INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY SCIENCE

P-ISSN: 2808-5957
E-ISSN: 2808-6724

Influencers Communication Strategies in Influencing Their Followers Purchasing Decisions: A Case Study on TikTok

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Keywords:
communication strategy; influencers; purchase decisions; TikTok; fomo; parasocial interaction

ABSTRACT

Background: The phenomenon of influencer marketing through the TikTok platform is increasingly influencing the consumption patterns of the younger generation, especially in the context of purchasing decision-making. **Objectives:** This study aims to analyze the communication strategies used by TikTok influencers in influencing their followers to buy promoted products. **Method:** Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, this study involved four influencers and ten active followers as participants. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, video content observations, and short questionnaires to followers. **Results:** The results show that the most effective communication strategies are the use of personal narratives, authentic delivery styles, and fear of missing out (FOMO) techniques that create social urgency. Emotional interactions and parasocial relationships have also been shown to strengthen the influence of promotional messages on purchase intent. These findings are reinforced by observational and visualization data, which show that high engagement rates tend to correlate with increased follower-to-buyer conversion rates. **Conclusion:** This research contributes to the development of digital communication theory and provides practical implications for brands and influencers in developing promotional strategies that are more effective, ethical, and in accordance with the characteristics of today's digital audience.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media platforms have undergone a significant transformation in influencing people's consumption patterns, one of which is through the presence of digital influencers. TikTok, as a short video-based application, is one of the most influential channels in shaping the preferences and purchasing decisions of the younger generation, especially Gen Z and millennials (Boerman et al., 2017). According to the Gusti, (2023), More than 70% of TikTok users in Indonesia are exposed to promotional content from influencers, and around 64% of them admit to having bought the products they see on the platform (Wu et al., 2022).

The phenomenon of "TikTok made me buy it" is a strong representation of how the influence of influencer communication in the digital space is getting stronger and cannot be ignored (Abidin, 2016). This phenomenon not only occurs globally, but also has a significant impact in Indonesia, especially among productive age users who use TikTok as a source of

information and product recommendations. On the one hand, influencers are able to create an emotional closeness with followers through a personalized approach, a casual communication style, and the presentation of entertaining and accessible content (Vo, 2025).

This phenomenon not only occurs globally, but also has a significant impact in Indonesia, especially among productive age users who use TikTok as a source of information and product recommendations. On the one hand, influencers are able to create an emotional closeness with followers through a personalized approach, a casual communication style, and the presentation of entertaining and accessible content (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019); (Yodha & Indrawati, 2024).

Academically, several studies have highlighted the role of influencers in influencing consumer purchasing decisions (Vrontis et al., 2021). (Le & Quang, 2024), In his study in Vietnam, it was found that affiliate marketing-based communication strategies by TikTok influencers were proven to have a significant influence on the purchasing behavior of the younger generation. These influences are mediated by psychological factors such as fear of missing out (FOMO) and emotional responses to the content being delivered.

Meanwhile, research by (Chavda & Chauhan, 2024), shows that influencer credibility, proximity to followers, and audience engagement levels are important determinants in shaping purchase intent, especially on platforms that prioritize visualization and storytelling, such as TikTok (Hudders et al., 2021). However, another study in Palembang Researching the influence of influencers on skincare purchase decisions shows that marketing content and digital advertising actually have a stronger influence than promotion by influencers, indicating that the effectiveness of influencer communication strategies is not always uniform and contextual (Koay et al., 2020).

This reality underscores the importance of further research on the communication strategies used by influencers on TikTok in influencing purchasing decisions, especially in the local context in Indonesia. (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The lack of studies that examine in depth the communication mechanisms used by influencers on TikTok, especially those targeting the young market in Indonesia, is a gap that needs to be filled academically. In the context of digital marketing communication, understanding how messages are structured, delivered, and received by audiences through platforms like TikTok is an urgent need amid increasingly competitive business competition (Elmousa et al., 2024); (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The urgency of this research lies in the fact that TikTok is not just an entertainment platform but has evolved into a marketing tool that massively influences consumer behavior. Various brands, including micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), are starting to utilize TikTok influencers to reach consumers with a closer, faster, and visual approach (Leung et al., 2022). However, there is still little research that comprehensively explains what kind of communication strategies are truly effective in driving consumer purchasing decisions. Furthermore, new phenomena such as "de-influencing", where influencers encourage audiences not to buy certain products for the sake of ethical or sustainability awareness, are another dimension that needs to be understood from a communication perspective.

This research has novelty in terms of approach and object of study. Different from previous studies that mostly still focused on Instagram or YouTube, this study will specifically address TikTok as a unique contemporary communication medium, with

different interaction patterns and algorithms. In addition, this study will combine elements of communication strategy with parasocial interaction theory, fear of missing out (FOMO), and affiliate approaches to understand how these elements influence purchasing decisions. The use of local case studies in Indonesia, especially among the younger generation of TikTok users, is expected to make empirical and theoretical contributions that are relevant to the current context.

The main objective of this study is to identify and analyze the communication strategies used by TikTok influencers in influencing their followers, as well as to evaluate how these strategies impact the purchasing decision-making process. This research also aims to explore the role of credibility, authenticity of messages, emotional interactions, and narrative forms built by influencers in shaping audience perceptions and behaviors. By combining a qualitative approach and a study of digital marketing communication theory, this research will present an in-depth understanding of persuasive communication patterns in the digital era.

The benefits of this research are not only felt in the academic realm, but also practically. Academically, this research contributes to the development of digital communication science, particularly in the study of persuasive communication and platform-based marketing. Meanwhile, from a practical perspective, the results of this research can be a reference for brands, marketing agencies, and influencers in developing more effective, authentic, and ethical communication strategies. In addition, the results of this research can be used as a foundation to educate consumers to be more critical in receiving promotional messages on social media, while encouraging the creation of a healthy and responsible digital ecosystem.

The implications that can be drawn from this research include both theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, this research can expand the understanding of parasocial interactions and communication strategies in the context of new media such as TikTok. Jiang et al., (2022). This is important given the dynamic nature of social media that demands the renewal of theories and approaches in reading mass communication behavior. Practically, the findings from this study can be used to develop communication guidelines for influencers and brands, including messaging strategies, content format selection, and audience relationship management to optimally achieve marketing goals without sacrificing trust and transparency values.

Thus, this research not only fills a gap in the study of digital communication in Indonesia but also offers a new approach in understanding the relationship between influencers, social media, and consumer behavior in the digital era. Through this study, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of how the right communication strategy can build an influential relationship between influencers and their followers, as well as encourage the creation of informed and sustainable purchasing decisions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case-study approach to examine how TikTok influencers communicated promotional messages and how followers interpreted these

messages in relation to purchasing decisions. The analysis focused on authenticity, personal narratives, fear of missing out (FOMO), and audience interaction. The design supported contextual interpretation rather than statistical estimation of causal effects.

The study was conducted in Bandung, Indonesia. The reported sample comprised four active TikTok influencers with more than 50,000 followers each, representing beauty, fashion, gadgets, and food and beverage promotions, and ten followers aged 18–26 who actively used TikTok. Participants were selected purposively. The manuscript does not establish a verifiable fieldwork period; this information must be supplied from the original research records.

To obtain relevant and in-depth data, the main instrument in this study is the researcher himself, who acts as a key instrument (human instrument). In the qualitative approach, researchers have a central role in interpreting data through direct involvement in the field, critical observation, and reflective understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In addition, the researcher also used semi-structured interview guidelines as an auxiliary instrument, which were compiled based on the theoretical framework of persuasive communication, parasocial interaction, and digital marketing strategies.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with four influencers, observations of approximately three to five recent promotional videos per influencer, documentation of content and audience interactions, and a short questionnaire administered to ten followers. Interviews explored promotional communication, perceived authenticity, and audience engagement. Video observation examined narrative structure, visual presentation, urgency cues, comments, and engagement indicators. The questionnaire recorded self-reported purchases and reasons for interest. The original questionnaire, recruitment records, and measurement procedures should be supplied to permit verification.

The reported qualitative material was interpreted thematically by comparing interview accounts, observed content, and questionnaire responses around authenticity, FOMO, and parasocial interaction. The available manuscript does not document the complete coding procedure, member checking, peer debriefing, or the exact observation period; these procedures cannot be asserted as completed without supporting records. Participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and disclosure of paid promotional relationships require explicit confirmation from the researchers.

This case-study approach provides contextual insight into how promotional communication is constructed and received. Because the sample is small and purposively selected, the results should be interpreted as exploratory rather than representative of TikTok users generally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research involved four TikTok influencers who were active in product promotion activities through endorsement content and affiliate marketing. Each has a follower count of over 50,000 with different product categories, such as beauty, fashion, gadgets, and food and beverage. In terms of followers, as many as ten respondents were selected purposively with the criteria of having bought a product after seeing the promotions from the observed influencers. The age of the respondents ranged from 18–26 years old, the majority of students and young workers who actively use TikTok for at least one hour per day.

In-depth interviews with the four influencers uncovered some of the communication strategies consistently used to influence followers' purchasing decisions. First, all influencers emphasized the importance of "authenticity" in conveying messages. They avoid overly formal promotional scripts and prefer a narrative approach, such as telling personal experiences using products. Second, the FOMO technique is the main strategy used by bringing up words such as "go viral," "stay a little," or "don't run out."

Third, they actively answer comments, repost content from followers who buy products, and create giveaways to increase emotional interaction. One influencer stated: *"I don't want to look like a salesman. It's more like 'eh I'm trying this again', so that the impression is like a recommendation from a friend, not an advertisement."*

Findings from the Follower Questionnaire

A short questionnaire distributed to ten followers showed that:

1. As many as 8 out of 10 respondents admitted to having bought a product after seeing influencer content.
2. The main reasons they are interested is because of the natural way of delivery (7 respondents), personal testimonials (6 respondents), and the impression that the product is trending (5 respondents).
3. Other factors to look out for are special discounts, affiliate codes, and endorsements from more than one influencer.

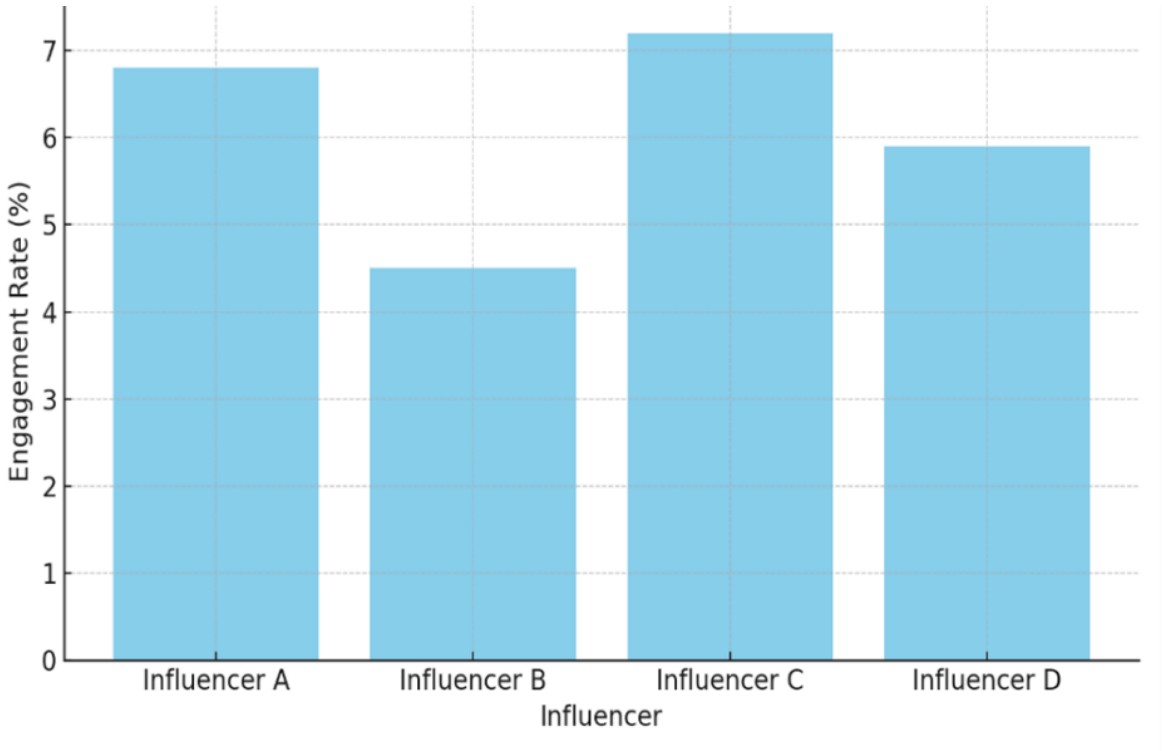


Figure 1. TikTok Influencer Engagement Rate

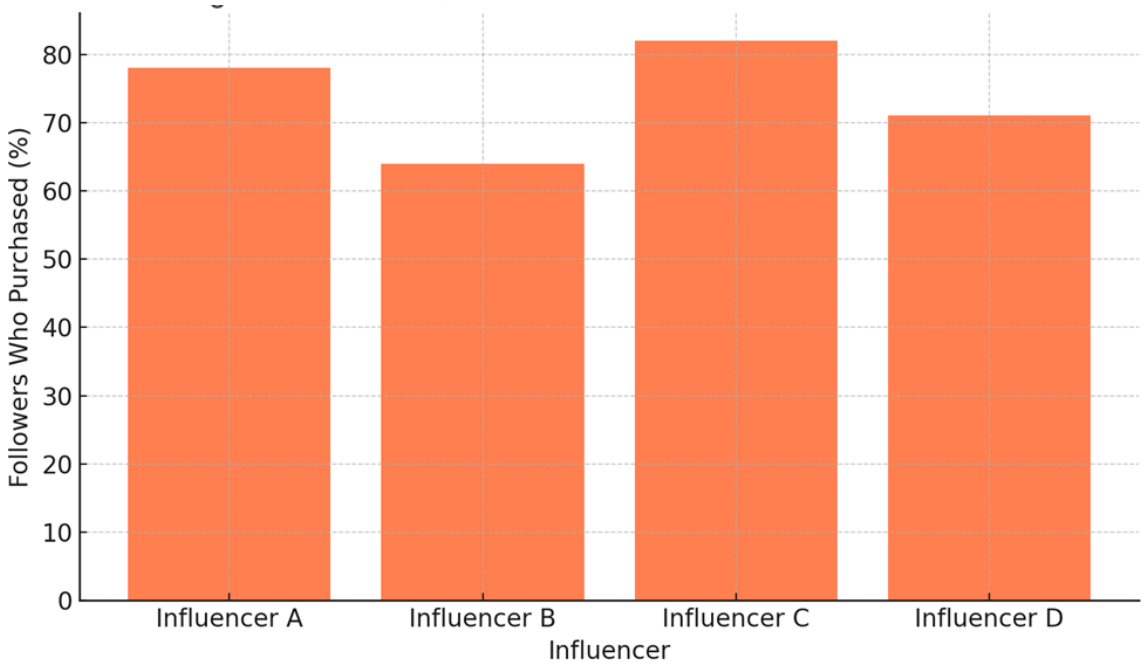


Figure 2. Percentage of Followers Who Buy Products after Watching TikTok Influencers

TikTok Content Observation Results

Observations of the last 3–5 videos of each influencer show that all promotional content has an informal narrative structure, with a friendly tone. Generally, the video starts with an expression of excitement (e.g., "Guys, you guys should try this...") and then continues with a product demonstration. Popular hashtags such as #TikTokMadeMeBuyIt, #ReviewJujur, and #Rekomendasi are used to facilitate the algorithmic distribution of content. Each video has a high engagement rate, with an average of 1,200–2,300 likes and 150–500 comments.

Many comments indicate interest or curiosity about the product, as well as testimonials from other users who have tried the product. Przybylski et al., (2013); Sokolova & Perez, (2021). From a technical perspective, influencers use visual close-up techniques of products, insertion of text (e.g., discounted prices), and trending background music to increase appeal. The observed use of product demonstrations, informal storytelling, promotional text, and comment interaction indicates how persuasive cues were combined within short-form videos. Engagement counts describe visible audience activity, not verified purchasing behavior; the reported ranges should be checked against dated observation records.

The following table summarizes the results of observations of 4 influencers based on two main variables:

Table 1. Engagement Rate and Percentage of Followers Who Make Purchases on Each TikTok Influencer

Influence	Engagement Rate (%)	Followers Who Purchased (%)
A	6.8	78
B	4.5	64
C	7.2	82
D	5.9	71

The engagement values reported for the four influencers (6.8%, 4.5%, 7.2%, and 5.9%) and the corresponding purchase percentages (78%, 64%, 82%, and 71%) are retained as originally presented. However, their denominators, observation periods, and calculation methods are not documented. The purchase percentages cannot be calculated directly from a questionnaire of ten followers. Accordingly, these figures cannot establish a statistically supported correlation or conversion rate without the underlying account-level data.

The results of this study show that the communication strategies implemented by influencers on TikTok play an important role in shaping the purchasing decisions of their followers. The main findings came from in-depth interview data, follower questionnaires, content observations, and comparisons with previous studies. The FOMO interpretation is consistent with the conceptual account of fear of missing out in (Przybylski et al., 2013), but this qualitative study did not measure FOMO as a statistical mediator. Likewise, the emphasis on perceived authenticity and trust can be discussed alongside Lou & Yuan, (2019), while the ethical importance of identifying sponsored messages is relevant to (Boerman et al., 2017). These comparisons concern conceptual relevance, not proof of equivalent effects across studies.

Interviews conducted with four TikTok influencers revealed that the communication approach used tends to prioritize narratives that are personal and emotional. Influencers consciously avoid overly explicit promotional styles and prefer to convey messages in the form of personal experience stories. For example, one of the speakers stated that he never mentioned that the product reviewed was an advertisement, but introduced it as something he had just tried and really liked. This strategy creates the impression that the promotion is authentic, not just a paid advertising contract. The interpretation of this statement suggests that the success of an influencer's communication strategy depends heavily on the perception of authenticity received by the audience.

In addition, the use of the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) technique is consistently applied by all influencer respondents. Words like "hurry up before it sells out" or "everyone else wears this" implicitly build social pressure and urgency that influence the psychology of followers to buy products right away. These results are in line with the FOMO theory by Przybylski et al., (2013), which states that the urge not to fall behind in social trends is one of the strong motivators in consumptive decision-making, especially among young people who are very active on social media.

A central ethical tension emerges when paid promotion is presented as a spontaneous personal recommendation. Such presentation may foster perceived authenticity while limiting followers' ability to recognize commercial persuasion. Clear sponsorship disclosure and transparent affiliate relationships are therefore important safeguards; the present

material does not establish whether the observed videos consistently met disclosure standards.

In terms of followers, the results of the questionnaire distributed showed that 80% of respondents admitted to having bought a product after watching promotions from TikTok influencers. The dominant reasons include non-pushy communication styles, influencer credibility, and feelings of emotional connection. This data reinforces the hypothesis that pseudopersonal communication or parasocial interaction plays an important role in forming audience trust. These results support the theory. Konijn & Hoorn, (2017) This explains that one-way relationships between media personalities and audiences can have similar impacts to real interpersonal relationships in terms of behavioral influence.

From the results of observations of TikTok content belonging to the four influencers, several uniform visual and structural patterns can be identified. The entire promotional video begins with an enthusiastic expression that arouses curiosity ("You should try this!"), continues with a demonstration of the product and its benefits, and closes with a call to action ("the link is in the bio"). The visuals used pay close attention to color composition, the use of viral music, and the insertion of persuasive promotional text. Follower responses in the comment column indicate active participation, whether it's product questions, testimonials, or enthusiasm to try the same product. This pattern indicates that TikTok is not only a content distribution platform but also a dynamic interaction space that strengthens the relationship between influencers and followers.

When compared to the results of previous studies, this study confirms some of the findings while showing new nuances. The practical implications of this research are very relevant for the communication and digital marketing industry players. First, for brands, influencer selection should not only be based on the number of followers, but also on the quality of engagement and the suitability of the communication style with the target market.

Brands should also give creative space for influencers to convey messages in a way that suits the characteristics of their audience, instead of providing rigid promotional scripts. Second, for influencers, it is important to continue to build an emotional connection with followers through active responses to comments, the use of personal narratives, and maintaining the authenticity of identity. Third, for communication education institutions, the results of this research can be used as teaching materials in understanding the dynamics of persuasive communication in the digital era and ethics in digital promotion practices.

However, this research also has some limitations. First, the limited number of study subjects (four influencers and ten followers) makes the findings not yet generalizable to the population of TikTok users in Indonesia. Second, the types of products observed vary (skincare, food, fashion), so the effect of communication strategies can differ depending on the context of the product. Third, the qualitative approach with case studies has the strength in in-depth exploration, but does not quantitatively measure effects that can be confirmed through inferential statistics. Fourth, the existence of interpretive bias from the researcher as the main instrument can affect the results if it is not accompanied by critical reflection and strict data triangulation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how TikTok influencers' communication strategies relate to followers' purchasing decisions through a qualitative case study involving four influencers and ten followers. The findings indicate that personal narratives, perceived authenticity, FOMO cues, and active audience interaction shaped how promotional messages were presented and interpreted. Informal storytelling and product demonstrations appeared particularly relevant to perceived credibility and emotional connection.

Questionnaire responses also identified natural delivery, personal testimonials, and trending products as reasons for interest. However, inconsistencies in reported purchasing responses and undocumented calculation methods for engagement and purchase percentages limit quantitative interpretation. Practically, brands and influencers should prioritize transparent sponsorship disclosure, credible communication, and audience trust. Future research should document sampling and measurement procedures more fully and examine these patterns across larger, more diverse participant groups and product categories.

FUNDING

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The study, including the in-depth interviews, observation of TikTok promotional content, and the follower questionnaire, was conducted independently by the author.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that this research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. The author has no affiliation with, and received no payment, products, or other benefits from, the influencers who participated in this study, the brands whose products were promoted in the observed content, or the TikTok platform.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Siti Ainul Kholipah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation (in-depth interviews with four TikTok influencers, observation of their promotional videos, and administration of the follower questionnaire), Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing – original draft, and Writing – review & editing. The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript and takes full responsibility for its content.

GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

The author declares that generative AI was used during the preparation of this manuscript. Generative AI tools, including Claude (Anthropic), were used solely to improve the language clarity and grammatical structure of the text and to assist in identifying relevant scholarly literature; all suggested references were verified by the author against their original sources (DOI and publisher records) before inclusion. Generative AI was not used to generate research data, analyze the interview, observation, or questionnaire data, or draw the conclusions of this study. The author reviewed and edited all AI-assisted content and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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