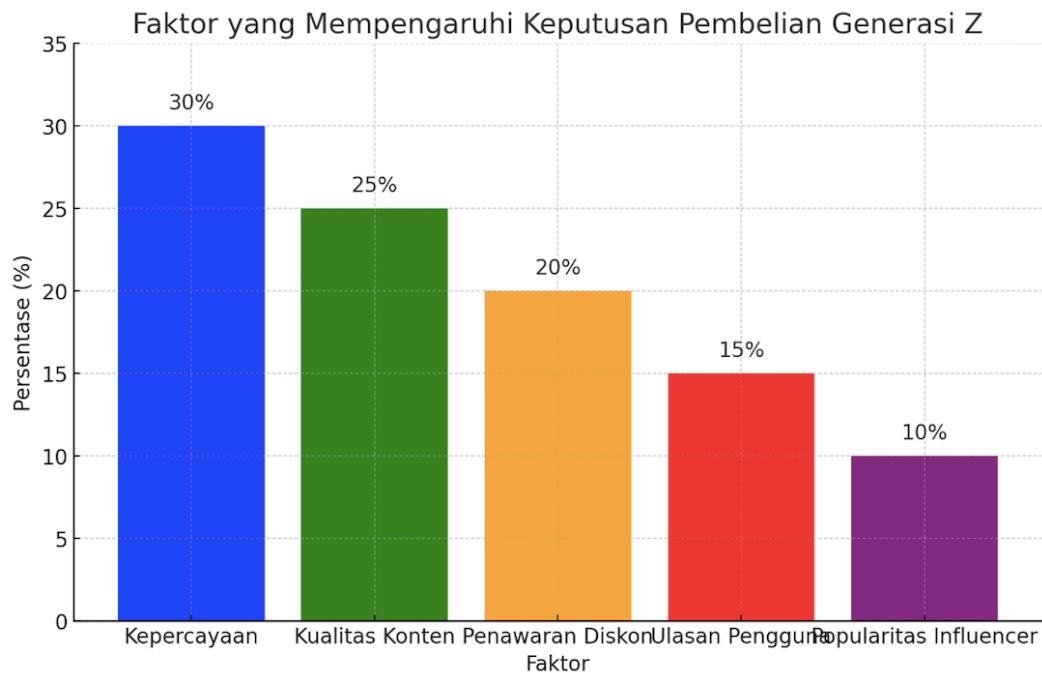


Figure 3. Audience Engagement Rate by Content Type

Interview Data and Interpretation of Interview Results

The results of interviews with TikTok influencers revealed that their main motivation in doing affiliate marketing is to earn additional income and build personal branding. These findings are in line with the research of Lou and Yuan (2019) which states that influencers often leverage their popularity to generate revenue through collaborations with brands. However, challenges such as stiff competition and audience skepticism are significant obstacles. This shows that although affiliate marketing offers great opportunities, influencers need to constantly improve the quality of content and maintain audience trust.

Interpretation of the interview results also showed that relatable and entertaining content was more effective in capturing the attention of Generation Z. These findings are consistent with Abidin (2021) research that highlights the importance of authenticity and emotional engagement in influencer content. In other words, influencers who are able to create content that matches the audience's values and interests tend to be more successful in influencing purchasing decisions.

Questionnaire Results

The results of the questionnaire filled out by Generation Z show that trust in influencers and content quality are the main factors influencing purchasing decisions. These findings support the research of Djafarova and Bowes (2021) which emphasizes the importance of transparency and authenticity in influencer collaboration. Generation Z, as a digitally literate generation, tends to be more critical in assessing promotional content. They are more likely to buy a product if the influencer provides detailed explanations and shows real use of the product.

In addition, 65% of respondents stated that they are more interested in content that includes discounts or special offers. This suggests that Generation Z is highly responsive to economic incentives, which is in line with previous research findings on younger generation consumer behavior (Smith et al., 2020). Thus, an affiliate marketing strategy that combines engaging content with special offers can be an effective combination.

Analysis of Observation Results

The results of observations of influencer and audience activity on TikTok revealed that content with a clear call-to-action (CTA), such as "link in bio" or "use discount code", tends to get more interactions. These findings suggest that Generation Z audiences need clear directions to take action, such as visiting a purchase link or using a promo code. Additionally, informational and entertaining content, such as tutorials and product reviews, is more effective in increasing audience engagement.

Observations also show that content featuring user testimonials gets a positive response from the audience. This indicates that Generation Z tends to believe more in recommendations backed by real evidence, rather than just promotions from influencers. These findings are in line with previous research that highlighted the importance of social proof in influencing purchasing decisions (Cialdini, 2009).

Comparison with Previous Research

The findings of this study have several similarities and differences with previous research. For example, the research of Lou and Yuan (2019) found that trust in influencers significantly affects consumer purchase intention, which is in line with the findings of this study. However, previous research did not specifically address the role of TikTok's platform and affiliate marketing strategy, which was the main focus of this study. In addition, Abidin's (2021) research highlights the importance of authenticity and emotional engagement in influencer content, which was also found in this study. However, this study makes an additional contribution by identifying that special offers and user testimonials are important factors in influencing Generation Z's purchasing decisions.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer valuable insights for businesses, influencers, and the TikTok platform to optimize affiliate marketing strategies targeting Generation Z.

- 1) For Businesses: Selecting influencers whose values align with the brand and target audience is crucial for effective promotions. Offering exclusive deals, such as discounts or limited-time bonuses, can significantly boost Gen Z's purchasing interest. Additionally, maintaining high product quality is essential, as this demographic tends to critically evaluate products before making buying decisions.
- 2) For Influencers: Content that is relatable, entertaining, and informative resonates most with Gen Z audiences. Transparency in promotions—such as showcasing genuine user testimonials—helps build trust and credibility. Consistently engaging with followers through comments, replies, and interactive content fosters stronger audience relationships and enhances long-term influence.
- 3) For the TikTok Platform: Enhancing affiliate marketing tools—such as streamlined linking features or performance analytics—could support influencers and businesses in executing campaigns more effectively. At the same time, enforcing clear community guidelines on promotional content ensures authenticity and maintains user trust in the platform.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussions that have been conducted, it can be concluded that influencer affiliate marketing strategies have a significant influence on Generation Z's purchasing decisions on the TikTok platform. Trust in influencers, content quality, and special offers (such as discounts or bonuses) are the main factors that influence purchasing decisions. Generation Z, as a digitally literate and critical generation of promotional content, tends to be more responsive to authentic, entertaining, and informational content, such as tutorials, product reviews, and user testimonials. This shows that authenticity and transparency in product promotion are the key to the success of affiliate marketing strategies on TikTok. The study also revealed that clear call-to-action (CTAs), such as "link in bio" or "use discount codes", play an important role in increasing engagement and purchase conversions. In addition, content that features social proof, such as user testimonials or real proof of product usage, can build audience trust and drive purchase decisions. These findings are in line with previous research that emphasized the importance of emotional engagement and trust in digital marketing. Practically, this study provides recommendations for business people to choose influencers that match their values and target market, as well as ensure that the products promoted are of good quality. For influencers, it's important to focus on creating relatable and informational content, while maintaining transparency in product promotion. Meanwhile, the TikTok platform can leverage these findings to develop features that support affiliate marketing strategies, such as more advanced analytics tools or better integration between content and e-commerce platforms. Although this research makes an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of affiliate marketing on TikTok, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study only focused on TikTok and Generation Z platforms, so the findings may not be generalizable to other platforms or different generations. Second, the limited sample size and qualitative approach used may be less able to provide robust statistical generalizations. Therefore, follow-up research with a wider scope and more diverse methods is needed to reinforce these findings. Overall, this study confirms that affiliate marketing strategies run by influencers on TikTok can be an effective marketing tool to reach Generation Z, as long as it is done with an authentic, transparent, and focused approach on audience needs and preferences. These findings not only enrich the literature in the field of business communication and digital marketing, but also provide practical guidance for industry players in optimizing their marketing strategies in the digital age.

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