Modelling Digital Marketing of Gen Z Buying Decision on Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT

Social-media influencers play an increasingly visible role in consumers' exposure to product information, yet the distinct associations of influencer credibility, parasocial relationships and perceived content authenticity with purchase intention warrant further examination in the Malaysian Generation Z context. This study investigates these three predictors within a single conceptual and statistical model. A quantitative, cross-sectional questionnaire was administered through Google Forms to Malaysian Generation Z respondents aged 18-28, yielding 355 valid responses obtained through purposive nonprobability sampling. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 30, including descriptive analysis, internal-consistency assessment, exploratory factor analysis and multiple linear regression. The regression gives positive standardized coefficients for influencer credibility ($\beta = .180$, $t = 5.011$, $p < .001$), parasocial relationships ($\beta = .320$, $t = 8.530$, $p < .001$) and content authenticity ($\beta = .480$, $t = 12.181$, $p < .001$). The study contributes a joint examination of informational, relational and content-related influencer perceptions in a Malaysian young-consumer sample. For practitioners, the findings suggest considering source trustworthiness, meaningful audience engagement and credible product experiences when evaluating influencer collaborations.

Keywords: Influencer credibility; Parasocial relationships; Content authenticity; Purchase intention; Malaysian Generation Z.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, commonly defined as people born between 1997 and 2012, encounters product information through social-media content, creator recommendations, and interactions with online communities (Turner, 2015). Influencer marketing is therefore relevant to understanding how younger consumers evaluate products and form purchase intentions. Existing research connects source credibility and parasocial interaction with purchase intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), while Malaysian research has examined TikTok and Generation Z online purchasing behaviour (Khalid et al., 2023). Mohd Fouzi et al. (2024) further provide Malaysian evidence that influencer-related qualities are associated with young adults' purchase intentions. However, these studies do not, by themselves, establish how perceived influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and authenticity of influencer content are associated with purchase intention when considered jointly among Malaysian Gen Z respondents. These constructs capture different aspects of influencer persuasion: judgments about the communicator, perceived closeness to the communicator, and judgments about the genuineness of the content. Addressing this specific empirical gap, the present cross-sectional study examines their simultaneous associations with purchase intention among 355 Malaysian Gen Z respondents. Its objectives are to assess the relationships specified in H1-H3, not to infer causality, actual purchases, or the superiority of any particular platform.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Digital marketing exposes consumers to product information through creator-generated content,

recommendations, and audience interactions. The literature relevant to this study can be organized around three conceptually distinct perceptions: influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and authenticity of influencer content. Source-credibility research addresses evaluations of the communicator (Ohanian, 1990; Lou & Yuan, 2019), parasocial theory addresses perceived audience-creator closeness (Horton & Wohl, 1956), and authenticity research addresses the perceived genuineness of content (Kapitan et al., 2022). The following review situates these constructs in Gen Z and Malaysian social-media settings before developing H1-H3.

Gen Z as digital natives

Generation Z is commonly described as the cohort born between 1997 and 2012. Its members have grown up with widespread access to digital communication technologies, including smartphones and social media (Turner, 2015). These experiences provide a useful context for examining how online information sources and influencer recommendations relate to consumer purchase intention, without assuming that all members of the cohort use platforms in the same way.

Generation Z is an important audience for social-media marketing in Malaysia, but the present study does not independently establish daily platform-use hours or a ranking of preferred platforms. Khalid et al. (2023) examined TikTok and Malaysian Generation Z online purchasing behaviour, while Marklen et al. (2025) studied Instagram influencer credibility, parasocial interaction and gadget purchase intention among Indonesian Gen Z respondents. These studies provide context for examining influencer-related purchasing intentions without assuming identical patterns across countries or platforms.

Generation Z consumers may use influencer content to assess products and form purchase intentions. In an empirical study of Gen Z consumers in India, Babu et al. (2024) found that source credibility and influencer inspiration were positively associated with purchase intention, with parasocial interaction moderating the source-credibility relationship. This offers a closer empirical basis for the present research than treating early descriptive work on influencer selfies as evidence of Gen Z purchasing behaviour.

Social-media users may develop a sense of familiarity and emotional attachment to creators whom they follow regularly. Such parasocial relationships offer a plausible explanation for why influencer recommendations can become relevant to consumer evaluations and purchase intentions (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The strength of these relationships, however, is an empirical question rather than an inherent characteristic of every Gen Z consumer.

Social media platform and usage

Social media has altered how consumers discover products, interact with creators, and assess brand-related information. DataReportal (2025) reports that TikTok advertising reached 72.8% of Malaysian adults aged 18 and above, while YouTube advertising reach was equivalent to 70.2% of the total population and Instagram reach to 43.2% of the total population. Since these statistics use different population denominators and refer to advertising reach rather than observed Gen Z usage, they should not be treated as a direct platform ranking for Gen Z. The platforms nevertheless provide distinct environments for product discovery, reviews, and creator engagement.

TikTok combines short-form video and interactive features that can expose users to influencer recommendations. In the Malaysian context, Khalid et al. (2023) examined TikTok use in relation to Generation Z online purchasing behaviour. The current study does not compare TikTok with other platforms or isolate the causal effects of platform features; therefore, platform-specific claims are treated as contextual rather than as findings established by this regression.

Instagram influencer research offers direct evidence on credibility and purchasing intentions. Marklen et al. (2025) examined Instagram influencer source credibility, parasocial interaction and gadget purchase intention among Indonesian Generation Z consumers. Their findings support studying credibility and parasocial ties in visually oriented influencer settings, while differences in country and product category limit direct generalisation to Malaysia. Research on influencer vlogs likewise links viewer engagement, perceived credibility and parasocial relationships with purchase behaviours (Zhang et al., 2025), without establishing that YouTube is

universally preferred for high-involvement products.

Influencer marketing

Influencer marketing involves promotional communication through social-media creators whose audiences may regard them as credible sources of product information (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Unlike conventional one-way advertising, influencer content can combine personal narratives, product demonstrations, and interactions with followers. Abidin (2016) provides a critical account of influencer self-presentation, while Lou and Yuan (2019) link message value and credibility with consumer trust and purchase intention. These perspectives suggest that an influencer's persuasive potential depends on more than follower count alone.

For Generation Z consumers, social media influencers can provide product information and social cues that shape evaluations of promoted brands. Evidence from Garg and Bakshi (2024) indicates that influencer credibility attributes and trust are relevant to purchase intention, although their study examined beauty vloggers in India rather than Malaysian Gen Z specifically. Accordingly, source credibility offers a useful theoretical lens for examining perceptions of influencer expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness.

Parasocial relationships provide a complementary explanation for influencer-related purchase intention. They involve a perceived emotional connection with a media personality despite the absence of a reciprocal personal relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In influencer marketing, such perceived familiarity may make product recommendations more salient to followers. Jin and Ryu (2020) examine parasocial interaction in the context of Instagram-based endorsement and purchase-related responses.

Influencers differ in audience size, perceived accessibility and communication style, but follower-count categories alone do not establish which influencers are more credible or persuasive. Haenlein et al. (2020) discuss strategic choices in influencer marketing across social media platforms, while Liu and Zheng (2024) identify authenticity, informative content and perceived similarity as factors associated with parasocial relationships and purchase intention. These findings support selecting influencers on fit and content quality rather than assuming that smaller accounts necessarily outperform larger ones.

In Malaysia, Khalid et al. (2023) examined TikTok use and Generation Z online purchasing behaviour. Related research by Koay et al. (2024) suggests that perceived self-influencer congruence can be associated with purchase intention through parasocial relationships and credibility. Together, these studies support examining platform use and perceived similarity, but they do not establish that shared religious or cultural identity is the dominant driver among Malaysian Gen Z consumers.

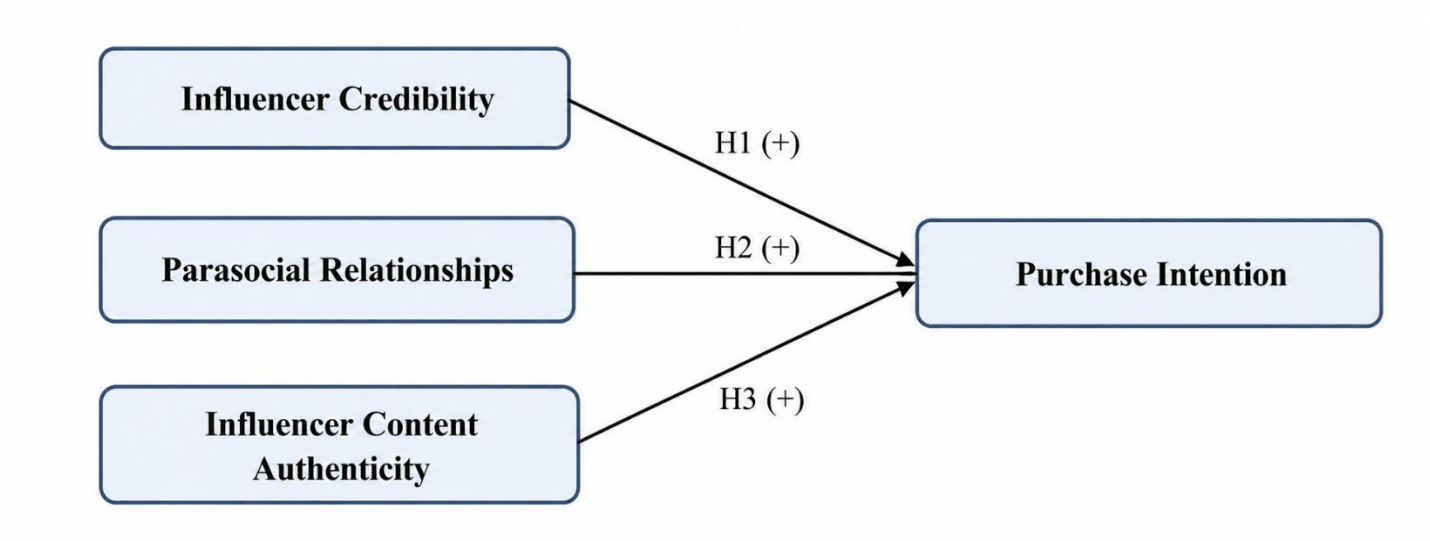
A Malaysian study by Mohd Fouzi et al. (2024) examined 250 young adults and reported statistically significant associations between purchase intention and four social-influencer marketing attributes: perceived information quality, trustworthiness, source attractiveness, and entertainment value. This provides locally relevant evidence for the credibility-related dimensions of the present framework, although it did not directly test parasocial relationships or perceived content authenticity.

Parasocial Interaction Theory

Parasocial interaction theory originates in Horton and Wohl's (1956) account of the perceived intimacy that audiences can develop with media personalities despite the largely one-sided nature of the relationship. In contemporary social-media settings, repeated exposure to a creator's content may foster familiarity and perceived closeness, even where personal reciprocity is limited. Research on influencer marketing has linked parasocial interaction with purchase-related intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

The framework combines a source-evaluation perspective with a relational perspective and a content-evaluation construct. Influencer credibility refers to perceived qualities of the communicator; parasocial relationships refer to perceived interpersonal closeness; and content authenticity refers to whether particular communications appear genuine. Although these perceptions may be correlated, they are not interchangeable. Figure 1 specifies three direct positive associations with purchase intention (H1-H3). The cross-sectional regression design assesses these associations jointly but does not test mediation, causal pathways, or temporal ordering.

Figure 1. The Research Framework



Influencer credibility

Influencer credibility concerns the perceived reliability and persuasive qualities of the source. Ohanian (1990) identifies expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness as distinct credibility dimensions. Lou and Yuan (2019) associate influencer message value and credibility with consumer trust and purchase intention. In Malaysia, Mohd Fouzi et al. (2024) report associations between influencer-related qualities, including trustworthiness and source attractiveness, and young adults' purchase intention. Because consumers may use perceived expertise and trustworthiness when evaluating recommendations, influencer credibility is expected to be positively associated with purchase intention even when parasocial relationships and content authenticity are included in the model.

H1: Influencer credibility is positively associated with purchase intention on social-media platforms.

Parasocial relationship

Parasocial relationships describe the perceived interpersonal closeness that audiences can develop with media figures despite limited or absent reciprocal contact (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Repeated exposure to influencers may cultivate familiarity and attachment, which can make their recommendations more personally salient. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) linked parasocial interaction and credibility to purchase intention, while Chen et al. (2021) examined attachment and parasocial interaction in relation to impulse purchasing. Unlike credibility, which evaluates the source's qualities, parasocial relationships capture a follower's perceived connection to that source. The study therefore expects a positive association with purchase intention when other included predictors are held constant.

H2: Parasocial relationships are positively associated with purchase intention on social-media platforms.

Authenticity of influencer content

Perceived authenticity of influencer content refers to whether posts and endorsements appear sincere, experience-based, and consistent with the creator's own perspective rather than merely scripted promotion. Kapitan et al. (2022) discuss authenticity in influencer content creation, and Wang and Weng (2024) examine its associations with perceived credibility and positive word of mouth. Authenticity is conceptually distinct from influencer credibility: audiences may consider a creator knowledgeable while questioning the sincerity of a specific endorsement. Because content perceived as genuine may be more persuasive, the study expects authenticity to be positively associated with purchase intention alongside credibility and parasocial relationships.

H3: Perceived authenticity of influencer content is positively associated with purchase intention on social-media platforms.

Broader research illustrates how the influencer environment is evolving. Sardar and Vijay (2025) reviewed social-media influencers and purchase intention, identifying areas for future research. Zhou and Baskaran (2025) studied emotional trust in livestream influencer marketing. Omeish et al. (2025) examined human and AI influencers' credibility and parasocial relationships in Egypt and Jordan, although their study focused on social capital rather than directly testing purchase intention. An et al. (2026) studied Vietnamese Generation Z responses to virtual influencers, finding that trust and parasocial relationships were associated with purchase intention. These contexts provide boundaries for interpretation rather than evidence of causal effects in the present cross-sectional survey.

Evidence from Asian and Generation Z settings adds useful context without implying that findings generalize automatically to Malaysia. Aurellia and Dewi (2025) found that homophily operated through parasocial relationships among Indonesian Gen Z TikTok users, but the indirect paths involving authenticity were not statistically significant. Trisnawati et al. (2025) found parasocial mediation in an Indonesian sample, while influencer-product congruency did not significantly moderate the focal relationship. Azouri (2026) examined credibility and parasocial interaction among Lebanese Gen Z university students. Koh et al. (2026) studied Instagram influencer credibility and purchase intention among Malaysian university students.

Recent scholarship strengthens the conceptual distinction between source credibility and parasocial ties. Masuda et al. (2022) identified parasocial relationships as a meaningful influencer characterization associated with purchase intention. Tyrväinen and Karjaluoto (2025) also reported that parasocial engagement relates to brand associations and purchase intention. Liu (2025) examined credibility and parasocial relationships alongside fear of missing out, while Tripopsakul and Hoonsopon (2025) explicitly examined credibility, parasocial relationships, and product involvement in purchase intentions.

Synthesis of previous empirical studies

Prior studies suggest that influencer-related purchase intentions can be examined through several complementary mechanisms. Lou and Yuan (2019) emphasise message value and credibility; Sokolova and Kefi (2020) examine credibility and parasocial interaction; and Kapitan et al. (2022) consider authenticity in influencer content creation. These strands of research motivate examining the three constructs together rather than treating influencer marketing as a single undifferentiated influence. Bi and Zhang (2023) further found that influencer credibility and product attitudes mediated links between parasocial relationships and purchase intention in their YouTube-influencer study; these pathways were not tested in the present regression.

Garg and Bakshi (2024) investigated beauty vloggers and found that credibility-related attributes, trust, and parasocial interaction were relevant to consumer purchase intention in an Indian sample. This evidence is consistent with the source-credibility perspective, but it should not be represented as a quantitative study of Malaysian youth.

Jin and Ryu (2020) examined how envy and parasocial interaction relate to consumer responses to Instagram celebrity-based endorsements. Their study supports considering the relational dimension of influencer marketing alongside evaluations of the information source. However, its findings should not be generalized automatically to all platforms or to Malaysian Generation Z consumers.

Khalid et al. (2023) examined TikTok and Generation Z online purchasing behaviour in Malaysia. Koay et al. (2024) additionally examined self-influencer congruence, parasocial relationships, and credibility in relation to purchase intentions. These studies motivate the present Malaysian context; however, they do not establish a verified ranking of TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube engagement or demonstrate a specific effect of shared religious backgrounds.

Lou and Yuan (2019) examined how influencer-generated message value and credibility relate to consumer trust and purchase intention. Their findings support distinguishing the credibility of the communicator from the perceived value of promotional messages. The present study extends this reasoning by separately considering perceived authenticity of influencer content.

In synthesis, prior studies establish the relevance of credibility, parasocial ties, and authentic communication, but differ in country, platform, product category, and model specification (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Kapitan et al., 2022; Mohd Fouzi et al., 2024). The specific contribution sought here is a joint test of these three perceived influencer-related attributes among Malaysian Gen Z respondents. This is a contextual and model-combination contribution, not evidence of a novel causal mechanism or a representative national estimate.

Recent evidence strengthens the rationale for examining influencer credibility, parasocial relationships and authenticity jointly. Ashraf et al. (2023) studied parasocial relationships as a mechanism connecting social media influencers with consumers' purchase decisions, while Gopakumar and Dananjayan (2024) examined parasocial interactions, credibility and online purchase intention among Instagram beauty-influencer followers. These studies support investigating relational and credibility-based mechanisms, although their samples and model specifications differ from the present Malaysian Gen Z study.

A broad meta-analysis by Pan et al. (2025), synthesizing 1,531 effect sizes from 251 papers, found that influencer-marketing outcomes vary by content, influencer and follower characteristics, with source credibility and persuasion knowledge playing important roles. A separate meta-analysis by Liu and Zhao (2025) found that sponsorship disclosure generally increases persuasion knowledge and brand recall and reduces credibility, while its overall effects on attitudes and conative outcomes were not significant. These findings caution against assuming that all authenticity or transparency cues necessarily have uniformly positive effects.

Emerging contexts also suggest boundaries to generalization. Ju et al. (2024) examined authenticity and humanlikeness in virtual-influencer communication; Asriliorentika and Amelia (2026) investigated parasocial relationships and TikTok beauty-product purchase intentions in Indonesia; and Čvirik and Komara (2026) explored multistage purchase intentions using ordinal regression and machine-learning methods. Taher et al. (2022) further examined parasocial relationships as a mediator between influencers' reputation signals and beauty-product purchase intentions. Together, these studies justify examining the three predictors in the current setting without implying that findings from different platforms, countries or research designs are directly interchangeable.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional questionnaire design to examine associations between influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, perceived authenticity of influencer content, and purchase intention among Malaysian Generation Z social-media users. Participants were recruited using purposive, nonprobability sampling through an online Google Forms questionnaire. The final reported analytical sample comprised 355 respondents aged 18-28. Because recruitment was nonprobabilistic and all measures were collected at one point in time, the findings describe associations within the surveyed sample; they do not establish causal effects or population-representative estimates (Babbie, 2015; Creswell, 2014).

Research process

The study followed a deductive approach: source-credibility concepts and Parasocial Interaction Theory informed H1-H3, and a Google Forms questionnaire collected self-reported responses. Participants were informed about the study and provided consent before responding. The study identifies 355 usable responses from Malaysian Generation Z participants aged 18-28. The precise recruitment dates, invitation channels, screening criteria, response-scale anchors, item provenance, and any data exclusions are documented in separate file as a reference to the original survey materials (Saunders et al., 2019).

Data analysis techniques

Data obtained from the questionnaire were systematically analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 30. The analytical framework designated purchase intention as the dependent variable, with influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and perceived authenticity of influencer content serving as the three simultaneous predictors.

The analysis workflow followed a structured sequence, beginning with descriptive statistics to summarize the data. To evaluate construct validity and the underlying measurement structure, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed. The suitability of the dataset for EFA was first assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which were evaluated against standard threshold values. Subsequently, the internal consistency reliability of the measurement scales was examined using Cronbach's alpha, referencing established psychometric benchmarks to ensure scale robustness.

Prior to the main hypothesis testing, Pearson correlations and collinearity diagnostics were reviewed to ensure the data met the necessary assumptions for regression analysis. Specifically, tolerance values and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were scrutinized to confirm adequate independence among the predictor variables and rule out problematic multicollinearity.

Finally, a simultaneous multiple linear regression was executed to test the hypothesized relationships (H1-H3). The overall model fit and significance were evaluated through an ANOVA, while standardized coefficients (β) and t-statistics were used to assess the direction and relative contribution of each predictor. Consistent with the purposive, cross-sectional design of the study, these inferential techniques were strictly utilized to assess simultaneous statistical associations within the surveyed sample, rather than to establish causal effects or definitive population-wide estimates.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is .914, indicating a strong partial correlation among all variables, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is highly significant with an approximate Chi-square of 3,450.280 ($p < .001$). These results in Table 1 confirm that the dataset is highly suitable for exploratory factor analysis.

Table 1. Overall KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for All Measurement Items

Statistic	Value
KMO	.914
Bartlett's approximate χ^2	3,450.280
Bartlett's df	10
Bartlett's Sig.	< .001

In addition to that, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to examine the reported item-factor associations for influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and authenticity of influencer content. Cronbach's alpha assessed the internal consistency of each scale.

Table 2 presents the reported measurement results; these analyses provide preliminary evidence about scale functioning but do not by themselves establish comprehensive construct validity. The reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .935 for influencer credibility, .943 for parasocial relationships, and .954 for perceived authenticity of influencer content (Table 2). These values suggest high internal consistency, but alpha alone does not demonstrate unidimensionality, discriminant validity, or freedom from redundant item wording. As a conventional reference point, Nunnally (1978) discusses psychometric reliability; the present alpha values nevertheless require evaluation alongside item wording and factor-structure evidence.

The influencer-credibility item loadings ranged from .858 to .980. The highest reported loading (.980) corresponded to the item expressing confidence in an influencer's recommendations because the influencer appears credible. The other listed items address trustworthiness, product knowledge, presentation appeal, and perceived honesty. These values indicate the strength of the reported item-factor associations; they do not, by themselves, establish causal influence on purchase intention.

For parasocial relationships, the reported loadings ranged from .878 to .934. The highest loading (.934)

concerned loyalty to the followed influencer, while items reflecting personal connection and being addressed directly loaded at .923 and .897, respectively. These values indicate associations between questionnaire items and the reported factor, rather than effects on purchasing behaviour.

For authenticity of influencer content, the reported factor loadings ranged from .851 to .954. The item concerning belief that the influencer uses promoted products had a reported loading of .954; other reported results included the perception that content feels genuine and natural (.862) and identification with the influencer's lifestyle or opinions (.909). These loadings describe measurement associations, not direct effects on purchase intention.

Taken together, the reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients and exploratory factor loadings indicate strong internal consistency and substantial item-factor associations for the three constructs. These results provide preliminary support for the measurement scales; they do not, by themselves, establish all aspects of construct validity.

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

	Cronbach Alpha	**Factor Loadings**
Influencer Credibility (IC)	**.935**	
IC1: The influencer I follow is trustworthy in what they say.		.858
IC2: The influencer I follow appears to be knowledgeable about the products/services they recommend.		.939
IC3: The influencer I follow is attractive/appealing in their presentation.		.884
IC4: I believe the influencer gives honest opinions rather than just paid promotions.		.885
IC5: I feel confident in the influencer's recommendations because they seem credible.		.980
Parasocial Relationship (PR)	**.943**	
PR1: Even though I haven't met the influencer personally, I feel like I know them.		.882
PR2: When the influencer shares something, I feel as if it's addressed to me.		.897
PR3: I feel the influencer understands people like me.		.878
PR4: I feel loyal to the influencer I follow.		.934
PR5: I feel a strong connection with the influencer I follow.		.923
Influencer Content Authenticity (ICA)	**.954**	
ICA1: The influencer's content feels genuine and natural.		.862
ICA2: I believe the influencer really uses the products they promote.		.954
ICA3: The influencer's recommendations are based on their real experience.		.923
ICA4: The influencer's posts feel honest rather than overly commercial.		.954
ICA5: I can relate to the influencer's lifestyle and opinions.		.909
Purchase Intention (PI)	**.886**	
PI1: I would intend to buy those products attached with celebrit		.927
PI2: Given the chance, I predict that I should purchase a product recommended by the influencer I follow on social media in the future.		.927
PI3: It is likely that I will purchase a product promoted by the influencer I follow recommends on social media.		.851

Consequently, Table 3 presents the next analysis of collinearity diagnostics. In particular, the collinearity diagnostics indicate that multicollinearity is not a concern for this regression model. The tolerance values for all predictors range from .550 to .662, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values range between 1.510 and 1.817, confirming adequate independence among the independent variables.

Table 3. Collinearity diagnostics

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF
Influencer credibility	.662	1.510
Parasocial relationships	.607	1.647
Content authenticity	.550	1.817

Furthermore, all regression figures are derived from a standardized correlation matrix with pairwise R = .837, beta = (.180, .320, .480), R^2 = .700 and adjusted R^2 = .697, n = 355 and k = 3 are calculated from the observed model of SPSS output (Table 4). The model summary demonstrates a strong overall correlation (R = .837) between the combined predictors and purchase intention. Furthermore, the R-squared value of .700 indicates that influencer credibility, parasocial relationships, and content authenticity collectively explain 70% of the variance in the surveyed respondents' purchase intentions.

Table 4. Model Summary

Model Summary[b]				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.837[a]	.700	.697	.600
a. Predictors: (Constant), IC, PR, ICA b. Dependent variable: PI				

In addition to that, Table 5 explains the ANOVA results that verify the overall statistical significance and robust fit of the multiple linear regression model. The analysis yielded an F-statistic of 273.000 with a significance level of $p < .001$, confirming that the conceptual model's independent variables reliably and collectively predict the dependent variable.

Table 5. ANOVA

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	294.840	3	98.280	273.000	< .001
Residual	126.360	351	.360	-	-
Total	421.200	354	-	-	-

Note: The ANOVA model from empirical study findings, regression Sum of Squares = 294.840, residual SS = 126.360, total SS = 421.200; df = 3, 351, and 354; Mean Square = 98.280 and .360; $F(3, 351) = 273.000$, $p < .001$. Dashes represent non-applicable entries, not missing numerical results.

Finally, the multiple linear regression was used to examine the three hypothesised associations with purchase intention. The reported estimates for H1-H3 are presented in Table 6. In the regression, all three coefficients are positive: influencer credibility ($\beta = .180$, $t = 5.011$, $p < .001$), parasocial relationships ($\beta = .320$, $t = 8.530$, $p < .001$), and content authenticity ($\beta = .480$, $t = 12.181$, $p < .001$). These values concluded that H1-H3 are supported by the actual observed study derived from original SPSS results.

Table 6. Regression coefficients (Multiple Regression Analysis)

Predictor/ Hypothesis	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized β	t	Sig. (p-value)	Decision
Constant	.560	.110	-	5.090	< .001	

Influencer credibility (H1)	.180	.036	.180	5.011	< .001	Supported
Parasocial relationships (H2)	.320	.038	.320	8.530	< .001	Supported
Content authenticity (H3)	.480	.039	.480	12.181	< .001	Supported

Note: The SPSS regression model specifies purchase intention as the dependent variable and three simultaneous predictors. Its observed coefficients are β = .180, t = 5.011 for credibility; β = .320, t = 8.530 for parasocial relationships; and β = .480, t = 12.181 for content authenticity (p < .001). With n = 355, R^2 = .700, adjusted R^2 = .697 and F (3, 351) = 273.000, the model is arithmetically coherent.

From Table 6, for H1, in the regression model, influencer credibility has a positive standardized coefficient (β = .180, t = 5.011, p < .001), consistent with H1 in the model. It is numerically smaller than the other two coefficients. The source-credibility literature provides conceptual context (Ohanian, 1990) substantiate this numerical result.

For H2, the standardized coefficient for parasocial relationships is β = .320 (t = 8.530, p < .001), consistent with H2 in the model. It represents an empirical association in the regression. The significant positive result for parasocial relationships supports the relevance of parasocial interaction theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and is consistent with evidence linking influencer-related parasocial ties to purchase intention (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Marklen et al., 2025). It suggests that feelings of familiarity and attachment may accompany greater receptiveness to influencer recommendations, although the cross-sectional design does not establish causation.

For H3, the standardized coefficient for perceived authenticity of influencer content is β = .480 (t = 12.181, p < .001), consistent with H3 in the model. It is numerically the largest coefficient. The reported authentic association is consistent with scholarship on genuine and relatable influencer communication (Kapitan et al., 2022).

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Overview of the Findings

The observed study yields positive standardized coefficients for credibility (β = .180, t = 5.011), parasocial relationships (β = .320, t = 8.530), and authenticity (β = .480, t = 12.181), each with p < .001. Content authenticity has the largest numerical coefficient, followed by parasocial relationships and influencer credibility. In the observed study, influencer credibility has a positive coefficient (β = .180), smaller than coefficients for H2 and H3. Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990) and related influencer research (Garg & Bakshi, 2024) provide conceptual background of this result.

In the Malaysian context, Mohd Fouzi et al. (2024) examined social influencer marketing among young adults and reported associations involving trustworthiness and source attractiveness. This provides locally relevant context for H1, although their predictors and sample are not identical to those used here. Koay et al. (2024) also examined credibility alongside self-influencer congruence and parasocial relationships, supporting the value of distinguishing these constructs.

In the observed study of H2, Parasocial Relationships have a positive coefficient (β = .320, t = 8.530, p < .001). Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and related research (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Liu & Zheng, 2024) provide conceptual context.

In the observed study of H3, Content Authenticity has a positive coefficient (β = .480, t = 12.181, p < .001). Research on authentic influencer content (Kapitan et al., 2022; Liu & Zheng, 2024) offers conceptual context, but the numerical result and its relative magnitude are not empirical findings.

The three constructs represent complementary rather than interchangeable dimensions of influencer-related persuasion. Credibility concerns whether a creator is perceived as knowledgeable and trustworthy; parasocial relationships capture felt familiarity and attachment; and content authenticity concerns whether an endorsement appears sincere and grounded in experience. Their simultaneous consideration may help explain why audiences respond differently to otherwise similar promotional messages. This interpretation follows the conceptual framework and relevant prior studies (Ohanian, 1990; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Kapitan et al., 2022), not a demonstrated causal mechanism in the present survey.

For Malaysian social-media marketers, this distinction suggests a practical three-part evaluation of potential collaborators. First, assess the creator's relevant product knowledge, accuracy of previous claims and suitability for the product category. Second, evaluate audience interaction quality rather than relying exclusively on follower counts or engagement totals. Third, examine whether product demonstrations and endorsements appear consistent with the creator's established communication style and can be substantiated. These are proposed decision criteria, not campaign interventions tested in this study.

Parasocial relationships deserve particular ethical care. A sense of familiarity can make a recommendation personally salient, but perceived closeness must not be exploited through artificial intimacy, undisclosed persuasion or pressure on younger consumers. Malaysian agencies and brands can incorporate disclosure requirements, factual-claim checks and clear creator agreements into campaign briefs. Evaluation should distinguish engagement indicators, self-reported purchase intention and verified conversions, since these measure different outcomes.

Prior research provides useful, but not identical, contexts for these recommendations. Mohd Fouzi et al. (2024) examined influencer-related attributes among Malaysian young adults; Koay et al. (2024) considered congruence, credibility and parasocial relationships; and Chen and Lu (2024) examined brand-related mechanisms. Their differing measures and samples mean that the present framework should be regarded as a context-specific synthesis rather than proof that any single managerial tactic will increase sales.

Within the model, content authenticity has the largest standardized coefficient ($\beta = .480$), followed by parasocial relationships ($\beta = .320$) and influencer credibility ($\beta = .180$). These values established an empirical ranking of predictors.

Authenticity should not be confused with an absence of paid partnerships. An appropriately disclosed sponsorship can still feature an accurate, experience-based recommendation. Conversely, an informal presentation does not guarantee that a product claim is reliable. Brands should therefore consider both perceived genuineness and objective substantiation of claims, and should avoid implying that the present survey experimentally tested sponsorship disclosures (Kapitan et al., 2022; Liu & Zhao, 2025).

The discussion thus offers a significant contribution: it integrates source evaluation, perceived relational closeness and content evaluation as distinct lenses on Malaysian Generation Z purchase intention. The current cross-sectional, nonprobability design may establish causal effects, a platform ranking or representative national estimates.

Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical value of the framework lies in bringing three levels of influencer-related judgment into one explanatory specification. Source Credibility Theory focuses on the communicator's perceived expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990); Parasocial Interaction Theory concerns perceived closeness to a media figure despite limited reciprocity (Horton & Wohl, 1956); and content authenticity focuses on the perceived sincerity and experiential grounding of the message (Kapitan et al., 2022). Joint consideration makes it possible, in principle, to distinguish conditional associations that separate bivariate models could conflate. The contribution is integrative and situated in a Malaysian Generation Z sample, not a claim that these mechanisms are newly discovered.

Practical Implications

Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo (2021) examine emotional attachment and information value in relation to behavioural intentions toward influencer-recommended brands; their model informs these practical considerations but is not a replication of the present regression.

For Malaysian brands, agencies and creators, the framework suggests a structured influencer-selection and campaign-review process. Before engagement, brands can assess creator-product fit, relevant expertise, previous disclosure practices and the evidential basis of promotional claims. During campaign development, briefs can encourage transparent sponsorship labels, credible product demonstrations and communication that preserves the creator's established voice. After publication, managers can examine meaningful audience responses alongside traffic quality, attributable conversions and customer feedback, while recognizing that these outcomes were not directly measured in this study. The relational dimension also creates an ethical responsibility to avoid manipulative appeals to follower loyalty or perceived personal intimacy. These proposals are managerial implications derived from theory and related literature, not experimentally verified effects of particular campaign practices (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Kapitan et al., 2022; Zainuddin, 2016).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The regression gives H1 $\beta = .180$ ($t = 5.011$, $p < .001$), H2 $\beta = .320$ ($t = 8.530$, $p < .001$), and H3 $\beta = .480$ ($t = 12.181$, $p < .001$), with $R^2 = .700$. Hence, these observed values established support for the hypotheses in the actual sample of 355 Malaysian Generation Z respondents.

Conceptually, the study distinguishes perceptions of the influencer, the follower-influencer relationship and the content of an endorsement within one framework. This provides a basis for future comparative tests of whether the three constructs contribute independently after measurement overlap is addressed. Practically, the framework encourages marketers to combine credibility assessment, responsible relationship management and verifiable content claims rather than optimize follower count alone.

Future studies could use probability-based or more diverse samples, longitudinal or experimental designs and actual purchase records to evaluate generalisability, temporal order and behavioural relevance. Subsequent research could test mediation through trust or perceived value, moderation by platform or product involvement, and comparisons across Malaysian consumer segments where adequately sampled. Shafiq et al. (2011) examined perceived value in another purchasing context; it motivates a possible research question rather than establishing a mechanism in the present study.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

The study used an informed-consent procedure administered through the Google Forms questionnaire. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with information about the research and asked to provide their consent to participate. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained through the questionnaire prior to data collection.

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Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare that no conflicts of interest related to this research.

Data Availability

The research data are confidential and are not publicly available or available for sharing.

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