

Social Media Influencer Attributes' Impact on Generation Z Filipino Consumers' Perceived Parasocial Relationships and Purchasing Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on the purchasing behavior of Generation Z Filipino consumers, emphasizing the role of influencer attributes in fostering parasocial relationships (PSRs) that ultimately drive online shopping decisions. In the context of the Philippines' rapidly evolving e-commerce landscape and digitally native Generation Z population, this research explores how nano, micro-, and macro-influencers influence consumer behavior through strategic content and emotional engagement.

Grounded in David Chaffey's Social Media Marketing Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, Source Credibility Theory, Source Attractiveness Model, and Social Proof Theory, the study provides a multi-theoretical framework to analyze consumer-influencer dynamics. A quantitative-descriptive approach was used, surveying 380 Generation Z respondents in San Fernando, La Union, through a structured and validated questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Mann-Whitney U test, and Spearman's rho correlation.

Findings reveal that nano-influencers (with 0–10,000 followers) are particularly effective in building trust and emotional connection, significantly strengthening PSRs. Key attributes such as authenticity, content style, perceived fit, and popularity were found to contribute to stronger PSRs and positively influence purchasing intent. Gender differences were observed in emotional engagement, with female respondents demonstrating higher PSR levels, although purchasing behavior was not significantly different across genders.

The study concludes that Generation Z consumers value influencers who are relatable, emotionally resonant, and aligned with their values. PSRs play a critical role in shaping buying behavior, making influencer partnerships a powerful strategy in digital marketing. The study recommends that brands collaborate with nano-influencers who exhibit high credibility and emotional appeal to achieve lasting consumer engagement. This research contributes to existing literature by contextualizing influencer marketing within Southeast Asia. It offers practical insights for marketers seeking to optimize strategies for Generation Z in the post-pandemic digital economy.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers (SMIs), Parasocial Relationships (PSR), Generation Z, Online Purchasing Behavior, E-commerce, Nano-Influencers, Social Media Marketing (SMM), Purchasing Intentions, Social Media Platforms, Influencer Attributes, Buying Decisions.

INTRODUCTION

During the economic downturn, many companies sought new ways to reach and understand customers as their perspectives and behaviors shifted, while some firms experienced operational disruptions or closures (Mysore et al., 2022). In response, many businesses adopted digital marketing strategies, capitalizing on increased internet usage as people stayed home (Berlin School of Business and Innovation, 2021). This technological shift enabled the rise of online shopping, prompting many businesses to move their operations online (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The pandemic significantly reshaped purchasing habits, accelerating the growth of e-

commerce as consumers, restricted by government mandates and the closure of physical stores, increasingly relied on digital platforms for shopping (Goldman, 2021). Consequently, companies intensified their digital marketing efforts to reach customers, allowing start-ups and growing firms to maximize digital opportunities (Kankam, 2022), and forecasts predict that e-commerce will continue to thrive even as in-store shopping recovers (Goldman, 2021).

The Philippine e-commerce landscape continues to expand rapidly, driven by increasing smartphone penetration, digital payments, and a tech-savvy Generation Z population. By 2025, the market is projected to surpass USD 24 billion, making the country one of the fastest-growing digital economies in Southeast Asia (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023). This growth is reinforced by innovations in social commerce, particularly through TikTok Shop, which in 2024 launched enhanced affiliate programs and in-app checkout features that streamline purchasing directly within the platform (TikTok Newsroom, 2024). The Philippine Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has also released updated 2024 guidelines requiring influencers and sellers to disclose sponsorships and ensure product authenticity to protect consumers in the digital marketplace (DTI, 2024). These developments align with global trends where social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok increasingly integrate AI-driven personalization, live selling, and interactive shopping tools to capture Gen Z audiences (Kemp, 2024). Given this context, influencer marketing remains a powerful driver of consumer engagement in the Philippines, with nano- and micro-influencers proving particularly effective due to their authenticity and relatability.

The pandemic accelerated the shift to digital commerce and fundamentally changed consumer expectations, emphasizing speed, convenience, and digital experiences. The rise of mobile commerce, coupled with innovations such as AI-driven personalization, big data analytics, and secure digital payment platforms like GCash and PayMaya, has accelerated e-commerce growth by making online shopping more seamless, personalized, and accessible to Filipino consumers (Locad, 2024; Kshetri, 2021). Furthermore, social commerce—purchasing through social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook—also rose sharply during this period, blending entertainment with shopping to capture younger, tech-savvy consumers. As the world recovers from the pandemic, these digital shopping habits are expected to persist, signaling that the future of global retail will be increasingly hybrid, with seamless integration of online and offline channels being vital for sustained growth (Laudon & Traver, 2020; Kshetri, 2021).

The e-commerce sector in the Philippines has experienced significant expansion over the past decade, with particularly notable growth from 2020 to 2025. This growth has been fueled by increasing internet penetration, rising mobile connectivity, and a burgeoning middle class with greater disposable income. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, accelerating digital transformation as businesses and consumers turned to online platforms to adapt to lockdowns and health protocols. The Philippine e-commerce market was valued at approximately USD 17 billion in 2021 and is projected to grow to USD 24 billion by 2025, reflecting a strong compound annual growth rate driven by increased internet penetration, mobile adoption, and digital payments (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2023).

The Philippine government has played a key role in fostering the growth of e-commerce through initiatives such as the Philippine E-Commerce Roadmap 2022, which aims to improve digital infrastructure, promote digital payments, and enhance consumer protection (Department of Trade and Industry, 2022). Social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, have also contributed to the rise of social commerce, with social media influencer (SMI) marketing becoming an essential tool for engaging Filipino consumers (Leung et al., 2022). Moving beyond 2025, the future of e-commerce in the Philippines appears highly promising. The country is expected to maintain its upward trajectory, driven by a young, tech-savvy population and the continued expansion of internet and mobile infrastructure. By 2025, the Philippines is anticipated to lead Southeast Asia in total retail and e-commerce sales growth (eMarketer, 2023). As more Filipinos gain access to mobile internet, the penetration of e-commerce is expected to deepen, especially in rural and underserved areas. Innovations in technology, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and machine learning, are expected to enhance the online shopping experience further, offering consumers more personalized and immersive ways to shop (Ilmudeen, 2021). Moreover, the increasing shift towards sustainable practices and e-commerce platforms focusing on eco-friendly products is expected to resonate with the growing consumer awareness about environmental issues (Bazrkar et al., 2021). With these trends, the

Philippines is set to become a dominant force in the global digital economy, making it a key market for both regional and international e-commerce players. Following this global trend, the Philippines saw its e-commerce market projected to reach \$12 billion by 2025 (McKinsey, 2022).

Social media marketing comes in many forms, including social media influencer (SMI) marketing. User-generated content proliferates on social media, and users can become influential creators by actively developing and posting personal narratives and product reviews. These users are known as “Social Media Influencers (SMI)” and have garnered significant interest from businesses and brands (Masuda et al., 2022). SMIs are content creators who shape audience attitudes on various social media platforms and in other electronic word-of-mouth formats (Droz-dit-Busset, 2022). Influencer marketing is thriving because it is a low-cost and rapid method for getting customers. These influencers recommend products by sharing their positive experiences on social media platforms with their followers (Leung et al., 2022).

Unlike traditional celebrity endorsements that relied on one-way communication, social media influencers foster two-way engagement and perceived authenticity through digital platforms, making them more effective in building trust with Generation Z consumers (Belanche et al., 2020; Masuda et al., 2022). Social media influencers are well-known for their knowledge. They gain a large following of enthusiastic, interested people who follow their opinions by posting on a topic on their favorite social networking sites. Companies praise social media influencers for generating trends and persuading followers to purchase their products (Geysler, 2023). High school girls, fitness coaches, industry gurus, and affluent luxury brand lovers are all SMIs. Because of their enormous reach and authenticity, they can influence consumer purchasing like superstars, but are not limited to celebrities. Most academic studies on social media endorsers have contextualized their influence regarding source credibility or the source's knowledge of the communication issue. SMIs are trustworthy since their data is non-commercial and unaltered by corporations. Influencers also moderate information flows from companies to consumers. They advise their peers about essential customer opportunities (Zhang & Wei, 2021).

The rise of social media influencers (SMIs) has become a defining feature of the digital era, fundamentally reshaping marketing, branding, and consumer engagement worldwide. Social media influencers build a dedicated following on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook by consistently producing relatable, persuasive, and authentic content (Freberg et al., 2021). Their perceived credibility and close connection with audiences make them highly effective in shaping consumer behavior, often surpassing traditional advertising in terms of trust and impact (Lou & Yuan, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, as social media usage surged, influencer marketing gained unprecedented momentum, with brands heavily relying on influencers to maintain consumer relationships and promote products in an era of restricted in-person marketing (Nguyen et al., 2022). Research highlights that consumers, particularly from younger demographics like Millennials and Generation Z, are more receptive to influencers' recommendations than traditional celebrities (Jin & Ryu, 2020). This trend has fueled rapid growth in the influencer economy, with global spending on influencer marketing expected to exceed \$24 billion by 2025 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024). Moreover, the evolution of influencer marketing strategies—from product placements to live streaming, affiliate marketing, and social commerce—demonstrates the expanding role of SMIs in the global digital economy (Boerman, 2020). As social media platforms continue to innovate and diversify, the influence of SMIs is projected to deepen, making them indispensable partners in contemporary marketing landscapes.

In the Philippines, the rise of social media influencers (SMIs) has significantly shaped the digital marketing landscape, reflecting global trends while also adapting to local cultural and consumer behaviors. With over 86 million active social media users as of 2023, the Philippines ranks among the world's most highly engaged online populations (Kemp, 2023). Filipino consumers, especially from Generation Z and Millennials, demonstrate a high level of trust and loyalty toward social media personalities, valuing authenticity, relatability, and community-driven narratives (Labrador, 2021). Influencers on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become critical intermediaries between brands and consumers, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when digital consumption surged dramatically (Villanueva, 2022). Filipino SMIs often blend entertainment with subtle brand messaging, driving consumer engagement and purchasing decisions across sectors like beauty, fashion, technology, and food (Tanjuatco, 2020). Moreover, local brands have increasingly shifted advertising budgets toward influencer marketing, recognizing

that peer-like recommendations from micro- and nano-influencers can outperform traditional celebrity endorsements in building trust and driving conversions (Medina, 2022). As the Philippine digital economy continues to expand, fueled by growing internet penetration and mobile connectivity, social media influencers are expected to remain key players in marketing strategies, with increasing sophistication in content creation, data analytics, and e-commerce integration.

The rising number of social media influencers has become evident, especially during the pandemic. Many people have turned to social media platforms while confined to their homes. These social media platforms encourage consumers to engage in a two-way conversation with their favorite celebrities, brands, and other users in the virtual world via live chats and comment options (Kim & Kim, 2020). Social media influencers have become essential mediators in consumer decision-making, especially for younger consumers. A social media influencer is an opinion leader or tastemaker in one or more consumption sectors with a substantial social media following. They have been discovered to be more popular with their followers than their viewers (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

It is believed that the parasocial relationship (PSR) between influencers and their followers accounts for the increased materialism and purchasing inclinations of teenagers and adults who follow influencers. PSR is when consumers build a one-sided relationship with the influencer. Customers are more susceptible to being influenced by them. The term ‘parasocial relation’ refers to the perception of a connection between audiences and media personae that extends beyond a single encounter (Lou, 2021).

The phrase “parasocial relationships” has long suggested that these are not “genuine” relations, implying judgment. There are parasocial relationships between public figures and those who witness or form attachments to them. There is an apparent power disparity between the idol and the follower. Direct messaging and comments on live streams generate a sense of genuine closeness with their followers. The content influencers share is intended to pull others into their lives (Chen, 2021).

According to Hoffner and Bond (2022), parasocial relationships (PSRs) are emotional bonds that do not reciprocate with famous or prominent persons in the media. Social media platforms allow PSRs to improve many elements of media users’ well-being. Still, they can also harm people’s well-being. PSRs on social media can encourage healthy attitudes and habits while reducing health stigma, but negative self-comparisons might harm mental health. PSRs can also help people feel connected and part of a group, assist them in coping, promote personal growth and identity exploration, and minimize discrimination (through parasocial contact). PSRs can utilize social media platforms to positively influence several dimensions of well-being among media users, but there are also negative results (Hoffner & Bond, 2022).

Masuda et al. (2022) investigated parasocial relationships (PSR) between influencers and followers. The study stated that many studies explored the parasocial relationship (PSR) between influencers and followers. Despite many PSR studies, PSR has not often been weighed against other relationship marketing constructs. PSR has a substantial beneficial influence on purchase behavior. Compared to other characterizations, PSR positively impacted purchase behavior considerably. Perceived influencer types greatly influenced the establishment of consumers’ PSRs, as the respondents who purchased products or services after viewing YouTube advertisements created by influencers. The survey showed that social media influencer marketing strategies must be fine-tuned based on personal attributes, characterizations, and influencer type (Masuda et al., 2022).

A study stated that 2021 is one of the most significant years for live-streaming commerce since various industries and corporations have begun selling their products via live broadcast. This research incorporated source credibility, match-up hypothesis, and parasocial relationship theory into a single theoretical framework. A good match between celebrity and product can enhance celebrity endorsers’ perceived attractiveness, credibility, and skill. The perceived expertise of the celebrity served as a mediator between celebrity-product congruence and purchase intentions. Findings revealed that parasocial relationships significantly influence Taobao's live-streaming buying intentions (Rungruangjit, 2022).

Influencer marketing continues to expand steadily in the Philippines and is beginning to affect businesses. From 2017 to 2020, the global market for influencer marketing increased by more than three times. There are

almost 500,000 active influencers with over 15,000 followers on Instagram alone. Influencers are present in nearly every industry, from electronic gaming to cosmetics (Statista, 2021; Statista, 2022).

According to We Are Social and Meltwater (2023), 46.5% of social media users in the Philippines are male, while 53.5% are female. These percentages are not significantly different. The prior year, these percentages were 50.2% and 49.8%, respectively, which makes this a fascinating fact. While customizing the company's social media marketing techniques, it is essential to monitor such intricacies, as modest percentage points increase and magnify to millions of people when zoomed out. Social media users in the Philippines comprise mainly 84.45 million, with 72.5% of the population being online. Generation Z is the largest demographic of social media users, with 30.6% of users aged 18-24. Most users reside in metropolitan areas (51.8%) and 48.2% in rural areas (48.2%). Their cell phones are an extension of their identity and connection to the world, with no gender or status proportion (De Guzman, 2023).

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, represents a highly influential target market for social media influencer marketing, particularly in the Philippines. As digital natives, they spend an average of 5.5 hours daily on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (ABS-CBN News, 2024). This extended engagement on social media reflects their preference for real-time, interactive content and their reliance on these platforms for information, entertainment, and product discovery (Roman, 2023). Influencers who resonate with their values of authenticity, relatability, and emotional engagement heavily influence their purchasing decisions. According to studies, Filipino Generation Z consumers are likelier to engage with content that feels personal and aligns with their aspirations (Angeles et al., 2024). This demographic often views influencer-generated content as more trustworthy than traditional advertisements, which is a key factor in buying decisions (Aguado et al., 2021). Furthermore, Generation Z is driven by emotional purchasing behavior, preferring products that offer self-reward and align with their identities, which makes them exceptionally responsive to influencers who reflect their values (Roman, 2023).

Research also shows that Filipino Generation Z is deeply engaged in product research via social media before making purchase decisions, underscoring the significance of digital touchpoints in shaping consumer behavior (Angeles et al., 2024). Their tendency to validate online endorsements through peer interactions further amplifies the effectiveness of social media influencer marketing. As a result, brands that engage with this demographic need to establish a presence on social media platforms, leveraging influencers who can deliver authentic, relatable, and value-driven content (Aguado et al., 2021). This is further corroborated by the high rate of influencer engagement, with Filipino Generation Zers spending considerable time on platforms like TikTok, where they often follow and interact with influencers who curate content that is engaging, informative, and emotionally resonant (Roman, 2023). As social media continues to dominate the marketing landscape, understanding the nuances of Generation Z's behavior is crucial for brands aiming to capture and retain this audience.

Marketers increasingly use social media platforms for e-commerce as a promotional channel. They prefer highly interactive social media because it allows consumers to socialize and network better (Sreejesh et al., 2020). In this setting, the study analyzes the role of media interactivity and its effects on customers' reactions to social media ads through social media influencers that impact their online purchasing behavior. This study evaluates how social media influencers establish a parasocial relationship with consumers to foster purchasing behavior. This study will contribute substantially to the relatively recent literature and practice about the influence of Social Media Marketing Influencers' attributes on Generation Z's online purchasing behavior in the Philippines through fostering PSR.

Chaffey (2022) stated that there are 4.70 billion social media users globally, with 227 million new users joining in the past year. As of July 2022, the average daily usage duration is 2 hours and 29 minutes. 59% of the world's population uses social media, according to Global WebIndex. According to Meltwater and We Are Social's 2023 digital report, Social media is used by 72.5% of Filipinos. They spend 3 and 43 minutes daily on social media, down from 4 hours and 6 minutes the previous year. This is the average amount of time people aged 16 to 64 spend on social media or conversing. As the country gradually returns to routine, netizens spend less time online, preferring to unwind in public places (De Guzman, 2023). This data means Filipino businesses have more sales opportunities, especially in digital marketing. Most of the population in the

Philippines was comprised of Generation Z members from 1997 to 2012. This generation ranges in age from zero to twenty and constitutes almost 70 percent of the Philippine population. Approximately 40 million Generation Z Filipinos comprise the largest segment of our population (Chaffey, 2022).

Living a socially isolated lifestyle for more than a year resulted in increased online purchases. According to a university survey of Generation Z, 78% buy most of their products online (Santora, 2022). Future economic growth is anticipated to receive a significant boost from the emergence of Generation Z. The expectations of Generation Z have significantly altered the marketing industry. Marketers can improve their social media marketing efforts by understanding online shopping behavior more profoundly. This concept will allow them to collect helpful consumer information to intensify consumers' online shopping engagement even after the pandemic's ease (Ledesma, 2021). Retailers must engage Generation Z to keep their interest.

As a strategy for social media marketing, the influence of social media influencers is increasing. Social Media Influencers exhibit the impact of PSR, which is believed to have a significant role in explaining marketing effectiveness. The advertising industry first investigates social media influencers to generate buzz in younger markets and expand social media coverage (Dalangin et al., 2021). This study aims to validate how social media influencers effectively establish a parasocial relationship with their followers that influences their purchasing behavior, particularly Generation Z.

However, there has been a rise in the de-influencing trend that plays a significant role in shaping parasocial relationships and consumer behavior. De-influencing is a counter-movement where influencers actively discourage their followers from purchasing unnecessary products, promoting more mindful and intentional consumption. It encourages followers to reconsider their buying habits and prioritize sustainability, authenticity, and value over excessive consumerism (Gunawan & Bernarto, 2023). The positive effect of de-influencing on parasocial relationships is that it can foster greater trust and emotional bonds between influencers and their followers. When influencers advocate for responsible consumption, it resonates with Generation Z's values, strengthening the connection and encouraging more thoughtful purchasing behavior. On the negative side, if influencers inconsistently switch between promoting and de-promoting products, this could confuse their followers and erode the trust built in their parasocial relationships. Such confusion may diminish the influencer's credibility and weaken the emotional ties, reducing their influence on purchasing decisions. Thus, de-influencing strengthens and weakens parasocial relationships, depending on the influencer's authenticity and consistency in their messaging (Gunawan & Bernarto, 2023).

The increasing influence of social media influencers (SMIs) has reshaped the marketing landscape globally, particularly among younger generations such as Generation Z. While significant research has been conducted on the role of influencers in consumer behavior, limited studies have focused on the unique dynamics of nano-influencers and their impact on Parasocial Relationships (PSR) within specific cultural contexts, such as the Philippines. Existing literature primarily concentrates on large-scale influencers in Western markets, with less emphasis on how nano-influencers, who tend to have smaller but more engaged followings, affect consumer decision-making in emerging markets like the Philippines (Lee, 2021). This study seeks to fill this gap by examining nano-influencers' impact on PSR among Filipino consumers, an area that has been underexplored in Southeast Asia (Lee, 2021).

Given the rapid growth of social media use and increasing reliance on influencer marketing in the Philippines, this research is timely. Despite the growing presence of nano-influencers, their influence on Filipino Generation Z's purchasing behavior, particularly through the lens of PSR, remains poorly understood (Tsiotsou, 2022). The novelty of this study lies in its focus on nano-influencers' PSR in a Filipino context, an aspect not sufficiently covered in current literature.

The study utilized David Chaffey's Social Media Marketing Theory (Chaffey, 2021), which provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the strategic use of social media to engage audiences and drive conversions. Additionally, theories of parasocial interaction (Tsiotsou, 2022) were applied to explore the emotional and psychological bonds that consumers formed with influencers, while Social Media Influencer's Attributes (Lee, 2021) highlighted the characteristics that made nano-influencers more relatable and effective in fostering trust and engagement. To complement these, the framework on Online Shopping Behavior

(Solomon, 2023) was employed to examine the consumer decision-making process, focusing on Generation Z's preference for convenience, immediacy, and personalized experiences in e-commerce. Social Proof Theory was also used to explain how Generation Z relied on peer validation, influencer recommendations, and popularity cues to guide their purchasing decisions, reflecting the powerful influence of collective opinion in shaping individual behavior. Lastly, an exploration of Generation Z Characteristics (Briggs & Briggs, 2022) was incorporated to understand their unique traits, such as digital nativity, social media integration, and a preference for authentic brand interactions, which influenced their shopping habits. By addressing these gaps, the research contributed to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms driving social media marketing effectiveness and provided insights that informed more targeted influencer marketing strategies in the Philippine market.

This research contributes to the marketing strategies of Philippine businesses by providing valuable insights into how social media influencers (SMIs) and parasocial relationships (PSR) shape the purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers. It highlights nano-influencers' effectiveness—valued for their authenticity, relatability, and emotional appeal—in building trust and engagement, which are critical drivers of buying decisions. Businesses can craft more targeted, authentic, and emotionally resonant marketing campaigns by understanding how emotional connections influence consumer behavior. The study also offers strategic guidance on influencer selection, content development, and audience segmentation. It enables brands to optimize their digital marketing efforts and better connect with Generation Z in the evolving social commerce landscape.

According to a study, parasocial responsibility between endorsers and customers increases purchasing intentions. The influencer-consumer PSR was evaluated based on numerous parameters in the initial investigations. Source credibility is essential for persuading customers to form parasocial ties. This study inquired about consumers' live-stream shopping intentions. The study investigated which celebrity characteristics (attractiveness, credibility, and talent) increase purchasing (Rungruangjit, 2022). YouTubers emphasize the marketing value of PSR. This study demonstrates that social media influencers' PSR may influence the shopping decisions of their followers. PSR affects the behavior of others. Influencers' followers evaluate them based on particular characteristics (Masuda et al., 2022). This study examines PSR as the primary determinant of Philippine Generation Z consumers' purchasing behavior. This study will explain and validate social media influencer marketing by identifying the variables that young consumers consider that can increase PSR and influence their predicted purchasing behavior. The SMI attributes to consider will be the type of influencers (nano, micro-, and macro-influencer), perceived popularity, perceived fit, and content creation or style; how PSR and its underlying causes influence Generation Z's online purchasing behavior in the Philippines will be determined.

Research Objectives

The influence of social media influencers (SMIs) has transformed global marketing, particularly among Generation Z. While existing research has examined the role of influencers in shaping consumer behavior, there remains a gap in understanding how the specific attributes of nano- and micro-influencers impact the development of parasocial relationships (PSRs) within culturally specific contexts such as the Philippines. Despite the growing presence of these influencers, their effect on Filipino Generation Z's purchasing behavior through the lens of PSR remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how the attributes of SMIs shape PSR and influence consumer behavior among Filipino Generation Z consumers. Guided by the theories of source credibility, social proof, and models of influencer attributes and online shopping behavior, this research seeks to explore the interconnections between influencer characteristics, emotional engagement, and consumer decision-making. By analyzing the online behaviors of Filipino Generation Z on social media and e-commerce platforms, the study aims to provide meaningful insights that will help brands and marketers design more effective, authentic influencer campaigns tailored to the cultural and behavioral patterns of the Philippine market.

The study looks at how SMIs employ PSR to influence the purchasing behavior of Generation Z in the Philippines to continue online shopping even after the pandemic. Specifically, this study is aimed at providing answers to these research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Generation Z Filipino consumers following SMIs in terms of:
 - 1.1. Gender
 - 1.2. Social Media Platforms Used
 - 1.3. Online Shopping Platforms Used
 - 1.4. Online Shopping Account
 - 1.5. Online Shopping Frequency

2. What is the extent of influence of the factors involving SMI on the parasocial relationship, as perceived by Generation Z consumers, in terms of the SMI attributes:
 - 2.1. Type of SMI
 - 2.2. perceived popularity
 - 2.3. perceived fit, and
 - 2.4. content creation/style

3. What is the extent to which Generation Z consumers perceive parasocial relationships?

4. What is the extent to which Generation Z consumers exhibit indicators of purchasing behavior?

5. Is there a significant difference in the perception of the Generation Z consumer on the following when gender is considered?

- 5.1 SMI attributes
- 5.2 Parasocial Relationship
- 5.3 Purchasing behavior

H₁: There is no significant difference in the extent of influence of the factors involving SMI on the parasocial relationship, as perceived by Generation Z consumers when their gender is considered.

Conceptual Framework

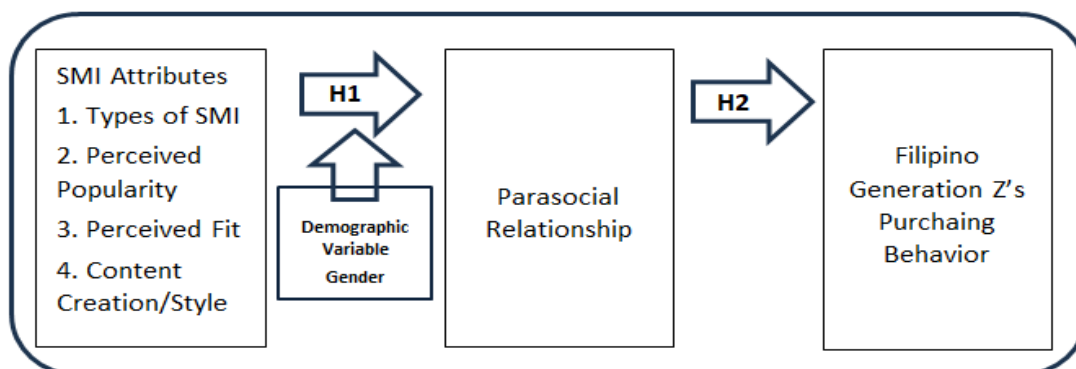


Figure 1 Conceptual Paradigm

With the SMI attributes, the Generation Z characteristics, and the influence of PSR on the purchasing behavior of Filipino Generation Z, the following conceptual paradigm was utilized as a guide in the study:

Social Media Influencer's Attributes

Type of Influencers. The impact of social media influencers is derived from their ability to reach highly engaged communities of followers and leverage their credibility to shape consumer behavior. Brands collaborate with influencers to increase recognition, promote product releases, address consumer queries, develop content, provide discounts, and boost sales (Morrison, 2022). With the rise of platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, a new category of nano-influencers has emerged, consisting of creators with fewer than 10,000 followers. While their audiences are smaller, nano-influencers typically achieve much higher engagement rates compared to larger influencers, as their content feels authentic, relatable, and community-driven (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2025). This makes them highly effective for hyper-local campaigns, niche markets, and brands seeking to build long-term trust rather than relying solely on mass exposure.

Nano-influencers are especially relevant in the Philippine context, where Generation Z values authenticity and relatability over celebrity status. Recent studies show that Filipino Gen Z consumers perceive nano-influencers as “people like them,” leading to stronger parasocial relationships (PSRs) and higher purchasing intent (Medina, 2024). For example, in TikTok Shop campaigns, nano-influencers often demonstrate products in real-life contexts such as dorm rooms, classrooms, or small businesses, which resonates strongly with Gen Z audiences who value transparency and everyday relatability. Despite their modest reach, nano-influencers can drive higher conversion rates than macro-influencers, since audiences interpret their endorsements as genuine recommendations rather than paid advertisements (Villanueva, 2024).

By contrast, micro-influencers (10,000–100,000 followers) and macro-influencers (100,000–1 million followers) still play significant roles in marketing strategies. Micro-influencers are valued for their relatability and expertise but may be limited in reach and geographic influence (Kay et al., 2020). Macro-influencers, on the other hand, offer large-scale exposure and strong brand associations but often face declining engagement rates and reduced perceptions of authenticity (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020). Understanding these distinctions is crucial for marketers. For Generation Z, especially in the Philippines, nano-influencers present the “sweet spot” of trust, relatability, and influence, making them particularly effective in shaping parasocial relationships and driving purchase decisions.

Perceived Popularity. Social media influencers aim to increase their followers as it entails their popularity, and social media platforms play an essential role (Alibakhshi & Srivastava, 2022). A study stated that popularity cues, such as streamer and product popularity, increased customers' spontaneous purchases (Lou et al., 2022). Streamers are seen as a source of entertainment by gamers, so they follow their videos (King and de la Hera, 2020). Streamers are motivated to broadcast exciting video content while actively interacting with an enormous viewer base to attract viewers (Zhao et al., 2021). Popularity cues are generated and used to promote product sales as atmospheric cues, a crucial feature (Lou et al., 2022).

Lou et al. (2022) study detects popularity indications such as streamer and product popularity by combining previous research definitions of popularity with live streaming commerce characteristics. Streamer popularity refers to visible data about consumers' favorable interactions with a streamer, such as viewing, liking, commenting, sharing, subscribing, rewarding, etc. Product popularity refers to the visual display of the total number of products sold to consumers.

Popularity is a more significant risk cue for customers than professionalism (Xiao et al., 2022). However, according to research, brand popularity has no significant or negative effect on purchase intention. Price has a substantial and negative impact on buying intent. The perceived quality and need significantly influence purchase intention. According to the conclusions of this study, popularity is not necessarily a consumer element in producing purchase intentions. At the same time, need significantly influences purchase intentions (Rizaldi, 2022).

Popularity can boost perceived product quality and certainty about that quality. However, findings show that when light products are combined with a popularity indication, customers are more inclined to choose them. The popularity signal did not affect choosing the regular options (Goedegebure et al., 2020).

Perceived Fit. Consistent with projections, perceived fit emerged as a good determinant of business reputation (Lim & Young, 2021). Matching a product with a suitable celebrity endorser is a cumbersome task, as many associations related to personal and professional spheres of life are attached to a celebrity. The match-up hypothesis states that a strong match between celebrity and product images should exist. Some celebrities have become image-conscious and do not want to be associated with products that do not match their personalities. Two forms of celebrity endorsements are seen as essential for all types of products and services by consumers. Universal associations include a popular career, skills and competence, product knowledge, a trustworthy and reliable image, ethics, and social responsibility. Product-specific linkages vary depending on the product category's nature (Parmar et al., 2019).

According to Giovanni and Gunawan (2022), credibility is mediated by consumer attitude. It significantly impacts purchase intention, whereas attractiveness is not determined by customer attitude and directly impacts buying choice. Product match-up is not moderated by customer attitude, nor does it influence purchasing intent. To trust the recommendations of social media influencers, these people must have significant experience in a particular area, charisma, and respect from other users. Hence, their credibility affects the value of the material and suggestions they publish online (Kwiatek et al., 2021).

Personal characterization is founded on the premise that interaction between similar persons happens more frequently than contact between dissimilar people. People with similar attitudes often communicate with one another. A high degree of similarity between the image of a social media influencer and the ideal self-image of a customer leads to effective endorsement outcomes (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The attractiveness and emotional appeal of SMI contribute to its influence. SMIs develop trustworthy and alluring social media personalities. Their credibility, beauty, and perceived likeness positively influence their followers' confidence in their branded postings. Similarity to the SMI is not just ego-relevant but also story-relevant. Strong peer-endorsed credibility affects advertisement efficacy (Nafees et al., 2021).

SMIs cultivate credible and appealing personas, which contributes to their convincing power. Similarity with the SMI is not limited to being ego-relevant but also story-relevant (Balaban et al., 2022). Emotion influences motivation and action choices in customers based on their associations with influencers. It is crucial in human-led negotiations because it increases the influencer's information processing and decision-making abilities (Wu et al., 2022). According to several studies, celebrity credibility substantially impacts the endorsement efficacy of a product or advertisement, attitude, and purchasing inclinations. Customers accept the truthfulness of an endorser's claims because of their source's credibility. Internet personalities do not need to be seen as experts because constant social media interactions provide information to assess the reliability of a source (Park & Lin, 2020).

The influence of social media influencers (SMI) on consumers' brand attitudes is growing in importance. SMI influence and SMI perceived source trustworthiness are vital for influencing consumer perceptions toward the brand. Research reveals that while SMI's power is positively associated with consumer views toward the brand, SMI's perceived knowledge and credibility somewhat mediate this relationship (Nafees et al., 2021). Message credibility examines how message qualities influence perceptions of information's credibility. In 1971, Rosenthal was among the first to differentiate between message and source trustworthiness. Depending on the message's specificity and verifiability, recipients judge its reliability irrespective of its source (Xiao & Shailer, 2022). As communicators, SMIs have an extensive reach and engaged audiences whose decision-making they impact. One of the aspects determining the influential power of an SMI is how trustworthy they are seen to be. Source trustworthiness is essential in online media environments characterized by source ambiguity. A more credible source contributes to the reasonable capacity of communicators (Balaban et al., 2022).

Celebrity endorsement research continues to rely on source credibility to evaluate endorsement efficacy. The trustworthiness of a source is contingent upon its attractiveness. People are more receptive to the products and attitudes of attractive celebrities. Consumers appreciate lovely individuals (Roy et al., 2021). A person must

maintain socially acceptable features to be beautiful. Attractiveness increases power and standing. People prioritize their physical attractiveness, attractiveness, and beauty to achieve social objectives. This method emphasizes the source's physical appeal, likability, and audience similarity (Mandal & Moro, 2021). The physical appearance of a message sender may influence how recipients perceive the message. Personal photo appeal is a crucial element. Culture and social customs profoundly affect attractiveness (Ma et al., 2022). A good product-source match favors celebrity endorsements in advertisements, even when the celebrities are unfamiliar. When fans detect a mismatch between the promoted product and the endorser, they are more inclined to view the celebrity as a profit-motivated marketer (Park & Lin, 2020).

This generation prefers to lean toward brands that have similar views. Suppose a business can demonstrate that it stands for similar ideals. In that case, it will be in an excellent position to reach individuals of Generation Z and earn their customer loyalty (Santora, 2022).

Content Style or Creation. Social media facilitates limitless, transparent interactions between businesses and customers. The social material generated by social media interactions is enormous and could benefit companies and customers. Well-managed social content could be the foundation for organizations to develop new service offerings. Content creation entails proper planning to make a substantial topic the focus of the social media influencer's advertisement. Social content is "Unstructured content resulting from the active interaction of actors, namely organizations and customers on social media platforms" (Zurita et al., 2020). The content qualities of social media influencers impact customers' online brand-related actions via parasocial relationships and wishful identification. Significant determinants of parasocial connections are design quality, technological quality, and creativity, three of the four content attributes of social media influencers. The study determined that the specified content features are required to encourage consumers' online brand-related actions (Cheung et al., 2022).

SMI marketing's goal should stretch beyond content exposure to promoting brand engagement. Consumers are likely to skip or bypass endorsement content if perceived as unappealing. SMI marketing is being increasingly utilized to disseminate brand-related information (Cheung et al., 2020). As SMI marketing increasingly depends on social media content, it is necessary to comprehend the qualities of information that trigger consumers' online brand-related actions for endorsement effectiveness (Hudders et al., 2020).

A study used information system literature to identify prospective content qualities, which implies that the quality of social media material is judged based on information, design, and technology factors (Faisal et al., 2020). The information, design, and technological factors are used to assess the quality of social media material. Consumers are encouraged to follow and replicate creative material, which increases their desire to engage with the provided content. Originality, freshness, and inventiveness are significant success criteria driving SMI consumer identification. Most research has focused on SMIs' traits, such as credibility, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and popularity (Casaló et al., 2020).

Video content has become more potent than imagery in building engagement. Vloggers must be alluring because their audience can always view them. Recent studies of social media influencers have emphasized physical appearance. Traditional beauty research has examined advertising model appearance (Woodroof et al., 2020). Streaming media platforms provide a new avenue for celebrity endorsement. Many customers believe user-generated material is more credible than standard promotional techniques (Park & Lin, 2020). The relatability of the sources increases when they can display emotion and sympathize with the viewers. It is common for influencers to appear more at ease with celebrities. As a result, consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by the influencer's product reviews (Schouten et al., 2021).

Sponsored content "liked" by a group, including a strongly tied predecessor, may exert a different influence. Users with less accurate information tend to follow predecessors with more precise knowledge or expertise. Consumers' perception of the influencer's credibility and expertise significantly impacts their purchasing behavior (Mattke et al., 2020). The information consumers find on social media seems more credible if it comes from subject-expert influencers (Elfanagely et al., 2022).

Generation Z is more inclined to look at online reviews and debate them with their peers. The opinions of bloggers and brand ambassadors are taken more seriously by Generation Z than by others. They feel more connected to bloggers and companies than other generations. It appears that Generation Z relies heavily on the advice of their peers when making decisions. Generation Z appreciates feedback from others (Dash et al., 2021). Generation Z tends to search for online information before making any purchase. This generation also tends to believe in the information they perceive as having similar characteristics (Shin & Lee, 2021). In similarities, Millennials and Generation Z are skeptical of messages containing any advertising. They perceived messages from social media influencers as more trustworthy than celebrity endorsers in advertising. However, information and statements shared by friends are more likely to be seen as relevant and authentic (Munsch, 2021). Members of Generation Z tend to band together and are heavily inspired by those they admire. They enjoy keeping up with current events. Seeing people they admire promoting their favorite things makes Generation Z customers also want those items (Santora, 2022).

Parasocial Relationship Concept

The notion of parasocial relationships and associated parasocial interaction was first developed in the 1950s by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl. The relationship resembles a real-world social relationship psychologically, albeit one-sided. When a consumer believes they are connecting with a social media personality during a discrete viewing or listening session, this is referred to as a parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction can lead to parasocial relationships. This process is comparable to how spending time with someone in person can lead to a friendship that grows stronger and more dedicated over time. By following a blogger's social media posts, users of social networking sites can establish such a relationship (Masuda et al., 2022).

People are predisposed to form social ties. When consumers are exposed to a person through either video or audio media, their brains respond as if they were in a real-world social situation. This response does not imply that the folks feel the interaction is genuine. Their perception will compel them to respond as if the situation were actual. PSR appears to be directly tied to social media followers' purchasing intentions. Credibility and parasocial engagement describe the decision to purchase from YouTube and Instagram social media influencers. PSR influences celebrity followers' purchasing intentions (Woodroof et al., 2020). Social media enables audiences to interact with their preferred media celebrities. Followers often establish durable attachments to influencers through cumulative interactions or content co-creation (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Researchers identified a sequential mediation model in which Influencer credibility and Product attitude mediate the relationship between the parasocial relationship and purchase intention. Those who believed their credibility as an influencer was poor were more inclined to purchase a product when their self-esteem decreased. Individuals with poor self-esteem are more likely to buy recommended products if their PSR with the influencers is high. People's self-esteem grows, and they are less inclined to purchase endorsed products. The study expands the influencer's credibility. Human elements, such as self-esteem, impacted influencer Credibility and the relationship between influencers and users. Businesses should consider their customers' personalities, motives, and preferences when developing a social media marketing plan (Bi & Zhang, 2022). PSRs influence viewers' propensity to continue interacting with the influencer (Su et al., 2021). According to the findings, having a parasocial relationship with an influencer boosts the influencer's credibility. In contrast, comments from other audience members reduce the effect (Reinikainen et al., 2020).

Generation Z Characteristics

Generation Z consists of those born between 1997 and 2012. The eldest members of this generation are already 25 years old. They actively participate in the workforce, purchasing homes, having families, and founding enterprises. Most Generation Z is still beginning their wealth-building journey, partly because many have yet to enter the labor force, and those working have not reached their prime earning years (Pinno, 2022).

These digital native generations are very active on social media platforms. Generation Z is involved in social media platforms that expose them to SMIs that could influence their online shopping purchasing behavior. For guidance on what is appropriate for multiple ages, online platforms have varying age ratings based on the types of online content they offer. Most well-liked media have an age rating, including the movies and TV series

people stream, games, and social media they use. Due to US data rules, minors under 13 must obtain their parents' or guardians' consent before signing up (ParentZone, 2022).

The minimum age to create an account on most social media sites, including TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Kik, YouTube, Snapchat, and Facebook, is thirteen (Graber, 2023). There is no clear and defined policy on social media privacy in the Philippines. However, several laws and jurisprudence generally address privacy concerning social media. The Constitution, Revised Criminal Code, Rules of Court, and Civil Code provide a variety of privacy policies. Therefore, House Bill 543, the Social Media Regulation and Protection Act, was passed by Congress to regulate minors' usage of social media (Manahan, 2022).

Generation Z continuously seeks new communities that define their sense of self. Because community involvement is flexible, marketers can go beyond typical audience segmentation by including communities where target audiences may belong (Bateman, 2022). Among these communities is the brand community. A brand community best demonstrates brand devotion. Individuals emotionally invested in a brand community purchase from the company, consume its material, and share it with others. It consists of individuals who follow the brand's social media posts, share their products/services and content with others, and enjoy seeing what the brand accomplishes. In short, a brand community is a location where individuals with an emotional connection to your brand can connect with the brand (West, 2021).

By 2020, Generation Z was anticipated to represent over 40% of the global consumer market. Generation Z is a digitally native generation, which means they have been utilizing technology since birth (Khadar, 2020). Generation Z is the first generation with easy access to the Internet. They are the first generation born in the digital world, growing up where they have never known a world without access to the Internet, mobile technology, smartphones, or social media (Shin & Lee, 2021). Generation Z spends approximately 11 hours daily reading, enjoying, and sharing content across all devices. They check these social media platforms multiple times throughout the day. It means Generation Z spends more time online than any previous generation (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

According to Roberts (2023), Generation Z spends considerable time online, and their spending power grows. Based on the Morning Consult survey, she stated that YouTube is the most popular platform among Generation Z, with 88% spending time on the app. Instagram comes in at number two with 76%, suggesting that the platform is not "over." Moreover, TikTok (68%) and Snapchat (67%) are not far behind. When it comes to Facebook (49%) and Twitter (47%), however, there is a significant decrease. Male respondents utilize YouTube, Twitter, Discord, Reddit, and Twitch more than females. In contrast, female Generation Z members dominate Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook. BeReal is still popular among Generation Z, although its usage is relatively low (Roberts, 2023).

Generation Z workers comprise about 12.6% of the workforce as of 2020. They typically earn about \$32,500 annually, according to an analysis by GoBankingRates. As they continue to enter the workforce, their income is predicted to increase fivefold to \$33 trillion by 2030 and surpass millennials' income by 2031 (DeVon, 2022).

The members of Generation Z are more conscious of their purchasing habits than prior generations. They are typically more conscientious about what they purchase and how their actions affect the environment. Therefore, people of Generation Z choose to support brands that are likewise committed to sustainability (Santora, 2022). In the research of Pangestu and Karnadi (2020), Generation Z is known to be financially savvy, and their financial literacy knowledge impacts their saving and spending decisions. However, according to Khadar (2020), there is no correlation between household income and internet spending. Before purchasing, Generation Z waits for discounts and other offers and is less affected by celebrities. They learn to make independent decisions based on the examination of available data. Bank alliances and substantial discounts on wallet payments can encourage the youth to adopt a digital lifestyle. Shopping for fashion and beauty products ranked higher in both the male and female consumables categories (Khadar, 2020).

According to a national study by the Pew Research Center, Generation Z women are 7% more willing than Generation Z men to spend more on a product or service when a company fully and publicly supports it. Marketers, retailers, and brand leaders need to be aware of the economic changes taking place with Generation

Z. Generation Z has a different perspective on their spending, saving, and financial future (CGK, 2020). However, Women in Generation Z save less than men. According to a new Bank of America survey on Generation Z spending habits, only 38% of Generation Z women have enough emergency savings to last three months. In comparison, 48% of Generation Z males have enough. The same survey stated that Generation Z women are less prepared to manage day-to-day expenses than males (63% against 76%) and less ready to invest for retirement (37% versus 49%) (Spector, 2022).

Online Shopping Behavior

Online shopping has become a significant technology in the twenty-first century, with suppliers investing in the user experience. It has assisted clients in making decisions and reducing their resources by allowing them to browse numerous retail brands, compare prices, and receive rapid notifications of new products. The Internet purchasing business in the United States is expected to reach \$300 billion in 2014, \$345 billion by 2019, and \$476 billion by 2024 (Adibfar et al., 2022).

Purchasing goods and services via the Internet is referred to as online shopping. After gathering product information, the customer chooses an item based on its needs and transaction criteria for the selected product, analyzes the product in comparison to other available possibilities, and obtains a post-purchase experience. Online purchasing behavior is linked to the psychological state of the buyer. People in the age of global communication have extensively used social networking platforms for both professional and personal purposes (Miah et al., 2022).

Online shopping is a type of e-commerce in which consumers use the Internet to purchase goods or services from a supplier directly. In this study, online shopping behavior pertains to Generation Z's purchasing decision to buy products online from different e-commerce platforms. An e-commerce platform is a software application that allows merchants and consumers to conduct online transactions. Web hosting, inventory management, payment processing, marketing, order fulfillment, and other functions are all managed by e-commerce platforms (Sheehan, 2022).

Generation Z uses social media to find inspiration, study products, and connect with their favorite brands. Influencers affect many purchasing decisions, ensuring e-commerce transitions from traditional digital marketing to influencer marketing (Lund, 2023). Nonetheless, their platform utilization patterns have slightly changed. Generation Z has evolved past e-commerce and has gotten comfortable with social commerce, which is making a complete purchase inside a social networking platform. Moreover, for a good reason- the algorithm can understand their preferences to offer pertinent recommendations, provide a personalized shopping experience (which also lowers the risk of abandoned carts), reduce the friction between the desire to make a purchase and the checkout process, and is more engaging with the use of in-app filters, augmented reality features, and live streams (Kastenholz, 2021).

During the third quarter of 2022, 61 percent of Filipino respondents said they bought a product or service online. Others purchased groceries from an online retailer. Filipino online shoppers are increasingly resorting to e-commerce platforms for retail purchases. These platforms offer more shopping options, reasonable costs, and various payment options. This event resulted in an expanding e-commerce market expected to quadruple between 2019 and 2025. Shopee, with over 70 million monthly online visitors, and Lazada, with over 37 million monthly visitors, were two prominent platforms that stood out in this industry in the Philippines. Most Filipino online buyers are Generation Z and Millennials, the country's largest internet user demographic (Statista, 2023b).

According to the Philippines Central Bank, 51% of Filipinos are unbanked, while only 8% use credit cards. Filipinos like to pay cash on delivery and frequently use partner payment centers such as huge convenience stores and e-wallets such as GCash and PayMaya (Philippines - eCommerce, 2022). This payment option gives Generation Zs below 18 an edge in having access to buying products online without online payment platforms.

With increased information and awareness of buying and selling online, people are more careful and make more provisions while doing business online. Even though they have been extremely cautious in their

operations, no one knows who or the motives of the persons conducting these purchases (Tantimin, 2021). Therefore, everyone, including minors, can complete online transactions for buying and selling, mainly because online shopping platforms generally provide flexible payment options like cash on delivery.

Theoretical Framework

Social Media Marketing – David Chaffey’s Theory

According to Chaffey, social media marketing is "the monitoring and facilitation of customer connection, involvement, and sharing via digital media to foster positive engagement with a firm and its brands, resulting in financial value." Social Media Marketing is sustaining and facilitating connections, customer engagement, and sharing via digital media to strengthen good ties between a company and its brands for monetary gain (Gurubay et al., 2020).

This study utilizes Chaffey's theory on social media. According to this theory, the contact between a company and its customers changes human behavior, greatly influencing customer behavior. As a result, businesses adopted social media strategies to expand customers' purchasing options, encourage sales, and maintain brand loyalty. According to Chaffey's theory, social media marketing will considerably increase business performance by fostering long-term client relationships. Using Chaffey's approach, Haule and Swallehe's (2021) study described the impact of social media marketing on business performance.

Social media marketing is an effective method for businesses of all sizes to connect with consumers and potential customers. In social media, individuals discover, learn about, follow, and purchase from brands. Exceptional social media marketing may bring extraordinary success to a business by developing brand champions and increasing sales leads (Social Media Marketing for Businesses, 2023).

Social media influencers (SMI) are one of the strategies utilized in social media marketing and have a vast presence on various social media platforms. Influencer marketing is effective because social influencers have developed high trust with their followers. Their recommendations act as social proof for the brand's potential customers. Therefore, this study uses this theory to establish how SMI establishes a parasocial relationship with its followers to influence consumer behavior, which will benefit businesses.

The results of the study support this framework. Generation Z respondents reported frequent engagement with micro-influencers who maintained consistent, relatable content, thereby influencing emotional connections and purchasing behavior. This aligns with Chaffey's emphasis on digital engagement as a foundation for long-term loyalty and value generation.

Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory explains how a communicator's perceived trustworthiness and expertise influence how persuasive a message is. Hovland et al. (1953) originally proposed that a communicator's effectiveness depends mainly on two factors: trustworthiness (the degree to which the audience believes the source is honest) and expertise (the degree to which the source is perceived as knowledgeable about the topic). Later extensions of the theory, such as Ohanian's (1990) model, also emphasize attractiveness as a supplementary factor. In marketing, when consumers perceive a source as credible, they are more likely to accept and be persuaded by the message, leading to attitude change and behavioral response.

This theory highlights social media influencers and explains why they are effective in brand promotion. Influencers perceived as knowledgeable and authentic within their niche build high trust with their audiences, enhancing their credibility. Whether they are micro-influencers focusing on specific interests or macro-influencers with broader appeal, their ability to appear genuine, knowledgeable, and relatable makes their endorsements persuasive. Followers are more inclined to trust and act on an influencer's product recommendation because they view the influencer as an expert and a trustworthy source, consistent with the principles of Source Credibility Theory.

The study's findings reinforce this theory: micro-influencers were perceived as more trustworthy and relatable, particularly by female respondents, which significantly enhanced parasocial bonding and influenced purchasing decisions. Trust and perceived expertise emerged as key determinants in the respondents' willingness to follow recommendations, demonstrating the direct application of this theory in the observed behaviors.

Source Attractiveness Model

The Source Attractiveness Model proposed by McGuire (1985) suggests that a communicator's ability to influence an audience is strongly linked to likability, similarity, and familiarity. According to the model, audiences are more persuaded by sources they find physically attractive, personally likable, relatable, or similar to themselves. Familiarity with the source also enhances persuasive power. In marketing, this model implies that when a brand spokesperson (or influencer) is perceived as attractive in one or more ways, the audience is more likely to accept the message, develop positive attitudes toward the product, and be motivated to act.

This theory shows how social media influencers' perceived attractiveness (relatability, likability, and familiarity) enhances their effectiveness. Social media influencers often share aspects of their everyday lives, struggles, and passions, which allows followers to see them as similar and familiar individuals rather than distant celebrities. This perceived closeness increases likability and emotional connection, making their endorsements more persuasive. Whether through shared values, lifestyles, or aesthetics, influencers' ability to appear relatable and likable strengthens consumer trust and drives stronger marketing outcomes, in line with the Source Attractiveness Model.

The discussion of results highlighted the importance of emotional appeal and visual content. Influencers who showcased authenticity and shared relatable personal experiences fostered higher levels of emotional engagement, especially among Generation Z. This supports the relevance of attractiveness and relatability in enhancing PSR strength and influencing brand perceptions and buying behavior.

Social Proof Theory

Social Proof Theory, as articulated by Cialdini (2021), posits that individuals often look to the behaviors and actions of others to guide their own decisions, particularly in situations of uncertainty or ambiguity. The theory suggests that people are more likely to conform to what others are doing when they perceive those others as credible or influential, especially when uncertain about how to act. Social proof can manifest in various forms, such as following trends, adopting behaviors observed in peers or influencers, or trusting the popularity of a product or service. This psychological principle operates on the premise that individuals feel more secure in their choices when they see others making similar decisions, thus validating their actions.

This theory provides critical insights into the factors driving consumer decisions in the context of the research on Filipino Generation Z's purchasing behavior and social media influencers. Filipino Gen Z consumers are particularly influenced by the social validation offered by popular influencers. This indicates that Generation Z is more likely to follow and trust product recommendations from influencers seen as popular or widely endorsed by others. The concept of social proof explains why individuals in this demographic are drawn to influencers with large followings, as these influencers are perceived as more credible and trustworthy. Consequently, social proof plays a central role in shaping purchasing decisions, as Filipino Gen Z consumers rely on the actions and opinions of influential figures in their social networks to guide their own choices.

In the results, perceived popularity—measured through likes, shares, and follower count—was significantly associated with higher trust and engagement. Respondents reported feeling more secure and confident in their purchasing decisions when influenced by SMIs who were widely followed or praised by others. This outcome demonstrates the powerful role of social proof in shaping Generation Z's consumer behavior, validating the theory's application to the Filipino market.

Significance of the Study

Predicting consumers' online purchasing behavior is significant in e-commerce for targeted advertising and sales promotion. According to business theory, corporations often focus on creating iconic symbols in the minds of their customers. Agreeing with this notion, a consumer's first view of a product may make a long-lasting impression of the product (Liu et al., 2022).

As a strategy for social media marketing, the influence of social media influencers is increasing to enhance and promote a better impression of the endorsed products to consumers. Social Media Influencers exhibit the impact of PSR, which is believed to have a significant role in explaining marketing effectiveness. This study aims to produce information that could further establish a parasocial relationship fostered by social media influencers to impact the online purchasing behavior of Filipino Generation Z.

Masuda et al. conducted an online survey of Korean consumers who had purchased a product/service after watching an influencer's video advertisement on YouTube. Their study stated that parasocial relationship (PSR) influences purchase intention more than trustworthiness and expertise. PSR formation is also influenced by how consumers perceive the type of influencer (e.g., professional YouTuber, celebrity, or expert). PSR might be a more critical construct than credibility in general models (Masuda et al., 2022). This recent study by Masuda et al. has two significant limitations. This study's influencer type and customer attribute data could be further segmented for a more in-depth assessment of PSR's operation. Another is that the product or service categories to which influencers belonged were not considered in this study's investigation of influencer marketing.

Consumers are more likely to trust influencers with whom they have developed parasocial relationships (PSR) (i.e., one-sided relationships that individuals form with mediated personas) and tend to withhold their critical evaluation of influencers' sponsored commercial activities (Audrezet et al., 2020). Parasocial relationship theory will be applied to the current study on influencers' influential power attempts to Generation Z consumers. A more detailed investigation of the structure of PSR development and its impact on marketing efficiency could provide a more comprehensive explanation of the effect. This study will expand the previous study's data collection to create subcategories for each advertising target and assess marketing effectiveness across these sub-class items and services to verify social media influencer marketing effects.

While the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on consumer behavior has been widely studied, most existing research focuses on macro-influencers in Western markets, often overlooking the distinct impact of micro-influencers within Southeast Asian cultures (Lee, 2021; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Micro-influencers—those with smaller but highly engaged audiences—have become increasingly relevant due to their perceived authenticity and relatability, which are central to the formation of Parasocial Relationships (PSRs) (Masuda et al., 2022; Jin et al., 2022). However, limited studies have explored how these influencers operate in emerging markets such as the Philippines, where collectivist values, digital savviness, and high social media usage among Generation Z create a unique environment for PSR development (Chua & Chou, 2023). Moreover, the majority of PSR literature has yet to fully integrate cultural and regional nuances that shape online trust and consumer engagement in non-Western settings.

The academic significance of this study lies in its contextualization of PSR and influencer marketing in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated digital consumption and transformed consumer-influencer interactions. In the Philippines, where pandemic lockdowns heightened the need for virtual social connection, micro-influencers emerged as accessible and emotionally resonant figures, fostering stronger PSRs and influencing brand perceptions more intimately than traditional advertising (Alampay & Cabañes, 2022; Tan et al., 2024). These developments remain underexplored in current literature, particularly regarding how post-pandemic emotional and behavioral shifts influence consumer responses to influencer content. This research aims to bridge that gap by examining the role of micro-influencers in shaping PSRs and purchase intentions within the specific socio-cultural and economic conditions of post-pandemic Southeast Asia, contributing both theoretical insights and practical implications for region-specific digital marketing strategies.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a cross-sectional descriptive survey design within a quantitative approach to explore the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on Generation Z Filipino consumers' parasocial relationships and purchasing behavior. A cross-sectional design is particularly suited for this research as it allows for data collection at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the target population's current attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (McCombes, 2020). Since the study aims to examine the immediate impact of SMIs on Generation Z's purchasing decisions, the cross-sectional design is ideal for capturing the relevant data without the need for long-term tracking or establishing causal relationships. The dynamic nature of social media makes this design especially useful for documenting and analyzing consumer behavior trends that reflect the current influence of SMIs on purchasing decisions (Shin & Lee, 2021).

Additionally, the quantitative approach is employed to gather numerical data that can be analyzed statistically, ensuring an objective and rigorous examination of the research variables (Creswell, 2014). This approach allows the study to quantify key factors such as the frequency of engagement with social media content, the level of trust in influencers, and the direct impact of these interactions on purchasing behavior. The descriptive research method complements this by systematically documenting and characterizing these factors, offering a clear and measurable understanding of the relationship between SMIs and consumer behavior (McCombes, 2020). Using this methodological framework, the study provides statistically significant findings that can be generalized to the broader population of Generation Z Filipino consumers, yielding valuable insights for businesses, marketers, and academics interested in the intersection of social media, influencer marketing, and consumer purchasing behavior.

Data Gathering Instrument

The data were collected through a structured or printed survey questionnaire in Google Forms. The researcher conducted in-person data gathering and sent the survey questionnaires online via email or social media. Before providing the survey questionnaire to the respondents, the researcher obtained their consent to join the study voluntarily. Minor respondents aged 13-17 were first provided a Parental Consent form to obtain parental agreement, allowing them to join the study, along with an Informed Assent Form for minors and children to gain consent. Respondents aged 18-26 received an Informed Consent Form to obtain their voluntary participation. The Parental Consent, Informed Assent Form for Minors and Children, and the Informed Consent Form were thoroughly discussed with the relevant respondents and their parents to address any clarifications or questions they had.

The data-gathering instrument was a self-constructed survey questionnaire created by the researcher based on various reviewed literature. The questionnaire aimed to gather responses from Generation Z Filipino consumers to better understand how Parasocial Relationships (PSR) impacted Social Media Influencer (SMI) influence on the purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers.

The introduction of the questionnaire was intended to profile respondents based on gender and frequency of online shopping. Part I investigated SMI attributes such as (A) Type of Influencers, Perceived Popularity, Perceived Fit, and Content Creation/Style as factors that fostered PSR to influence consumers' purchasing behavior. The types of influencers were described based on the studies by Kay et al. (2020), Hudders et al. (2020), and Ladhari et al. (2020). The perceived popularity attribute was based on the studies by Lou et al. (2020), Rizaldi (2022), and Zhao et al. (2021). The perceived fit attribute was based on the studies by Kwiatek et al. (2021), Parmar (2019), Park and Lin (2020), and Sokolova and Kefi (2020). Content Creation or Style was described based on the studies by Cheung et al. (2022), Faisal et al. (2020), Hudders et al. (2020), and Schouten and Verspaget (2021). Part II described the characteristics of PSR, and Part III outlined the indicators of purchasing behavior based on the literature of Masuda et al. (2022) and Munsch (2021).

The results provided practical implications for businesses and influencers to strengthen and enhance the impact of their social media marketing strategies and better cater to consumer preferences.

This research will assist businesses in improving their marketing tactics that utilize social media influencers, enabling them to streamline their strategies and develop methods likely to meet the needs of Generation Z, a highly promising consumer group. The success of these initiatives would help businesses establish a more substantial presence in the industry.

This research opened new possibilities for various apps to leverage an opportunity to transform their platforms into hybrids of social networking and e-commerce, generating additional revenue streams. This study provided social media platforms with a path to capitalize on these opportunities.

This research also supported social media influencers in creating content that could foster parasocial relationships with Generation Z consumers, positively influencing their purchase behavior to benefit the brands or products they represented. The effectiveness of their content in engaging these consumers would strengthen their reputations as trustworthy SMIs, leading to more collaboration opportunities with brands or companies, potentially increasing their income.

The validity test ensured that the questionnaire effectively measured the intended constructs related to social media influencers and purchasing behavior. Three experts evaluated each item for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives, assigning a rating of 4 to all statements, which indicated substantial agreement on their validity. Based on their feedback, refinements were made, such as specifying factors that influenced the decision to follow an SMI, making follower count ranges more inclusive, and adding new items to capture different perspectives, including respondents who did not consider an influencer's popularity or content in their purchasing decisions. These revisions enhanced the questionnaire's comprehensiveness, accurately reflecting participants' attitudes and behaviors.

After validating the questionnaire, the researcher distributed it to 30 participants from San Juan, La Union, neighboring the study site. This preliminary survey assessed the instrument's reliability before conducting the main study. Following data collection, the study's statistician conducted a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha to measure internal consistency. The reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.723 across 64 items, indicating acceptable reliability. Since a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.7 was generally considered acceptable in social sciences research, the results confirmed that the questionnaire was a reliable tool for data collection.

Population and Locale of the Study

As the largest generation in history, Generation Z was primed to have a significant economic influence in the coming years. They were already making an impact, and businesses took note. According to the Philippine Statistics Office forecasts, the Filipino Generation Z accounted for around 45% of the Philippine population, equating to over 45 million people. Their economic power was expected to rise after their prime spending years (Ortiz, 2022b).

The study focused on Generation Z individuals exposed to social media platforms that allowed them to view the posts of social media influencers. Those aged 13 to 26 in Generation Z were considered study participants. Individuals aged 13 were the youngest in the generation included in this study, and most social media platforms allowed them to register an account with parental permission. Individuals above the age of 26 were the eldest members of Generation Z, and they were empowered in their purchasing behavior.

San Fernando City, La Union is a highly accessible urban center within the province, with a robust infrastructure and a diverse population. The city has a high level of internet connectivity, making it an ideal location for studying the online behaviors of Generation Z, particularly those involved in social media and e-commerce. Internet penetration in La Union has been steadily increasing, and the trend of online shopping is prevalent among the city's younger population (Ortiz, 2022b). The prevalence of social media users and the increasing trend of online shopping within the city provide a natural setting for the research, ensuring that participants can easily access and engage with social media influencers and e-commerce platforms.

By selecting San Fernando City, La Union, as the study locale, the research aligns with practical considerations of accessibility, internet connectivity, and demographic relevance. Furthermore, the city's relatively high concentration of Generation Z individuals offers an ideal sample size that allows for a meaningful exploration of the impact of social media influencers on purchasing behavior within this group.

The population of this study consists of Generation Z from La Union, Philippines, particularly from San Fernando City. The researcher prefers these locations, considering the accessibility of the place and the presence of internet connectivity, which is a requirement for online shopping. Shin and Lee (2021) categorized Generation Z as those born from 1996 to 2012. However, in this study, the respondents will be limited to those aged 13 to 26.

According to the PSA's 2020 population census, individuals aged 15–30 comprised 28% of the total Philippine population, amounting to approximately 31 million people (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2022b). In San Fernando City, La Union, the total population recorded in 2020 was 125,640 (PSA, 2022a). Based on data provided by the City Civil Registry as of April 2023, the number of residents aged 13 to 26 years—the target age group for this study—was 31,427. Utilizing this figure, the appropriate sample size for the study was calculated at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, resulting in a required sample size of 380 participants. The sample size was determined using the Sample Size Calculator available on Social Science Statistics (<https://www.socscistatistics.com/>). This ensures that the sample is sufficiently large to represent the target population while maintaining statistical validity and reliability. This demographic constitutes a significant portion of the study's target population (PSA, 2022a; City Civil Registry, 2023).

Purposive sampling was used to determine participants who had access to the Internet, viewed SMI posts, and accessed e-commerce or social media shopping platforms. The inclusion criteria included Generation Z individuals born from 1996 to 2012 in San Fernando City, La Union, with access to the Internet, SMI posts, and online shopping platforms. Exclusion criteria included Generation Z individuals with limited or no access to the Internet, who did not view SMI posts, and who had no access to online shopping. The inclusion criteria always prevailed; if one was not met, the participant was disqualified from the study.

Purposive sampling was selected for this study to ensure that participants met specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. The study focused on Generation Z Filipino consumers exposed to social media influencers (SMIs) and engaged in online shopping behaviors. The inclusion criteria specified that participants should be aged 13 to 26, as this age range represents the core of Generation Z and is most likely to be influenced by social media content and actively engage with e-commerce platforms. Furthermore, participants had to have access to the internet and regularly interact with social media platforms that feature influencer content. Additionally, participants must have experience with online shopping platforms, as the study sought to examine how social media influencers influence actual purchasing decisions through parasocial relationships. By selecting individuals who met these criteria, the researcher ensured that the sample was highly relevant to the study's focus on the intersection of social media influence and consumer behavior.

However, while purposive sampling offers targeted participant selection, it does have inherent limitations. One potential limitation is the risk of selection bias, as participants are chosen based on the researcher's judgment, which may result in a sample that is not fully representative of the broader Generation Z population in San Fernando, La Union, or the Philippines as a whole. This could impact the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the sampling method may limit the diversity of perspectives, as individuals who are more active on social media and online shopping platforms may differ significantly from those less engaged in these behaviors. Finally, the subjectivity of the researcher's decisions in selecting participants may introduce variability in the sample, which could affect the consistency and comparability of the results. Despite these limitations, purposive sampling remains the most appropriate choice for this study, as it allows for a focused investigation into the specific impact of social media influencers on the purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers.

Treatment of Data

The analysis involved several statistical techniques to explore relationships between social media influencers (SMI), purchase behavior, and other key factors. First, frequency count and percentage were used to assess the distribution of responses across different categories. This included evaluating the profile of respondents and identifying which social media platforms and online shopping platforms were most commonly used. The analysis revealed insights into the most popular platforms and user behavior by calculating the frequency of each response, followed by determining the percentage of users engaging with each platform. Multiple response analysis was also employed when respondents could select more than one answer, such as when they used multiple social media platforms or online shopping sites, which helps in understanding the diversity of platform usage.

Table 1 Four-point Rating Scale with Descriptive Equivalent or Interpretation

Numerical Rating	Descriptive equivalent
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Agree
4	Strongly Agree

For the extent of perception of Gen-Z consumers on different attributes of social media influencers and the extent of perception on parasocial relationships, the mode (most frequent response) was used since the data are ordinal and involve ranks. The scale used for the extent of perception can be seen in Table 1.

Data exploratory analysis revealed that the data were not normal. Thus, nonparametric tests were used. To further explore differences in rankings, the Mann-Whitney U Test was applied to compare the rankings of SMIs based on the number of followers. This nonparametric test helped assess whether there were significant differences in the rankings of SMIs between groups, such as those with high versus low follower counts.

Finally, Spearman's rho, a nonparametric correlation test, was used to examine the relationships between several variables: purchase behavior, SMI followed, perceived popularity, perceived fit, content creation and style, and parasocial relationships. This test assessed whether there were monotonic relationships between these factors, such as whether following a popular SMI led to increased purchase behavior or if an influencer's content creation style influenced the strength of the parasocial relationship followers developed. For example, it could reveal if followers who perceived a good fit with an influencer were likelier to make purchases or if influencers with high content creation and a strong personal connection fostered stronger parasocial relationships. Using Spearman's rho, the analysis uncovered how these variables were interrelated, providing insights into how influencer marketing strategies affected consumer behavior and engagement.

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyze the study's results statistically. As a widely recognized and reliable statistical software, SPSS allowed for efficient data management, organization, and interpretation, ensuring the findings were accurate and credible. The software was instrumental in processing the survey responses, performing descriptive statistics to summarize demographic information, and running inferential analyses such as correlation tests to examine the relationship between parasocial relationships (PSRs) and purchasing behavior among Filipino Generation Z consumers. Using SPSS enabled the researcher to identify significant patterns, test hypotheses, and generate meaningful insights with high precision. Moreover, the use of SPSS ensured that the data analysis adhered to standard research practices, enhancing the overall validity and reliability of the study. Through SPSS, the researcher presented the findings clearly and systematically, supporting robust conclusions and providing a strong foundation for actionable marketing recommendations.

In presenting the descriptive results, survey or questionnaire responses are often analyzed using a Likert scale that includes options such as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA), and Strongly Disagree (SDA). These categories allow for a nuanced understanding of participants' attitudes and opinions. Strongly Agree reflects strong support, Strongly Disagree reflects strong opposition, and Agree and Disagree offer more moderate positions. The percentage distribution across these responses reveals overall sentiment trends and the intensity of perceptions within the sample.

In the context of following influencers, the responses were further interpreted using the categories MF, MDF, and LF to describe the level of engagement: MF (Mostly Followed) indicates respondents who actively and consistently follow influencers; MDF (Moderately Followed) refers to those who follow a few influencers selectively or with less engagement; and LF (Least Followed) characterizes respondents who rarely or rarely follow influencers. Analyzing the responses through both the Likert scale and these followership categories provides a richer, more detailed understanding of Generation Z's behavior towards social media influencers in the Philippine setting.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher upheld strict adherence to ethical standards throughout the study, guided by confidentiality, informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, integrity, beneficence and nonmaleficence, justice, and respect for the rights and welfare of all participants. Before the commencement of data collection, all potential participants were provided with a detailed Informed Consent Form explaining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, intended use of data, and participants' rights. Special consideration was given to minors (individuals below 18 years of age); parental or guardian consent was secured before allowing their participation. Participants were fully informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary, that they retained the right to withdraw at any point without facing any penalties or negative consequences, and that their decision would not affect any future opportunities for collaboration with the researcher. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by ensuring that no personally identifiable information was collected. The researcher handled all data personally, with anonymized datasets shared only with the statistician, thus safeguarding participant privacy. All data were destroyed after the study: physical surveys were shredded, and digital files were permanently deleted.

The ethical conduct of the study was further strengthened by a commitment to the principles of integrity, beneficence, and nonmaleficence, ensuring that no participant was exposed to harm and that the benefits of the research outweighed any minimal risks involved. Justice was upheld by ensuring fair treatment and equal opportunity for participation across all eligible individuals within the population. To address potential conflicts of interest, the researcher disclosed any affiliations and maintained an independent stance throughout the research process. Respect for intellectual property and avoidance of plagiarism were observed by properly crediting all sources and adhering to academic writing standards. The principle of "do no harm" was central to the study design and implementation, and ethical distress was minimized by providing participants with access to support resources should any discomfort arise. The study underwent independent review and approval by relevant academic and institutional bodies to further ensure adherence to ethical standards. The researcher also committed to respecting colleagues by acknowledging collaborative contributions appropriately and maintaining professionalism in all communications. Finally, the validity of the study was safeguarded through rigorous methodology, transparent reporting of findings, and adherence to ethical research protocols, thus ensuring that the results contribute meaningfully to academic discourse and practice without compromising participant welfare or research integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The succeeding tables present an analysis of how SMIs employ PSR to influence the purchasing behavior of Generation Z in the Philippines to continue online shopping even after the pandemic. The sample in this research consisted of Generation Z consumers from San Fernando City, La Union. A total of 380 respondents completed the survey in May and June 2024.

All 380 respondents were considered valid samples as the study targeted Generation Z Filipino consumers, specifically those aged 13 to 26, as this group comprised around 45% of the population in the Philippines (Philippine Statistics Office, 2022). The focus was on Generation Z individuals from San Fernando City, La Union, who had access to the Internet and engaged with social media influencers (SMIs) and online shopping platforms. According to the City Civil Registry (2023), there were 31,427 individuals in this age range in San Fernando City, and a sample size of 380 participants was determined using purposive sampling at a 95% confidence level. The inclusion criteria required participants to be born between 1996 and 2012, have access to the Internet, view SMI posts, and engage in online shopping platforms or e-commerce. Individuals who did not meet these criteria, such as those without internet access or engagement with social media influencers, were excluded from the study. By focusing on those who actively interacted with digital platforms, the study ensured that the sample was composed of valid Generation Z Filipino consumers as respondents, whose behaviors and engagement with social media influencers were key to understanding their purchasing patterns and the influence of social media on consumer behavior.

Filipino Generation Z Characteristics

Table 2 Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	126	33.2%
Female	254	66.8%
Total	380	100.0%

The survey was distributed to 380 respondents, with a notable gender distribution: 66.8% were female, while 33.2% were male, indicating a predominantly female sample. This gender skew suggests that female Generation Z consumers may be more engaged or willing to participate in studies on social media influencers, online shopping, and consumer behavior. Several factors could contribute to this trend, including the higher prevalence of women in digital spaces, particularly on social media platforms where influencer marketing is most prominent. Research has shown that women, especially in younger generations, are likelier to engage with influencers and participate in online communities, making them a key demographic for brands targeting social media-driven purchases (Vargas & Young, 2021). Additionally, female consumers have often been identified as more likely to influence trends, share opinions, and make purchasing decisions based on social media content, which may further explain their higher representation in the survey (Dwyer et al., 2020). Despite this gender imbalance, the findings from the predominantly female sample still provide valuable insights into the behaviors, preferences, and interactions with social media influencers, as they represent a significant portion of Generation Z’s online activity and purchasing behavior.

Table 3 Social Media Platforms Used

SM Platforms Used	Response Rate (N=1123)	Percent of Cases (N=380)
1. Instagram	26.4%	77.9%
2. Facebook	25.8%	76.3%
3. Tiktok	20.2%	59.7%
4. Youtube	11.5%	33.9%
5. Twitter	10.9%	32.1%
6. Messenger	1.7%	5.0%

7. Snapchat	1.2%	3.7%
8. Discord	0.9%	2.6%
9. Tumblr	0.5%	1.6%
10. Reddit	0.4%	1.1%
11. Twitter	0.4%	1.1%
12. None	0.2%	0.5%
Total	100.0%	295.5%

The multiple-response analysis revealed that the participants provided 12 social media (SM) platforms for Generation Z Filipino consumers, showcasing their engagement with various digital spaces. Among these platforms, Instagram emerged as the most widely used, accounting for 26.4% of the total responses, with 77.9% identifying it as one of their preferred platforms. Instagram's popularity is consistent with its visual-centric nature, which appeals strongly to Generation Z due to its emphasis on short-form video content, influencer culture, and creative expression (Zeng et al., 2023). Following Instagram, Facebook ranked second, with 25.8% of the total responses, and 76.3% of respondents reported using it. Despite the rise of newer platforms like TikTok and Instagram, Facebook remains relevant due to its vast user base, integrated features such as Facebook Messenger, and group functionalities that appeal to a broad demographic (Moriarty, 2023).

Notably, the data also revealed that a vast majority (95.5%) of respondents used multiple SM platforms, reflecting a high level of diversification in their digital engagement. This trend highlights how Generation Z consumers seamlessly navigate different platforms to access various forms of content, from social interactions to entertainment and e-commerce. Only a tiny percentage (0.5%) of respondents indicated that they do not use any social media platforms, further underscoring this demographic's pervasiveness of digital connectivity. On the other hand, platforms such as Tumblr (0.5%), Reddit, and Twitter (0.4%) were the least used, indicating that these platforms, which tend to serve more niche or specific user groups, have lower engagement levels among this generation (Smith, 2023). These findings suggest that Generation Z's social media preferences are dominated by highly visual, interactive platforms that offer entertainment, communication, and community-building experiences.

The analysis of online shopping platform usage revealed 823 responses from the participants based on multiple responses. Shopee emerged as the most popular online shopping platform, accounting for 42.5% of the total responses, with 92.1% of respondents selecting it as their preferred platform. Shopee's dominance aligns with the growing trend of e-commerce in Southeast Asia, particularly in the Philippines, where it is known for its wide range of affordable products, user-friendly interface, and regular sales events that attract bargain-hunting shoppers (Dela Cruz, 2023).

Table 4 Online Shopping Platform Used

Online Shopping Platforms	Response Rate (N=824)	Percent of Cases (N=380)
1. Shopee	42.5%	92.1%
2. Lazada	20.1%	43.7%
3. Tiktok Shop	19.5%	42.4%
4. Shein	11.5%	25.0%
10. Facebook	1.3%	2.9%
7. Food Panda	0.8%	1.8%

9. Instagram	0.8%	1.8%
5. H&M	0.7%	1.6%
6. Uniqlo	0.7%	1.6%
11. Amazon	0.5%	1.1%
12. Market Place	0.5%	1.1%
13. Temu	0.5%	1.1%
8. E-bay	0.4%	0.8%
Total	100.0%	216.8%

Shopee’s success among Generation Z can also be attributed to its mobile-first approach, allowing for easy browsing and shopping via smartphones, which are central to this generation's digital experience (Ong & Tan, 2022).

Lazada, another prominent platform, followed with 20.1% of the total response rate, where 43.7% of the respondents identified it as their primary online shopping platform. Although it lags behind Shopee in terms of usage, Lazada is still a major player, offering a similar range of products and services, including fast delivery and attractive promotions (Lim & Tan, 2021). The findings also indicate that all respondents reported engaging in online shopping, which reflects the widespread adoption of e-commerce among Generation Z consumers in the Philippines. In contrast, eBay registered as the least popular platform with only 0.4% of the total responses, signaling its diminished relevance in the Philippine market, where local platforms like Shopee and Lazada are preferred due to factors such as local customer support, payment options, and localized shipping services. These trends reinforce the growing dominance of regional platforms in Southeast Asia’s e-commerce landscape (Ng, 2023).

Table 5 Shops Online with Own Account

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	344	90.5%
No	36	9.5%
Total	380	100.00%

The survey results highlight that most (90.5%) of Generation Z consumers shop online using their accounts, indicating a strong and consistent preference for e-commerce. This high engagement with online shopping reflects Generation Z's increasing digital comfort and independence, who prioritize convenience, accessibility, and variety in their shopping experiences. As digital natives, they are well-versed in navigating e-commerce platforms, and their preference for online shopping aligns with their expectations for fast, seamless, and mobile-optimized transactions. This behavior underscores the critical role of e-commerce in their consumer habits and highlights the growing shift from traditional in-store shopping to digital retail experiences.

On the other hand, 9.5% of respondents who do not shop online using their accounts are likely minors or individuals with limited financial independence, suggesting a lower engagement with e-commerce among this subgroup. As these individuals age and gain more autonomy, they are expected to follow the broader trend of online shopping. For retailers and marketers, this finding emphasizes the importance of enhancing digital platforms and offering personalized, user-friendly experiences to cater to the evolving preferences of Generation Z. In conclusion, the overwhelming trend toward online shopping among Generation Z signals that

businesses must continue to innovate and adapt their e-commerce strategies to stay competitive in a digitally driven retail landscape.

The high rate of online shopping adoption among Generation Z presents both opportunities and challenges for businesses. Retailers should focus on enhancing their digital presence to meet the growing demand for e-commerce, especially given that Generation Z consumers are likely to prefer shopping online even as they age. To remain competitive, businesses must prioritize user-friendly digital interfaces, mobile-optimized websites, and personalized shopping experiences that cater to the preferences of this tech-savvy generation.

Moreover, the popularity of online shopping among Generation Z underlines retailers' need to streamline their e-commerce processes, ensuring fast, secure, and convenient shopping experiences. Offering options like easy payment methods, rapid delivery, and responsive customer service will likely continue to attract this demographic.

The survey results underscore the growing importance of online shopping for Generation Z, marking a significant shift in consumer behavior. Generation Z is reshaping the retail landscape with a strong preference for e-commerce and digital transactions. Businesses must continue to adapt their strategies to meet the needs of this generation by focusing on convenience, personalization, and technological innovation in their online platforms.

Table 6 Frequency of Online Shopping

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	201	52.9%
Often	92	24.2%
Rarely	49	12.9%
Always	38	10.0%
Total	380	100.0%

The findings from Table 6 indicate that online shopping is not a habitual activity among Generation Z consumers. While a significant portion of respondents (52.9%) shop online occasionally, only 10% do so consistently, and a smaller group (12.9%) engages in it rarely. This suggests that while online shopping is accessible and increasingly integrated into their lifestyle, it is not yet a daily behavior for most of Generation Z. Several factors may explain this, such as a preference for experiences over material goods, financial constraints, or environmental concerns. Additionally, while digital shopping offers convenience, the lack of habitual engagement might reflect generational values prioritizing authenticity and social interaction over constant consumption. These results underline a more measured approach to e-commerce, where online shopping is integrated into life but not necessarily a dominant activity.

The trend observed in the responses aligns with other studies on Generation Z's shopping behavior, which show that while this demographic is highly comfortable with online shopping, their purchasing frequency varies (Lopez & Garcia, 2022). The fact that more than half of the respondents (52.9%) shop online sometimes suggests that online shopping is integrated into their lives, but not necessarily a daily routine for many. This could be attributed to factors such as budget constraints, product availability, or the nature of the items they typically purchase, as not all purchases require frequent online transactions. Additionally, the 10% of respondents who reported that they always shop online highlights a smaller segment of consumers who may prioritize digital shopping more heavily, possibly due to convenience, product preference, or brand loyalty.

The findings also reflect Generation Z's growing influence on the retail sector, as they are accustomed to digital technologies and often turn to online platforms for various reasons, from ease of comparison shopping

to better deals (Nguyen & Santos, 2023). However, the variation in frequency suggests that while online shopping is popular, it does not entirely replace traditional shopping behaviors for everyone in this generation. It indicates a balanced approach, where digital shopping is an important part of the consumer experience but may not be the sole product acquisition method.

Influence of SMI Attributes on Generation Z's Parasocial Relationships

Table 7 Attributes as to Types of SMI on Factors Considered in Following SMI of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	Percentage (%)	(Most Frequent Response)	Descriptive Result
1. I follow SMI, who is trustworthy.	100.00	4	SA
2. I follow the posts of bloggers and vloggers online.	18.28	3	A
3. I follow SMI, and I can relate to their content.	17.71	3	A
4. I follow the posts of online celebrities on different social media platforms.	17.55	3	A
5. I follow experts with user experience.	17.47	3	A
6. I follow SMI with quality content.	15.19	3	A
7. I usually consider the number of followers of the influencer I follow.	13.81	3	A
Overall Most Frequent Response (MFR)		3	A

The findings from Table 7 offer valuable insights into Generation Z's preferences regarding Social Media Influencers (SMIs) as factors considered in following them. The data reveal that most respondents indicated "Agree" (3) across the majority of indicators, particularly for statements such as "I follow the posts of online celebrities on different social media platforms" and "I follow the posts of bloggers and vloggers online." This highlights Generation Z's high level of engagement with various types of influencers. Additionally, respondents agree that they consider the number of followers, follow SMIs with quality content, and prefer influencers whose content is relatable. Importantly, trustworthiness stood out with a "Strongly Agree" (4) response, indicating that it is the most influential attribute. These patterns were critically analyzed through Source Credibility Theory, which posits that an influencer's trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness significantly affect the audience's acceptance of their message (Ohanian, 1990). The data underscore that trustworthiness and perceived expertise are pivotal to Generation Z's loyalty toward SMIs, confirming previous findings (Salukov, 2023; Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021). Hence, influencers perceived as credible sources can better foster strong parasocial relationships, significantly impacting consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior.

The results also align with the principles of Social Media Marketing, which emphasize leveraging digital platforms to create value through engagement, content, and community. Generation Z's preference for influencers who produce high-quality, relatable, and experience-based content reflects a strategic shift from traditional marketing to interactive, content-driven engagement. Nano- and micro-influencers, often characterized by smaller but highly engaged audiences, exemplify this approach by offering personalized interactions and authenticity that mass-market celebrities may lack (Kay et al., 2020). This suggests that brands seeking to capture Generation Z's attention should prioritize ongoing digital campaigns and collaborations with credible and relatable influencers, rather than relying on one-off, high-reach endorsements. Moreover, insights from the Source Attractiveness Model further clarify the results: while physical attractiveness was not the primary emphasis, the elements of likability and relatability were central. Influencers who reflect the

audience’s lifestyle, values, and interests—key dimensions of perceived attractiveness—are more effective in influencing Generation Z’s behaviors. Therefore, those who successfully combine trustworthiness, expertise, and emotional relatability emerge as the most powerful voices in the digital space. In sum, the findings affirm that for Generation Z, influencer marketing success lies not in sheer popularity but in credibility, authenticity, and digital engagement.

Table 8 Attributes as to Types of SMI on Type of SMI Followed by Most of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	(Most Frequent Response)	Descriptive Result
1. 0 - 10,000 followers	3	MF
2. 10,000 - 100,000 followers	2	MDF
3. 100,000+ followers	3	LF
Overall Most Frequent Response (MFR)	3	MF

The results from Table 8 offer important insights into the types of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) most followed by Generation Z consumers. Based on the data, the most frequent response (MFR) was "3" (Most Followed) for Nano-influencers with 0–10,000 followers, while Micro-influencers with 10,000–100,000 followers were marked as 2 (Moderately Followed), and Macro-influencers with 100,000+ followers were identified as 3 (Least Followed). These findings, addressing SOP 2.1, reinforce the growing academic consensus that Generation Z prefers nano-influencers (those with 0–10,000 followers) over larger influencers. This preference aligns with studies by Hudders et al. (2020) and Ladhari et al. (2020), which emphasize that nano-influencers are often seen as more relatable, genuine, and accessible, enabling deeper, trust-based engagement with followers. The strong following for nano-influencers suggests that Generation Z values authenticity and close, personal interactions more than mass visibility or celebrity status (Kay et al., 2020; Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021).

Furthermore, the lower engagement with influencers having 10,000–100,000 followers (moderately followed) and over 100,000 followers (least followed) supports the view that macro-influencers are often perceived as less authentic and more commercialized by Generation Z audiences (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020; Salukov, 2023). Macro-influencers tend to project a polished image that Generation Z, with its emphasis on transparency and self-expression, often distrusts. These results suggest a critical shift in digital marketing: brands seeking meaningful engagement with Generation Z must collaborate with nano-influencers who offer relatability, authenticity, and highly engaged communities, rather than relying solely on influencers with mass appeal.

Critically, these findings align with the Source Credibility Theory and the Source Attractiveness Model. According to Source Credibility Theory (Ohanian, 1990), an influencer’s trustworthiness and expertise are key determinants of their persuasive power—qualities that nano-influencers often exhibit more strongly due to their perceived authenticity and proximity to followers. The Source Attractiveness Model further supports this, highlighting that relatability and likability are crucial elements of influence. Nano-influencers, through shared experiences and genuine communication, satisfy these dimensions, making them more effective in building emotional and parasocial relationships. Additionally, the results resonate with Social Proof Theory, which emphasizes that individuals look to the behaviors and endorsements of others—especially relatable peers—to guide their own decisions. Nano-influencers’ close-knit communities and authentic interactions serve as powerful social proof, enhancing consumer trust, loyalty, and long-term engagement.

In conclusion, the study findings clearly indicate that Generation Z’s most-followed influencers are nano-influencers (0–10,000 followers), highlighting the generation’s preference for authenticity, trust, and relatability over fame or mass popularity. Brands aiming to connect authentically with Generation Z must strategically partner with nano-influencers who can deliver not only reach but also genuine, high-value engagement, ultimately leading to stronger brand loyalty and sustainable marketing success.

Table 9 Attribute as to Types of SMI on Perceived Popularity of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	Percentage(%)	Mode	DR
1. I find influencers' popularity based on the number of fans and audience.	22.19	3	A
2. I find branded products endorsed more favorable.	17.52	3	A
3. I find products endorsed with multiple purchases more reliable.	15.99	3	A
4. I purchase products that SMIs popularly introduce	15.18	3	A
5. I do not care about the product's popularity at all	15.18	3	A
6. I most likely purchase products with numerous comments, likes, and views.	13.93	3	A
Overall Mode		3	A

The results presented in Table 9 address SOP 2.2, focusing on the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on Generation Z consumers' perceptions of popularity. The most frequent response (MFR) across all indicators was "Agree" (3), indicating that Generation Z consumers are significantly responsive to popularity cues when engaging in purchasing behavior.

The findings demonstrate that Generation Z consumers purchase products popularly introduced by SMIs, suggesting that influencer endorsements serve as a credible source of product validation. This observation is consistent with the arguments of Lou et al. (2022), who emphasized that visible popularity cues—such as likes, comments, and shares—play a pivotal role in enhancing spontaneous purchasing behavior by providing reassurance through social proof.

Furthermore, the data reveal that respondents associate an influencer's credibility with follower count and audience size. This reflects the notion that popularity metrics are not merely superficial but serve as proxies for trustworthiness and expertise, aligning with Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility Theory. Influencers with substantial followings are perceived to hold higher authority, increasing their persuasive potential over Generation Z consumers.

The tendency to purchase products with numerous comments, likes, and views further highlights the importance of social proof in Generation Z's decision-making process. As Zhao et al. (2021) noted, high engagement metrics encourage trust, suggesting that Generation Z consumers interpret collective behavior as an indicator of product quality and reliability. Similarly, endorsement by influencers and the visibility of multiple purchases reinforce the perception of credibility and reliability. This is consistent with Xiao et al. (2022), who argued that popularity can act as a risk-reduction mechanism during purchasing decisions.

Additionally, the preference for branded products endorsed by influencers indicates that Generation Z equates brand affiliation with product desirability, reflecting a strategic relationship between brand image and influencer reputation. This implies that influencer marketing strategies that leverage well-known brands can further enhance consumer trust and loyalty among this cohort.

However, it is important to note that some respondents also agreed with the statement that they "do not care about the product's popularity at all," suggesting that although popularity significantly influences behavior, it does not uniformly dictate consumer choices. This finding resonates with the work of Rizaldi (2022), who posited that while popularity enhances perceived product value, intrinsic product quality, authenticity, and personal relevance often take precedence in the final purchasing decision.

This nuanced perspective aligns with Social Proof Theory, which emphasizes the importance of trust, emotional connection, and authenticity as validated by the behaviors and endorsements of others. For Generation Z, although popularity metrics enhance credibility, they simultaneously seek authenticity and genuine value alignment from influencers. As Goedegebure et al. (2020) observed, the effectiveness of popularity cues varies depending on the type of product being promoted; casual lifestyle products may benefit more from popularity signals than functional or essential goods.

Overall, the findings underscore that while Generation Z consumers are highly influenced by the perceived popularity of SMIs and their endorsed products, popularity alone is insufficient. Engagement metrics and visible social proof enhance perceived credibility and encourage purchase behavior, but authenticity, product quality, and personal relevance remain critical. For brands and marketers targeting Generation Z, these insights highlight the necessity of balancing visible popularity with authentic engagement and value-driven marketing strategies to achieve sustained consumer trust and loyalty.

Table 10 addresses SOP 2.3 by examining Generation Z consumers' perceptions of the alignment—or "fit"—between social media influencers (SMIs) and the products they endorse. The results indicate that the overall Most Frequent Response (MFR) across the indicators was "Agree" (3), suggesting that Generation Z consumers place considerable importance on the perceived congruence between an influencer's image and the products they promote.

Table 10 Attributes as to Types of SMI on Perceived Fit of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	DR
1. I rely on influencers knowledgeable about the product.	22.28	3	A
2. The influencer's credibility influences product effectiveness.	20.16	3	A
3. I relate to the influencer's image, which is similar to mine.	20.06	3	A
4. I trust influencers who have significant experience with the product.	19.15	3	A
5. I find the products reliable if they match the influencer's image.	18.35	3	A
6. I do not care about the product's perceived fitness.		2	D
Overall Mode		3	A

Respondents emphasized that they find products more reliable when these products align with the influencer's image, reinforcing the relevance of the Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953) in understanding this dynamic. According to this theory, an endorser's trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness significantly influence the effectiveness of a message. In this context, a strong influencer-product fit enhances the influencer's perceived credibility, thereby increasing the persuasiveness of the endorsement and strengthening consumer trust in the product. Moreover, this finding aligns with the match-up hypothesis, which asserts that endorsements are more effective when there is a strong association between the endorser's characteristics and the endorsed product (Giovanni & Gunawan, 2022). The congruence between the influencer's image and the product thus elevates the endorsement's credibility, increasing the likelihood of purchase.

The consistent agreement across indicators further highlights the influence of influencer expertise. Respondents valued influencers' knowledge and experience with the products they promote, echoing the importance of Source Credibility Theory (Hovlan et al., 1953). This theory emphasizes that an endorser's expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness collectively determine how persuasive their message will be. When consumers perceive influencers as highly knowledgeable, it enhances the influencer's credibility, reduces uncertainty, and fosters trust in the product being endorsed, ultimately promoting purchase intentions. This observation aligns with the findings of Park and Lin (2020), who argue that expertise significantly enhances endorsement credibility and persuasive power.

A particularly insightful aspect of the findings is the acknowledgment that relatability strengthens the consumer-influencer connection. Respondents agreed with the statement, "I relate to the influencer's image, which is similar to mine," emphasizing that emotional identification fosters deeper engagement. This supports the personal identification theory, which suggests that individuals are more likely to be influenced by those who reflect their self-image and values (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Relatability, therefore, acts as an emotional bridge between the consumer and the product, amplifying the persuasive impact of the endorsement.

Moreover, the strong agreement with the statement that "the influencer's credibility influences product effectiveness" demonstrates that trustworthiness and authenticity are central to Generation Z's acceptance of marketing messages. This observation mirrors Balaban et al.'s (2022) research, where influencer credibility was identified as a critical determinant of endorsement effectiveness. Notably, credibility is closely intertwined with expertise and trust, key factors that mitigate perceived risks and influence consumer evaluations of products. This is particularly salient among Generation Z, who are widely recognized for their skepticism toward overt advertising and preference for authentic and transparent communications (Nafees et al., 2021).

The response to the statement "I do not care about the product's perceived fitness," which was "Disagree" (2), introduces an important dimension for interpretation. It suggests that, for Generation Z, perceived fit is not merely a peripheral factor but a crucial element influencing trust and purchase intention. This finding challenges earlier assumptions that product popularity or low pricing alone could override the significance of influencer-product congruence (Rizaldi, 2022). Instead, it affirms that Generation Z consumers carefully evaluate the authenticity of endorsements, valuing a strong and natural association between influencer and product over superficial popularity metrics.

The understanding of perceived fit also finds resonance in the broader influencer marketing literature. Lou et al. (2021) demonstrated that influencers who reflect consumer lifestyles and values generate stronger emotional engagement and higher purchase likelihood. Similarly, Wu et al. (2022) argued that congruence between an influencer's image and the endorsed product significantly enhances perceived authenticity and credibility, further strengthening endorsement effectiveness. These findings collectively suggest that perceived fit functions as a form of social proof, wherein consumers interpret the influencer's alignment with a product as a signal of its desirability and legitimacy. As people tend to follow the behavior of others—especially those they admire or relate to—this congruence reinforces both personal attitudes and the social validation attached to purchasing behavior.

These results reflect the broader shifts in consumer behavior among younger demographics, particularly Generation Z. As digital natives, Generation Z consumers approach marketing with heightened awareness and discernment, expecting influencers to embody authenticity, expertise, and a genuine connection to the products they endorse. The implications for brands are clear: influencer marketing strategies targeting Generation Z must prioritize authentic brand-influencer alignment, ensuring that partnerships are not merely transactional but reflective of shared values and lifestyles.

In conclusion, Table 10 illustrates that the perceived fit between influencers and products significantly shapes Generation Z's purchasing behavior. The findings align with and extend the Source Credibility Theory by demonstrating that attitudes toward the product, the perceived credibility of the influencer, and evaluations of their expertise and trustworthiness collectively influence purchasing intentions. Therefore, brands seeking to engage Generation Z must move beyond superficial endorsements, carefully selecting influencers whose image and persona authentically align with the brand's identity and values. By doing so, they can foster trust, enhance endorsement effectiveness, and ultimately drive stronger consumer engagement and loyalty.

Table 11 Attributes as to Types of SMI on Content Creation/Style of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	DR
1. I favor content with high-quality and trustworthy information.	54	4	SA

2. I am attracted to content with creativity, design, and technological quality.	46	4	SA
3. I trust appealing content that disseminates brand-related information.	35	3	A
4. I follow video content regularly.	33	3	A
5. I relate to content with emotional appeal as if it sympathizes with the viewer.	31	3	A
6. I do not care about the content as long as I like the product.		2	D
Overall Mode		3	A

Table 11 reveals Generation Z’s nuanced approach to content creation and style in social media influencer (SMI) marketing, highlighting their high expectations for quality, emotional resonance, and authenticity. The results indicate that a majority of respondents strongly agree that they prefer content that is high-quality and trustworthy, with 54% expressing this sentiment. Similarly, 46% strongly agree that they are attracted to content featuring creativity, design, and technological quality. Meanwhile, about one-third of those who responded “agree” trust appealing content that effectively disseminates brand-related information (35%), regularly follow video content (33%), and relate to content with emotional appeal that seems to sympathize with the viewer (31%). Very few respondents (2%) disagreed with the statement that they do not care about the content as long as they like the product. Overall, the average response reflects agreement, highlighting that quality, trustworthiness, creativity, and emotional resonance are important factors driving engagement and purchase behavior among the respondents.

The results show a clear preference for content that balances creativity, technological sophistication, and trustworthiness. Respondents strongly agreed with the statements that they are attracted to content with creativity, design, and technological quality, as well as high-quality and trustworthy content. This preference reflects Generation Z’s digital fluency, having grown up in highly polished and sophisticated digital media. As emphasized by Faisal et al. (2020) and Cheung et al. (2022), high-quality, aesthetically pleasing content is eye-catching and signals brand credibility and the professionalism of influencers, ultimately fostering consumer trust.

This preference aligns with Source Credibility Theory, which asserts that the credibility of a message source, such as an influencer, affects how persuasive that message is. According to this theory, factors like expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the source play a pivotal role in influencing consumer behavior (Hovland, 1953). In the context of this study, Generation Z consumers highly value content that exudes credibility, both in terms of the influencer's perceived professionalism (via high-quality production and design) and in the trustworthiness of the information provided. The emphasis on trustworthy content, where the influencer’s narrative aligns with their image and values, underpins the significant role that perceived credibility plays in shaping purchasing decisions. Generation Z’s preference for authentic and professional content reinforces the need for influencers to establish trust with their followers through both content quality and transparency.

Furthermore, the Social Attractiveness Model is highly relevant here, as it focuses on how likability, relatability, and emotional connection enhance an influencer’s persuasive impact. The emotional appeal that resonates with Generation Z, as highlighted by the strong agreement with "I relate to content with emotional appeal as if it sympathizes with the viewer," speaks to the need for influencers to create deeper, emotional bonds with their followers. By establishing parasocial relationships—where followers feel a personal connection to the influencer—brands and influencers can nurture consumer loyalty and enhance engagement. This emotional connection, facilitated through engaging and empathetic content, helps foster lasting consumer relationships, where the influencer is seen not just as a promoter but as someone with whom the consumer shares values and experiences.

Additionally, the Source Attractiveness Model provides further insight into Generation Z's content preferences. This model suggests that consumers are more likely to be influenced by sources they find physically attractive, similar to themselves, or likable (Kelman, 1961). In the context of influencer marketing, this model suggests that influencers who appear relatable, approachable, and consistent with the values of their audience are more likely to create effective engagement. Generation Z's preference for micro-influencers (0-10,000 followers) over macro-influencers is a reflection of this model, where followers are drawn to influencers they perceive as more authentic, personable, and aligned with their own identities. Micro-influencers often come across as more accessible and less commercialized, fostering a stronger, more genuine connection that appeals to Generation Z's desire for authenticity.

Social Media Marketing also plays a crucial role in understanding Generation Z's responses to influencer content. As a strategic approach that leverages digital platforms to engage consumers, social media marketing emphasizes the importance of content quality, personalization, and community-building. In the case of Generation Z, their preferences for high production standards and emotionally engaging content reflect the value they place on compelling digital experiences. Additionally, their reliance on peer validation and alignment with influencers who share their values underscores the importance of community-driven content in shaping engagement and purchase behavior. Generation Z's digital fluency further empowers them to actively manage their online experiences, curate their feeds, selectively follow influencers, and interact with content that resonates with their personal identity. This interactive and empowered consumption pattern highlights the effectiveness of well-targeted social media marketing strategies in influencing their behavior and brand loyalty.

A key finding in this study is the rejection of the notion that "I do not care about the content as long as I like the product." Generation Z is not willing to overlook poor content quality for the sake of a desirable product. This contrasts with earlier assumptions that product preference alone could override weak messaging (Zurita Wan Ahmad et al., 2020). Generation Z demands high-quality, engaging content that aligns with their values, showcasing how content style, emotional appeal, and influencer authenticity influence their purchasing behavior.

The preference for video content further highlights Generation Z's inclination toward dynamic and emotionally engaging media. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, where short-form video content reigns, provide influencers with the tools to convey emotions, personality, and personal experiences in ways that static images cannot. The success of video-based content in capturing attention aligns with the findings of Park and Lin (2020) and Woodroof et al. (2020), who argue that video content allows for deeper emotional resonance and more meaningful connections between influencers and followers.

Finally, the preference for micro-influencers reinforces the importance of engagement over reach. Generation Z's inclination toward influencers with smaller, more engaged followings is consistent with the Source Attractiveness Model, which emphasizes the importance of relatability and personal connection. Micro-influencers often create more authentic, personalized content, fostering a sense of community and deeper trust with their followers. As Hudders et al. (2020) note, these influencers generate stronger consumer loyalty and are better positioned to influence Generation Z's purchasing decisions.

In conclusion, the findings from Table 11 emphasize that Generation Z's interaction with influencer content is shaped by a sophisticated evaluation of both content quality and influencer authenticity. Source Credibility Theory, Source Attractiveness Model, and Social Proof Theory all provide valuable insights into how content creation and style influence Generation Z's engagement and purchasing behavior. High-quality, emotionally resonant, and creatively executed content is essential for capturing their attention and fostering trust. Generation Z's rejection of low-quality content underscores the necessity for influencers and brands to deliver engaging, authentic, and high-standard digital experiences. Moreover, through the lens of Social Proof Theory, the popularity and engagement surrounding influencer content—such as likes, shares, and comments—serve as validation cues that further shape purchasing decisions by signaling product trustworthiness and social approval.

Perception of Parasocial Relationships Among Generation Z Consumers

Table 12 focuses on how Generation Z perceives parasocial relationships (PSR) with social media influencers (SMIs) and the influence of SMI attributes, such as credibility, emotional appeal, and expertise, on their followership.

Table 12 Perception of Parasocial Relationships and the Influence of SMI Attributes on Generation Z's Followership

Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	Descriptive Result
1. I feel connected to the influencers when I view or listen to their posts.	16.38	3	A
2. I can relate to influencers who have credible and emotionally appealing content.	15.97	3	A
3. I feel more at ease with SMI based on their number of followers.	14.67	3	A
4. I believe in influencers who are experts in providing their product information.	14.67	3	A
5. I trust the influencers with numerous views, comments, likes, and shares.	14.05	3	A
6. I feel strongly connected to the SMI whenever I watch him/her.	12.89	3	A
7. I feel like the SMI's are my friends whom I trust with their opinions and reviews.	11.38	3	A
Overall Mode		3	A

The Overall Most Frequent Response (MFR) of "Agree" (3) across all indicators signals that Generation Z consumers consistently value the key elements of parasocial relationships: credibility, emotional appeal, expertise, and relatability in their interactions with influencers. This indicates that, for Generation Z, influencers are not just seen as product endorsers but as trusted figures whose opinions are closely tied to their personal identities and emotional experiences.

A notable aspect of the findings is Generation Z's preference for influencers with high visibility, reflected in their comfort with influencers who boast large followings, views, and likes. This preference aligns with the social proof concept, wherein individuals use the behavior of others (such as the number of followers and engagement metrics) to guide their own decisions, especially in situations of uncertainty (Cialdini, 2021). Social proof is a proxy for trustworthiness and credibility, suggesting that Generation Z is more likely to trust influencers with a demonstrated popularity. This finding supports Social Influence Theory, which posits that people are influenced by others' behaviors when making decisions.

However, while social proof is important, it is not the only element driving Generation Z's engagement with influencers. The emotional appeal of content plays a central role in developing parasocial relationships, as indicated by Generation Z's agreement with statements such as "I feel connected to influencers" and "I feel strongly connected to the SMI whenever I watch him/her." Parasocial relationships, a term coined by Horton and Wohl (1956), describe one-sided relationships where followers feel a sense of intimacy and personal connection with influencers, even without direct interactions. As Tukachinsky and Stever (2023) explain, these relationships help create a sense of familiarity, making influencers seem like close, trusted friends.

Moreover, emotional appeal fosters this intimacy and increases engagement with content. Generation Z consumers are drawn to influencers whose content resonates with them emotionally, whether through relatable experiences, authentic storytelling, or empathetic expressions. According to Yuan and Lou (2020), parasocial relationships are cultivated when viewers perceive influencers as emotionally accessible, thus enhancing their sense of connection and loyalty. Reinikainen et al. (2020) reinforce this notion, demonstrating that parasocial engagement significantly boosts influencer credibility, which in turn increases consumer trust and purchase intentions. Therefore, influencers who cultivate emotionally engaging and authentic content create stronger parasocial bonds, increasing consumer loyalty and willingness to follow their product recommendations.

The role of expertise is another crucial component. The finding that Generation Z values influencers who provide credible and knowledgeable product information reflects an inherent desire for trust and reliability. This aligns with Bi and Zhang's (2022) argument that consumers trust influencers who demonstrate expertise in their respective domains. Expertise, in this context, is seen as a form of credibility, which is essential for shaping consumer attitudes and purchase behavior. Woodroof et al. (2020) support this view, stating that expert influencers can influence consumer attitudes and evaluations by positioning themselves as credible sources of information. In a world of overabundance of content, expertise becomes a powerful differentiator, helping influencers stand out and gain Generation Z's trust.

Additionally, relatability is highly valued by Generation Z, as seen in their tendency to feel more connected to influencers who share relatable and emotionally appealing content. The relatability factor is critical because it builds a foundation for authenticity, one of the most valued qualities among Generation Z consumers (Schouten et al., 2021). Generation Z is particularly attuned to influencers who share personal stories, insights, and experiences that resonate with their own lives and values. This connection fosters trust and deepens the parasocial relationship, making followers more likely to trust the influencer's opinions and endorsements.

Interestingly, Generation Z perceives influencers as "friends", a testament to the strength of the parasocial relationship they have developed. This view of influencers as trusted friends aligns with research by Su et al. (2021), who found that parasocial relationships lead to stronger engagement and increased trust in influencer recommendations. Reinikainen et al. (2020) further highlight that the emotional attachment fostered by these one-sided relationships encourages followers to follow the influencer's product recommendations, seeing them as more genuine and trustworthy.

This analysis reflects the theoretical underpinnings of several marketing concepts. Source Credibility Theory (Hovland, 1953) explains how Generation Z's trust in influencers is shaped by their perceived expertise and trustworthiness. Influencers with larger followings and strong engagement metrics signal social proof, enhancing their credibility in Generation Z consumers' eyes. The theory suggests that consumers are likelier to follow and trust influencers who exhibit these credibility attributes, ultimately influencing purchasing behavior.

Social Media Marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) also plays a role in explaining the findings. Generation Z's emotional connections with influencers reflect a marketing approach centered on continuous engagement, content personalization, and community-building rather than just transactional interactions. Influencers build ongoing trust and loyalty by nurturing parasocial relationships through authentic and interactive content, which is crucial for sustained influence and deeper consumer engagement over time.

Finally, the Source Attractiveness Model (Kelman, 1961) posits that consumers are more likely to be influenced by attractive or relatable sources. Generation Z's preference for emotionally appealing content and influencers who resonate with their values supports this model, suggesting that influencers' ability to create relatable, engaging content is as important as their visibility and expertise.

Table 12 highlights the key role of parasocial relationships in shaping Generation Z's engagement with influencers. The findings underscore the importance of credibility, emotional appeal, expertise, and relatability in fostering these relationships. Social proof, emotional connection, and expertise are crucial to building trust and influencing consumer behavior. By cultivating authentic, emotionally engaging, and credible content, influencers can strengthen their parasocial bonds with Generation Z, resulting in greater consumer loyalty and more effective marketing strategies. These insights provide valuable implications for brands seeking to

leverage influencer marketing in ways that resonate with Generation Z and drive sustained consumer engagement.

Extent of Purchasing Behavior Indicators Exhibited by Generation Z Consumers

Table 13 Purchasing Behavior of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	DR
1. I feel secure in purchasing products endorsed by SMIs.		3	SA
2. I am more convinced to purchase after following SMIs who seem to be friends with their opinions and reviews.	28	3	A
3. I purchase products after watching an influencer's expert and trustworthy posts.	27	3	A
4. SMIs make me feel confident in making online purchases.	24	3	A
5. I asked my parents to purchase the product for me.	21	3	A
6. I purchase the products using my account.		4	D
Overall Mode		3	A

The results from Table 13 provide valuable insights into Generation Z's purchasing behavior, particularly regarding social media influencers (SMIs). The responses suggest that Generation Z consumers are highly influenced by the opinions and endorsements of SMIs, with many reporting increased confidence in online purchases after following influencers who seem relatable and trustworthy. For example, the statement "I am more convinced to purchase after following SMIs who seem to be friends with their opinions and reviews" received an MFR of 3 (Agree), which aligns with the Social Proof Theory. This theory posits that individuals often look to others—especially those they admire or perceive as similar—for cues on how to behave. In this case, Generation Z's tendency to trust and emulate influencers reflects their reliance on social proof in digital environments. The emotional bond formed through parasocial relationships further amplifies this effect, making the influencer's endorsements feel more genuine and persuasive, thus increasing the likelihood of purchase.

Moreover, the statements "I purchase products after watching an influencer's expert and trustworthy posts" and "SMIs make me feel confident in making online purchases" both received an MFR of 3 (Agree), further supporting the idea that credibility and expertise are significant factors in shaping purchase intentions. These findings fit well with TPB's concept of subjective norms, where the influence of external factors, such as the opinions of trusted influencers, guides the consumer's purchasing decisions. Generation Z's reliance on influencers for product recommendations suggests that they look to these social cues to determine the appropriateness of their buying behavior.

The statement "I feel secure in purchasing products endorsed by SMIs" was rated with a strong agreement (MFR = 3, SA), indicating that Generation Z places high importance on security and trust in online transactions. This perception of security can be understood through the perceived behavioral control component of TPB, which suggests that when consumers feel they have control over the purchasing process, such as trusting the influencer and feeling safe in their transactions, they are more likely to proceed with purchases. However, this sense of security and confidence does not fully translate into behavior in all cases, as evidenced by the statement "I purchase the products using my account," which received a disagree response (MFR = 4, D). This indicates that despite high levels of trust in influencers and the overall purchasing process,

many Generation Z consumers still hesitate to make purchases through their accounts, possibly due to concerns about payment security or a lack of financial independence.

The response to "I asked my parents to purchase the product for me" with an MFR of 3 (Agree) further highlights the financial dependency of Generation Z. Although they are confident in the purchasing decision and trust the influencer's endorsement, external constraints such as financial dependence on parents still play a significant role in their final purchasing behavior. This aligns with the Consumer Decision-Making Theory, which emphasizes that consumer decisions are not solely based on internal factors (such as attitudes and intentions) but are also influenced by external circumstances, such as financial capability and access to payment methods.

The findings illustrate that while Generation Z is highly influenced by the credibility and trustworthiness of social media influencers, external factors like financial dependence and perceived control over transactions still shape their final purchasing decisions. TPB and Consumer Decision-Making Theory help explain this behavior by highlighting the interplay between internal attitudes, external social influences, and constraints such as financial independence. To bridge the gap between intention and actual purchase, marketers targeting this demographic must consider strategies that address the emotional connection with influencers and the practical barriers, such as secure and convenient payment options.

Significant Difference In The Perception Of The Generation Z Consumer

Table 14 Significant Difference in Generation Z's Perception of SMI Attributes, Parasocial Relationships, and Purchasing Behavior by Gender

Indicators	Gender (N)		P-value	Interpretation
	Male	Female		
A. SMI Attributes				
1. Type of SMI				
1.1 Factors Considered in Following SMI			<0.001	S
1.2. Type of SMI Followed Most	173.87	198.75		
1.2.1 0 - 10,000 followers			0.027	S
1.2.2 10,000 – 100,000 followers	190.17	190.66	0.962	NS
1.2.3 100,000+ followers	202.90	184.35	0.090	NS
2. Perceived Popularity	174.23	198.57	0.022	S
3. Perceived Fit	171.00	200.17	0.005	S
4. Content Creation Style	197.23	187.16	0.340	NS
B. Parasocial Relationship	170.22	200.56	0.003	S
C. Purchasing Behavior	178.75	196.33	0.103	NS

The results presented in Table 14 reveal important gender-based dynamics in Generation Z's perceptions of social media influencer (SMI) attributes, parasocial relationships, and purchasing behavior. Beginning with the significant indicators, it is evident that gender plays a substantial role in how young consumers engage with influencers, particularly at more personal and emotional levels.

First, the significant difference in the factors considered in following an SMI (p -value = 0.000) highlights that males and females prioritize distinct criteria when choosing which influencer to engage with. Female respondents are more influenced by emotional authenticity, relatability, and alignment with personal values, while males may be more attracted to factors such as entertainment, expertise, or aspirational qualities. This finding is consistent with the Social Attractiveness Model, which emphasizes that likability, relatability, and emotional connection are essential to consumer engagement and loyalty. Source Credibility Theory notes that perceptions of expertise and trustworthiness vary based on audience characteristics.

The type of SMI followed, particularly nano-influencers (0–10,000 followers), shows a significant gender difference (p -value = 0.027), with females demonstrating a stronger preference for this category. Nano-influencers are perceived as more relatable, trustworthy, and authentic, offering more personalized engagement, which resonates more with female Generation Z consumers who value sincerity and emotional connection. This finding aligns with the Source Attractiveness Model, which emphasizes that likability, familiarity, and perceived similarity enhance persuasiveness, as well as with Social Proof Theory, which stresses the influence of observing others' behaviors and endorsements in shaping decisions and trust. Females are more inclined to engage with influencers they perceive as genuine peers, fostering stronger parasocial relationships that drive higher trust and responsiveness. In contrast, no significant gender differences were observed for micro-influencers (10,000–100,000 followers; p -value = 0.962) and macro-influencers (100,000+ followers; p -value = 0.090), suggesting that as influencers gain larger followings, perceptions shift towards a more uniform evaluation across genders based on factors like credibility, authority, and content quality rather than emotional closeness. This trend reflects the principles of Source Credibility Theory, where audiences assess influencers more through competence and expertise when relational intimacy decreases. Therefore, while females display stronger emotional engagement with nano-influencers, both male and female consumers tend to assess larger influencers through a more cognitive, standardized lens, indicating that brands should leverage nano-influencers for building emotional trust, particularly among females, and use macro-influencers to emphasize credibility and aspirational status when targeting Generation Z more broadly.

Significant gender differences were also found in perceived popularity (p -value = 0.022), with females placing greater importance on the social validation and perceived social standing of social media influencers (SMIs). This suggests that for female Generation Z consumers, an influencer's visible popularity—such as the number of likes, followers, and positive comments—serves as a heuristic for trustworthiness and credibility. In digital spaces where direct personal interaction is absent, social proof becomes a powerful substitute for interpersonal trust. This finding is strongly supported by the Source Credibility Theory, which posits that an individual's credibility is enhanced when they are seen as widely accepted and endorsed by others. For females, the popularity of an SMI appears to serve as both a shortcut for assessing reliability and an affirmation of the influencer's value within a social context. In contrast, males appear to be less reliant on popularity metrics when evaluating SMIs, possibly indicating a more independent assessment based on content quality or expertise rather than peer validation. This gender-based difference highlights how females may be more influenced by communal signals and social acceptance patterns, aligning with broader psychological research that suggests women tend to be more relational and attuned to social approval processes. Consequently, marketing strategies aiming to influence female Generation Z consumers may benefit from emphasizing influencers' visible popularity and communal support. In contrast, for males, strategies highlighting individual expertise and content value may be more effective.

Furthermore, a significant gender difference in perceived fit (p -value = 0.005) indicates that females value the congruence between themselves and the influencer, meaning they are more likely to connect with influencers who reflect their identity, lifestyle, and values. This finding highlights that for female Generation Z consumers, the perception of "fit" is not merely about admiration but about personal resonance, where influencers become symbols of aspirational identity and community belonging. This strongly supports the principles of the Social Attractiveness Model, which emphasizes that likability, perceived similarity, and emotional connection are

crucial for building trust, loyalty, and deeper consumer commitment. Emotional resonance, therefore, becomes a key driver of engagement for females, who prefer influencers that mirror their beliefs and life aspirations. In contrast, males appear less influenced by perceived fit, suggesting that their engagement decisions are more transactional or content-driven than relational. Males may prioritize other attributes such as entertainment value, expertise, humor, or novelty, aligning more closely with cognitive-based evaluations rather than emotional identification. This difference indicates that males might follow influencers based on perceived utility or entertainment rather than emotional affinity, making emotional fit a weaker predictor of influence among male audiences. The greater importance females place on perceived fit also aligns with the broader shift in digital marketing toward authenticity and niche targeting, especially for brands seeking to foster loyal female followings. Therefore, influencer marketing strategies aiming at females must focus more on building authentic, value-aligned relationships, while for males, strategies emphasizing informational value, humor, or innovation might be more effective. Overall, the gendered difference in perceived fit reveals that emotional alignment is a critical success factor, particularly for engaging female Generation Z consumers, while different, more pragmatic influencer attributes may drive male engagement.

The results regarding parasocial relationships (p -value = 0.003) reveal that females tend to form stronger one-sided emotional bonds with influencers than males. This finding is consistent with recent psychological research indicating that women are more relational and emotionally expressive, leading to deeper emotional connections with figures they follow. For instance, studies have shown that women are more inclined to develop parasocial relationships due to a higher focus on relational engagement and emotional attachment (Cohen, 2021). Women also tend to view influencers not just as information sources, but as relatable and trustworthy companions, enhancing the perceived intimacy and trust in the relationship (López et al., 2022). This emotional connection with influencers encourages women to follow influencer recommendations more closely, as trust and perceived authenticity are crucial factors. Conversely, males engage with influencers more utilitarianly, often seeking expertise, entertainment, or practical solutions, which leads to less emotionally intense engagement (Keller & Lee, 2023). This difference in parasocial relationship formation can be attributed to gender-based variations in consumer behavior: men tend to focus more on functionality and informational value, while women emphasize emotional engagement and connection (Pereira et al., 2023). As a result, parasocial relationships are stronger among females, influencing their decision-making processes significantly. This aligns with Social Proof Theory, which highlights how individuals look to the behavior and acceptance of others—especially within social groups—to guide their own decisions. The emotional bonds women form with influencers serve as social proof that validates their purchasing choices. Marketers targeting female audiences should focus on cultivating trust and emotional intimacy with influencers, while male audiences may respond better to strategies emphasizing expertise and value.

The results for content creation style (p -value = 0.340), which showed no significant gender difference, suggest that both male and female Generation Z audiences appreciate a variety of content formats, such as humorous, educational, lifestyle, or aspirational styles. This finding indicates that stylistic preferences are not heavily influenced by gender, reflecting a broader trend where Generation Z values content for its authenticity and relevance rather than for specific stylistic elements (Choi & Kim, 2022). This aligns with recent research indicating that younger generations prioritize the relatability and emotional resonance of content, placing less importance on whether it is humorous or educational (López et al., 2023). Both male and female audiences tend to gravitate towards influencers whose content feels genuine and mirrors their personal interests or values, rather than being swayed by the specific style of presentation. Therefore, the key drivers of engagement for Generation Z are not rooted in gendered stylistic preferences but in the authenticity, trustworthiness, and perceived emotional connection of the content. This suggests that marketers should focus on fostering authenticity and emotional engagement in their content strategy rather than tailoring it to gendered style preferences. By doing so, they can better resonate with the broader audience and build deeper connections with Generation Z.

The lack of significant gender differences in purchasing behavior (p -value = 0.103) suggests that both male and female Generation Z consumers are similarly influenced by key factors such as the trustworthiness of influencers, the authenticity of content, and the convenience offered by social commerce platforms. These findings align with consumer decision-making theory, which posits that purchasing decisions are primarily shaped by rational evaluations of product attributes, value, and ease of acquisition, factors that are not

inherently gendered (Schouten et al., 2021). The advent of social commerce, which allows for seamless purchasing directly through social media platforms, further diminishes any gendered distinctions, as both male and female consumers prioritize the simplicity and efficiency of the buying process (Hudders et al., 2021). Furthermore, Source Credibility Theory suggests that the credibility of an influencer—particularly their expertise and trustworthiness—plays a crucial role in shaping purchasing decisions, with both genders valuing these qualities equally over emotional engagement (Kastenholz, 2021). Additionally, the concept of social proof, wherein purchasing behavior is guided by the collective opinions and validation of a wider community rather than individual emotional connections, helps explain why gender differences are insignificant in influencer-driven purchasing behavior (Munsch, 2021). Ultimately, these results underscore the growing influence of convenience and credibility in shaping consumer behavior, transcending traditional gender-based preferences.

The findings suggest that influencer marketing strategies targeting Generation Z should prioritize emotional and relational engagement, particularly for female audiences, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity in shaping purchasing behavior across both genders. For female consumers, fostering emotional connections and relatable content remains crucial, aligning with the principles of Social Proof Theory, which emphasizes that individuals are more likely to adopt behaviors or make purchasing decisions when they see others—especially peers or admired figures—doing the same (Schouten et al., 2021). This tendency is amplified in digital environments where likes, shares, and engagement metrics serve as cues of popularity and acceptance. However, across all genders, credibility and authenticity emerge as key determinants of purchasing decisions, consistent with Source Credibility Theory and consumer decision-making theory, which highlight the rational evaluation of influencer trustworthiness and content genuineness as critical factors in the buying process (Hudders et al., 2021; Kastenholz, 2021). Therefore, successful influencer marketing campaigns for Generation Z should blend these emotional and rational elements to optimize engagement and conversion rates, ensuring that content is both relatable and credible, irrespective of gender.

Extent Of Influence Of The Factors Involving SMI On The Parasocial Relationship, As Perceived By Generation Z Consumers

Table 15 Relationship Between Purchasing Behavior of Generation Z Consumers and SMI Attributes and Parasocial Relationship

Indicators	Correlation Coefficient (Overall Purchasing Behavior)	Interpretation
A. SMI Attributes		
1. Type of SMI		
1.1 Factors Considered in Following SMI	0.158**	S
1.2. Type of SMI Followed Most		
1.2.1 0 - 10,000 followers	0.140**	S
1.2.2 10,000 - 100,000 followers	-0.179**	S
1.2.3 100,000+ followers	-0.012	NS
2. Perceived Popularity	0.245**	S
3. Perceived Fit	0.402**	S

4. Content Creation Style	0.017	NS
B. Parasocial Relationship	0.390**	S

Legend: **Significant at 0.01 (S)
 Not Significant (NS)

The findings from Table 15 offer a detailed exploration of the factors influencing Filipino Generation Z’s purchasing behavior for social media influencers (SMIs). The significant positive correlation between trustworthiness, expertise, and purchasing behavior (correlation coefficient = 0.158, $p < 0.01$) reveals the centrality of Source Credibility Theory in shaping Generation Z’s interactions with influencers. This demographic, particularly in the Filipino context, places substantial importance on an influencer’s perceived credibility and knowledge. In Filipino culture, authority figures—such as respected community leaders and family members—hold significant sway in decision-making processes. Filipino Generation Z consumers, therefore, are more likely to engage with influencers who exhibit trustworthiness and expertise, aligning with cultural values like reliability, integrity, and wisdom (Tio, 2020). These values are deeply embedded in Filipino social structures, where family and close-knit relationships shape consumer decisions, reinforcing the idea that trustworthy influencers, seen as credible and knowledgeable, are more likely to influence purchasing decisions.

Additionally, the positive correlation between nano-influencers (those with 0–10,000 followers) and purchasing behavior (correlation coefficient = 0.140, $p < 0.01$) further emphasizes the relevance of Social Media Marketing (Smith, 2022), which underscores the strategic use of digital platforms to create meaningful customer engagement and drive conversions. Nano-influencers, who often have smaller yet more engaged audiences, are particularly effective within this framework as they leverage their platforms to share relatable, interactive, and community-driven content. For Filipino Generation Z, the significance of personal connections and the value of community—hallmarks of Filipino culture—make nano-influencers especially impactful. These influencers often share everyday experiences, aspirations, and cultural touchstones with their followers, enabling them to build strong emotional bonds and trust. In this context, nano-influencers are viewed not just as endorsers but as relatable figures, making their product recommendations feel more genuine and credible. However, experts caution that the proliferation of unqualified influencers may disseminate misleading advice, undermining consumer trust and diminishing the engagement and recognition of more credible and knowledgeable sources.

In contrast, micro-influencers (those with 10,000-100,000 followers) exhibit a negative correlation with purchasing behavior (correlation coefficient = -0.179, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as influencers gain a larger following, their perceived authenticity and the emotional resonance they create with their audience tend to diminish. This decline in effectiveness aligns with the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire & Harris, 2023), which posits that the personal connection and relatability that attract followers are essential for influence. As micro-influencers scale up, their content becomes more commercialized and less personal, leading Filipino Generation Z to perceive them as less relatable or genuine. This observation points to the limits of influencer size in the Filipino context, where the emotional bond between influencers and their audiences is integral to their effectiveness.

Moreover, the lack of significance with macro-influencers (those with over 100,000 followers), with a correlation coefficient of -0.012 ($p > 0.01$), underscores a shift in Filipino Generation Z’s preferences. These influencers, with their large followings, often become less relatable and more commercialized, making them less effective in influencing consumer decisions. This finding challenges traditional marketing assumptions, which suggest that larger followings equate to greater influence. The Filipino Generation Z consumer, steeped in the cultural values of pakikisama (smooth interpersonal relationships) and community-based decision-making, tends to favor influencers who feel closer to their social circle. Thus, those with smaller, more intimate followings are seen as more trustworthy and influential.

A significant positive correlation also emerges with Perceived Popularity (correlation coefficient = 0.245, $p < 0.01$), which shows that Filipino Generation Z is more likely to engage with influencers perceived to be popular or socially validated. This supports Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 2021), which suggests that individuals often rely on the actions and opinions of others when making decisions, particularly when those others are perceived as socially influential. Filipino Generation Z, heavily influenced by social networks and the desire for accepted behavior in their peer groups, is more inclined to trust the recommendations of influencers with large followings or those widely regarded as popular. In Filipino culture, group cohesion and social validation are paramount, and these cultural values are reflected in how Filipino Generation Z engages with influencers on social media. The more popular an influencer appears, the more likely Filipino Generation Z consumers will follow their suggestions.

The concept of Perceived Fit (correlation coefficient = 0.402, $p < 0.01$) emerges as the most significant driver of purchasing behavior. This reflects Filipino Generation Z's emphasis on aligning with an influencer's values, lifestyle, and interests. This finding aligns with Social Proof Theory, which posits that individuals often look to others—particularly those they admire or relate to—for cues on how to behave or what to purchase. For Filipino Generation Z, the emotional connection to influencers whose values resonate with their own plays a central role in shaping purchasing behavior. When they see influencers who mirror their cultural values—such as family-orientedness, community ties, and local traditions—they are more likely to perceive these influencers as trustworthy and authentic. This perception of shared identity fosters social validation, increasing the likelihood of accepting and acting on influencer recommendations.

In contrast, Content Creation Style (correlation coefficient = 0.017, $p > 0.01$) shows no significant correlation with purchasing behavior, suggesting that while aesthetic appeal and content format may enhance engagement, they do not directly influence purchasing decisions. Filipino Generation Z appears to prioritize authenticity and relatability over the style or format of the content influencers present. Although content creation style, such as the use of high-quality visuals or creative storytelling, can improve engagement and interaction, the perceived authenticity and emotional connection truly drive purchasing decisions. This reflects a cultural preference for personal and direct communication, which is often prioritized over polished, high-production content.

The strong positive correlation with Parasocial Relationships (correlation coefficient = 0.390, $p < 0.01$) underscores the significant role of emotional attachment in shaping Filipino Generation Z's purchasing behavior. According to Parasocial Relationships Theory (Derrick et al., 2020), consumers develop one-sided emotional connections with influencers, allowing them to feel a sense of personal investment in the influencer's life, values, and product recommendations. This emotional bond is crucial, as it engenders feelings of familiarity and trust, making followers more likely to act on the influencer's suggestions. For Filipino Generation Z, the power of parasocial relationships is particularly impactful, given their strong cultural emphasis on close-knit, personal connections and emotional resonance in offline and online interactions. This generation, which has grown up in a hyper-connected, digital world, gravitates toward influencers who appear genuine, relatable, and authentic—traits crucial for fostering these parasocial bonds. The finding suggests a shift in marketing strategies, especially in Filipino Gen Z, where emotional engagement and authenticity take precedence over traditional celebrity endorsements, which may no longer carry the same level of influence. As such, brands targeting this demographic need to focus on cultivating deep emotional connections with consumers through influencers who offer authenticity, relatability, and a sense of familiarity. This shift not only speaks to changing consumer preferences but also challenges the conventional model of relying on high-profile celebrity endorsements, highlighting the growing influence of digital personalities in modern marketing (Derrick et al., 2020; Reinikainen et al., 2021; Hudders et al., 2021).

The findings emphasize that psychological and socio-cultural factors influence Filipino Generation Z's purchasing behavior. Trust, perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, and social validation are critical in shaping consumer decisions, and these elements are deeply intertwined with Filipino cultural values. Influencer marketing strategies targeting Filipino Generation Z should focus on creating authentic, relatable content and fostering personal connections, prioritizing nano-influencers and smaller-scale influencers who can build genuine, emotional bonds with their followers. These insights underscore a shift towards a more personalized, community-focused approach in influencer marketing, where authenticity and emotional connection trump follower count or content style.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of social media influencers (SMIs) in shaping the online shopping behaviors of Generation Z consumers in the Philippines, particularly in the post-pandemic context. By leveraging parasocial relationships (PSR), SMIs foster emotional connections that influence purchasing decisions, with platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok playing critical roles in shaping consumer behavior. The results indicate that Generation Z is highly engaged with e-commerce, with Shopee and Lazada emerging as the most frequently used platforms for online shopping. The high social media platform usage rate, with respondents engaging across multiple platforms, further underscores the preference for diversified digital interactions. This preference reflects broader sociological trends toward hyperconnectivity and multitasking characteristic of digital natives, who navigate fluid identities across various online spaces. Additionally, the overwhelming adoption of online shopping platforms reflects a generational shift toward digital retail experiences driven by convenience, accessibility, and technological integration, a pattern shaped by the pandemic's acceleration of digital transformation and the embeddedness of technology in Generation Z's everyday lives.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that while online shopping is an everyday activity among Generation Z consumers, the frequency of their engagement varies, with a significant portion of respondents engaging in online shopping occasionally rather than consistently. This variability suggests that online shopping, though integral to their consumer habits, does not entirely replace traditional shopping behaviors but rather coexists with them in a hybrid consumer culture. This pattern may be explained by cultural and social factors such as the Filipino collectivist orientation, where in-person social interactions remain important for family and community bonding, influencing shopping habits. The gender skew, with a higher proportion of female respondents, aligns with existing literature on the greater engagement of women with social media influencers and digital content, reflecting gendered socialization patterns that encourage relational and affective engagement in women. These insights emphasize the need for businesses to adapt their marketing strategies to foster emotional connections through influencer partnerships, optimize user-friendly and mobile-optimized e-commerce platforms, and cater to the evolving preferences of Generation Z to capture and retain this digitally native consumer demographic effectively.

The findings reveal that Generation Z's engagement with Social Media Influencers (SMIs) is significantly shaped by trustworthiness, relatability, authenticity, and content quality. Trustworthiness emerges as the most influential factor in fostering strong parasocial relationships, highlighting the importance of credible, expert, and relatable influencers. Generation Z tends to favor nano-influencers (those with 0–10,000 followers) over macro-influencers due to their perceived authenticity and close, personal engagement, aligning with the Source Credibility Theory and the Source Attractiveness Model. This preference reflects a psychological drive for intimacy and social presence in mediated interactions, where smaller-scale influencers provide a sense of interpersonal closeness and reduced social distance. The study also underscores that while popularity metrics (such as follower count and likes) influence purchasing behavior, they are not the sole determinants of Generation Z's decisions—authentic content that aligns with personal values and experiences holds greater appeal.

Furthermore, Generation Z values high-quality, emotionally resonant, and creatively executed content, with a particular preference for video formats, reinforcing the need for influencers to craft visually sophisticated and emotionally engaging content. Filipino Generation Z is particularly drawn to influencers who reflect authenticity and relatability, which are integral to their cultural values of "kapwa" (shared identity) and "Hiya" (social propriety). These values prioritize trust, humility, and close interpersonal connections, leading this generation to engage more with nano-influencers who appear genuine and relatable than those whose popularity or material success is emphasized. For brands to effectively connect with this cohort, influencer marketing strategies must prioritize authenticity, trust, and a meaningful, relatable connection, leveraging the relational and emotional appeal of nano-influencers while delivering content that resonates with Generation Z's values and expectations.

Filipino cultural values such as *pakikisama* (social harmony), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), *ate/kuya* archetype (older sibling figure), *hiya* (sense of propriety), and *kapwa* (shared identity) offer a rich qualitative

lens through which to understand why certain influencer attributes resonate so strongly with Filipino Generation Z. These values shape how young consumers emotionally engage with influencers and define authenticity in a culturally specific way. For instance, *kapwa* fosters a preference for influencers who present themselves as part of the same community, sharing everyday experiences and struggles, thereby reinforcing a sense of shared identity and emotional closeness. *Pakikisama* supports the appeal of influencers who are approachable, friendly, and maintain harmonious digital interactions—traits that make them feel emotionally safe and socially acceptable. *Utang na loob* plays a role when followers perceive influencers as having provided value or inspiration, creating a moral sense of loyalty and trust toward the influencer. The *ate* or *kuya* archetype further explains the appeal of influencers who embody nurturing, protective, or guiding roles, making them more trustworthy and relatable.

Meanwhile, *hiya* acts as a cultural filter, encouraging influencers to remain humble, modest, and respectful, and discouraging overt self-promotion or inauthentic behavior. These values collectively shape a culturally grounded definition of influencer authenticity—one rooted not in celebrity status or visual perfection but in emotional resonance, relational closeness, and perceived sincerity. The implication is that for Filipino Gen Z, authenticity is deeply intertwined with cultural expectations and social norms, suggesting that influencers and brands seeking to engage this demographic must align with these values to build trust and meaningful connections.

The findings emphasize that Generation Z's engagement with Social Media Influencers (SMIs) is significantly shaped by trust, emotional appeal, expertise, and relatability. Social proof, indicated by large followings, views, and engagement metrics, plays a key role in building credibility, but it is not the sole factor. Emotional connection is just as important, with Generation Z consumers drawn to influencers whose content resonates with them personally and emotionally. This emotional bond creates a sense of intimacy, making influencers appear as trusted friends and deepening parasocial relationships, enhancing consumer loyalty. Additionally, Generation Z places a high value on influencers who provide credible, expert product recommendations, reinforcing the need for trustworthy and knowledgeable content. These factors foster strong parasocial relationships that significantly influence consumer behavior and engagement. For Filipino Generation Z, these dynamics are particularly influential due to cultural values emphasizing strong interpersonal connections and trust. Filipino culture places a premium on shared identity, family bonds, and close-knit communities, making influencers who display authenticity, emotional relatability, and credibility even more appealing. The cultural concept of "*kapwa*," which reflects a sense of interconnectedness and shared experience, enhances how Filipino Generation Z engages with influencers. This demographic is also highly attuned to social proof and peer validation, significantly shaping their trust and loyalty toward influencers. The combination of these cultural and social factors underscores the importance of authenticity, emotional resonance, and trust in crafting effective influencer marketing strategies for Filipino Generation Z consumers.

The study highlights that Filipino Generation Z consumers are strongly influenced by social media influencers (SMIs) when making purchasing decisions, particularly when these influencers are seen as relatable, trustworthy, and knowledgeable. Filipino Generation Z tends to form deep parasocial relationships with influencers, often perceiving them as "friends" offering advice and guidance. This emotional connection is crucial, as Filipino culture highly values close-knit family and community ties, which extend into the digital space. Influencers who reflect values such as authenticity, empathy, and relatability resonate most with this group, and they are more likely to trust these influencers' opinions and endorsements. However, despite their emotional engagement with influencers, many Filipino Generation Z consumers still rely on their parents for financial support when making purchases, reflecting a cultural norm of interdependence common in collectivist societies. This reliance can be particularly evident when it comes to online transactions, where concerns about payment security and financial independence are prevalent. Many are hesitant to make purchases using their own accounts due to these concerns. This behavior suggests that while emotional and social connections with influencers strongly influence their purchasing decisions, external factors such as financial dependence and cultural caution around financial risk play a significant role in shaping how Filipino Generation Z interacts with online shopping. Marketers should consider these cultural nuances by offering secure payment options and creating more accessible purchasing paths for this demographic.

The findings underscore the significant role of gender in shaping Filipino Generation Z's perceptions of social media influencers (SMIs), particularly in the context of emotional connection and cultural values. Female respondents strongly prefer SMIs who demonstrate emotional authenticity, relatability, and alignment with personal values. This preference aligns with the Filipino cultural emphasis on "kapwa" (shared identity) and "pakikisama" (social harmony), which prioritize community and relational bonds. For instance, Filipino influencers like Niana Guerrero have garnered substantial followings due to their authentic, family-oriented content that resonates deeply with audiences (Teenvogue, 2023). Such influencers are perceived as more relatable and trustworthy, fostering stronger parasocial relationships that significantly influence purchasing decisions (De Jesus & Ramos, 2022). Conversely, male respondents prioritize expertise, entertainment value, and content quality when evaluating SMIs. This trend reflects traditional gender roles in Filipino society, where men are often socialized to be more pragmatic and less emotionally expressive. Despite these differences, both genders equally value credibility and authenticity in influencers when making purchase decisions, highlighting the importance of trustworthiness and content genuineness across the board (Razon & Reyes, 2023). Therefore, marketing strategies targeting Filipino Generation Z should consider these gendered preferences and cultural values, ensuring that influencer marketing campaigns are both emotionally resonant and credible to engage this demographic effectively.

The findings highlight the significant role of social media influencers (SMIs) in shaping the purchasing behavior of Filipino Generation Z consumers, with a clear preference for authenticity, emotional engagement, and cultural alignment. Filipino Gen Z consumers are especially drawn to influencers they perceive as credible and trustworthy. This is evident in their preference for influencers who demonstrate expertise and integrity, qualities that resonate with Filipino cultural values. Furthermore, nano-influencers—those with smaller, more engaged audiences—are particularly effective in influencing purchasing decisions. These influencers are able to form personal, authentic connections with their followers, fostering a sense of familiarity and relatability that aligns with Filipino Generation Z's cultural focus on community and close-knit relationships. In contrast, micro- and macro-influencers, with their larger followings, show diminishing effectiveness as their broader reach often diminishes their perceived authenticity, making them less relatable for this demographic. Additionally, the strong correlation between parasocial relationships and purchasing behavior emphasizes the importance of emotional attachment in decision-making for Filipino Generation Z consumers. This group tends to trust and act on the recommendations of influencers with whom they feel a personal connection, often favoring those who share similar values, lifestyles, and cultural touchstones. These findings suggest that influencer marketing strategies should focus on fostering emotional bonds and creating authentic, relatable content, rather than relying solely on the size of an influencer's following. To effectively engage Filipino Generation Z, brands should prioritize smaller-scale influencers who can build genuine, lasting relationships with their audiences, thereby encouraging loyalty and driving consumer action through trust and cultural alignment.

The research findings provide a nuanced understanding of social media influencers' role in shaping purchasing behavior, particularly among Filipino Generation Z consumers. While previous studies, such as those by Massuda and Hudders, have explored the direct impact of influencer characteristics on consumer behavior, this study offers a critical insight by emphasizing the significant role of parasocial relationships (PSR). The finding that a strong positive correlation exists between PSRs and purchasing decisions for Filipino Generation Z (correlation coefficient = 0.390, $p < 0.01$) reveals an emotional undercurrent less emphasized in past literature, which predominantly focused on the transactional and rational elements of influencer marketing. This aligns with social psychological theories of parasocial interaction, which explain how individuals form one-sided emotional bonds with media figures that influence attitudes and behaviors beyond rational persuasion.

This research challenges traditional views where the influencer's follower count or visibility (macro and celebrity influencers) was deemed the primary determinant of influence. For example, Massuda's work emphasized the importance of influencer reach, where macro-influencers were seen as having more influence due to their larger audience. However, the current findings suggest that for Filipino Generation Z, micro and even nano-influencers, who may have smaller followings but offer higher levels of trust and engagement, are often more influential. This shift toward smaller-scale influencers is aligned with this demographic's growing desire for authenticity and relatability, a sentiment that previous studies have only partially addressed. The emotional connection fostered by parasocial relationships, where followers develop a sense of personal

investment in the influencers' lives and opinions, plays a crucial role in their decision-making process. This focus on emotional engagement contradicts earlier studies, which suggested that the influence of social media figures was primarily based on professional expertise or product-specific knowledge.

Moreover, the research also brings to light the growing significance of emotional resonance and relatability in influencer marketing strategies. The strong correlation between parasocial relationships and purchasing behavior signals a shift from reliance on traditional celebrity endorsements. Unlike earlier studies, which relied heavily on the credibility and attractiveness of influencers to sway consumer behavior (such as those by Kay et al., 2020), this study suggests that the perceived authenticity of an influencer, which fosters a deeper emotional connection, is a key driver in converting followers into consumers. It points to a more holistic approach, where the influencer's persona, content, and perceived relationship with their followers matter more than their professional credibility or expertise.

This study contributes to the evolving understanding of influencer marketing by highlighting the importance of parasocial relationships, emotional attachment, and authenticity. It challenges prior research that placed more weight on the technical aspects of influencer marketing, such as reach or professionalism. The findings suggest that marketers should reconsider their approach by focusing on the scale of an influencer's audience and the depth of the emotional connection they can foster with their followers, especially when targeting Generation Z consumers. This shift in perspective represents a significant departure from past research, which often treated influencers more as marketing tools than as emotionally engaging figures capable of shaping consumer behavior through long-term, one-sided relationships.

This study emphasizes the pivotal role of parasocial relationships (PSRs) in shaping Filipino Generation Z's purchasing behavior, especially in influencer marketing. The findings challenge traditional marketing paradigms that emphasize the reach and popularity of macro-influencers. Instead, it reveals that smaller-scale influencers, particularly nano-influencers, who foster deeper emotional connections and align with the cultural values of authenticity, trust, and relatability, are more influential. This emotional bond, rooted in PSRs, significantly influences purchasing decisions as Generation Z perceives these influencers as more relatable and trustworthy. Therefore, marketers and businesses must rethink their approach by prioritizing emotional engagement over metrics like follower count. To build stronger connections with this demographic, brands should focus on authentic content and partnerships that resonate emotionally with their audience. Influencers who reflect shared values and demonstrate genuine, relatable personas will more effectively foster consumer loyalty and influence purchasing behavior.

For researchers and marketers, these findings have substantial, actionable theoretical implications. The study encourages a shift in understanding PSR in influencer marketing by emphasizing the importance of emotional attachment over traditional transactional dynamics. Researchers should explore how PSRs vary across different cultures and demographics, considering cultural nuances like the Filipino values of "kapwa" (shared identity) and "Hiya" (social propriety) that influence consumer engagement. Marketers, on the other hand, should move beyond the reliance on superficial metrics such as follower count and focus on building trust and authenticity in their influencer partnerships. This approach calls for strategies that leverage influencers' emotional appeal and authenticity, as these factors are more likely to foster long-term consumer loyalty. Ultimately, this shift in perspective offers a more holistic view of influencer marketing, where the depth of connection matters more than the breadth of an influencer's reach, particularly when engaging with Generation Z.

The results of this study challenge traditional marketing strategies by shifting the focus from visibility and mass appeal to emotional authenticity and cultural resonance. Traditional strategies often prioritize macro- and celebrity influencers, assuming that high follower counts and polished content directly drive conversions. However, this study demonstrates that for Filipino Generation Z consumers, parasocial relationships (PSRs)—built through trust, relatability, and shared values—are stronger predictors of purchasing behavior than popularity or perceived expertise. This finding undermines the conventional belief that influencer reach alone determines influence. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of emotional connection, cultural alignment, and perceived sincerity, suggesting that brands must recalibrate how they identify and collaborate with influencers.

Long-term, this signals a strategic pivot for social media influencer (SMI) business partnerships in the Philippines. Brands should invest in long-term relationships with nano- and micro-influencers who embody Filipino values such as *kapwa*, *pakikisama*, and *hiya*, and who consistently demonstrate authentic engagement with their audiences. These partnerships are likely to yield greater brand loyalty, consumer trust, and sustained engagement over time. Additionally, the findings imply that influencer marketing campaigns should be context-sensitive and culturally embedded, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all model imported from global markets.

For influencer agencies and marketers, the study encourages a reevaluation of influencer selection criteria, favoring emotional resonance and cultural authenticity over pure metrics. It also opens the door for ethical influencer branding, where transparency, community-building, and mutual respect between brand, influencer, and follower become strategic assets. In the long run, brands that embrace these insights are more likely to cultivate deeper consumer relationships, build more resilient digital communities, and thrive in a market increasingly shaped by trust-based, value-driven engagement.

However, the rise of parasocial relationships (PSRs) in influencer marketing brings several ethical and social implications that require careful consideration. One significant concern is the potential over-commercialization of personal relationships. Influencers often cultivate an image of being relatable and approachable, fostering deep emotional bonds with their followers. Nevertheless, when these relationships are used as marketing and profit-generating tools, they can blur the lines between genuine connection and commercial manipulation. Generation Z, who is highly engaged with social media, may struggle to differentiate between authentic emotional engagement and marketing strategies designed to exploit their feelings and purchasing habits. This over-commercialization could lead to a sense of betrayal or disillusionment when followers realize that their perceived "friends" are primarily motivated by financial incentives, potentially damaging the authenticity of the PSRs.

Additionally, the mental health effects of PSRs on Generation Z consumers cannot be overlooked. The constant exposure to influencers who promote idealized lifestyles and material success can foster unrealistic expectations and feelings of inadequacy. Generation Z consumers, many of whom are still developing their identities, may experience anxiety, low self-esteem, or depression as they compare their lives to the curated content they see online. The pressure to keep up with influencers' lifestyles or to align with the values they promote can lead to negative psychological outcomes, emphasizing the need for responsible influencer practices that promote diversity, realism, and mental well-being.

Furthermore, the reliance on SMIs for purchasing decisions raises concerns about consumer autonomy and critical thinking. The strong emotional bonds formed through PSRs may reduce consumers' ability to critically evaluate product claims or marketing messages, leading to impulsive or uninformed purchases. This dynamic is particularly critical among Generation Z, who are more vulnerable to social influence yet still developing their consumer literacy. Marketers must ensure transparent and ethical promotional practices to safeguard consumer rights and promote informed decision-making.

Culturally, the Filipino context introduces additional layers of complexity. Filipino values such as "*pakikisama*" (social harmony) and "*utang na loob*" (debt of gratitude) may amplify the influence of social ties and obligations in consumer behavior, potentially increasing susceptibility to persuasive marketing through influencers perceived as part of one's social in-group. This cultural predisposition necessitates culturally sensitive approaches to influencer marketing that respect local norms while fostering ethical engagement.

In conclusion, while parasocial relationships offer potent mechanisms for influencer marketing, their use must be balanced with ethical considerations that protect consumers' emotional well-being and autonomy. Future research should explore the long-term psychological impacts of PSRs and develop frameworks for ethical influencer marketing that prioritize transparency, authenticity, and consumer protection.

The findings of this study contribute to the evolving discourse on parasocial relationships and influencer marketing by foregrounding the unique socio-cultural lens through which Filipino Generation Z engages with influencers. While global studies have emphasized authenticity, transparency, and relatability as key drivers of

influencer-follower relationships, the Filipino context reveals a nuanced configuration of these constructs. Lou and Yuan (2021), in their study of U.S. Generation Z audiences, found that influencer credibility hinges on individualistic values such as personal branding, message consistency, and overt self-disclosure—traits that bolster perceptions of professionalism and trustworthiness. Similarly, Ki et al. (2023) reported that South Korean Gen Z responds positively to aspirational, aesthetically polished influencers who project an idealized yet attainable lifestyle, reflecting cultural preferences for curated self-presentation and upward mobility. In contrast, this study finds that Filipino Generation Z places greater emphasis on relational authenticity, emotional resonance, and cultural intimacy. Influencers are not merely admired for their achievements or curated image but are valued for expressing *pakikisama* (getting along with others), *kababaang-loob* (humility), and *kapwa* (shared identity), which resonate strongly with the collectivist ethos and community-centered orientation of Filipino youth. This aligns with findings by Zhang and Chen (2022) on Chinese Generation Z, who prefer influencers exhibiting emotional warmth and interpersonal authenticity over technical expertise or celebrity status, suggesting that collectivist cultures may foster deeper affective parasocial bonds. However, what makes Filipino Gen Z distinctive is their construction of influencers as *ate/kuya* (older sibling figures), which fosters a sense of familial trust, mentorship, and emotional dependency not as commonly observed in other national contexts. This culturally grounded parasocial framework extends current PSR theories by integrating indigenous Filipino relational concepts into the understanding of influencer authenticity and engagement. It also suggests that content attributes do not solely determine the effectiveness of influencer marketing but are deeply shaped by cultural scripts and intersubjective meanings that influence how authenticity, trust, and influence are interpreted.

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by extending the existing frameworks of parasocial relationship (PSR) and influencer marketing theories through the incorporation of localized cultural authenticity as a critical factor shaping emotional engagement and consumer behavior. Traditional PSR theory primarily conceptualizes parasocial interactions as unidirectional emotional bonds formed through media exposure, often emphasizing psychological mechanisms such as perceived intimacy and trust. However, this research elucidates how, within the Filipino Generation Z context, these parasocial dynamics are profoundly mediated by indigenous cultural values, including *kapwa* (shared identity), *hiya* (social propriety), and *pakikisama* (social harmony), which collectively inform perceptions of influencer authenticity and trustworthiness. Unlike generalized notions of authenticity prevalent in Western-centric models, authenticity in this context is socially constructed and validated through cultural norms that prioritize humility, relational closeness, and community cohesion.

This culturally grounded authenticity amplifies the depth and resilience of parasocial bonds by fostering a sense of collective identity and interpersonal connection that transcends transactional or purely rational influencer-follower relationships. By integrating these socio-cultural dimensions, the study advances PSR theory beyond its traditional psychological scope to incorporate the socio-cultural embeddedness of influencer-follower interactions, thereby offering a more holistic and context-sensitive understanding of how emotional attachment is cultivated and leveraged in digital marketing. This nuanced perspective challenges dominant influencer marketing paradigms that prioritize follower count and content professionalism, urging marketers to design strategies that foreground culturally resonant, authentic narratives and emotional connectivity to engage localized Generation Z audiences effectively. Thus, this research bridges theoretical gaps by emphasizing the interplay between parasocial engagement and localized cultural authenticity, underscoring the importance of culturally informed influencer marketing frameworks that better reflect diverse consumer realities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively engage Filipino Generation Z consumers through influencer marketing, businesses should prioritize partnerships with nano-influencers, who have smaller but highly engaged audiences and are perceived as more authentic and relatable. This demographic values influencers who foster emotional connections and align with Filipino cultural values, such as "*kapwa*" (shared identity), "*Hiya*" (social propriety), and "*pakikisama*" (social harmony). Content should resonate emotionally, showcasing real-life experiences and personal stories that reflect these values. Brands must ensure transparency in influencer partnerships by clearly disclosing sponsored content and fostering trust with consumers by maintaining authenticity in the relationship between influencers and their followers. Ethical considerations should focus on

transparency and authenticity—businesses should ensure influencers disclose their partnerships, promote responsible consumption, and avoid unrealistic portrayals of success or materialism. Following these guidelines, businesses can foster deeper connections with the Filipino Generation Z, enhance their brand's authenticity, and drive sustainable influence.

Additionally, businesses should create high-quality, visually engaging content that aligns with Generation Z's preference for polished, creative video formats, especially on platforms like Instagram Reels and TikTok. Influencers known for their authenticity, humility, and empathy will resonate more strongly with Filipino Generation Z, as they value influencers who demonstrate relatability over those with unattainable or overly glamorous lifestyles. To address the financial concerns of this group, brands should offer flexible, secure payment options, including cash-on-delivery and mobile wallet integration, to accommodate their cautious approach to online spending.

Furthermore, brands should work with influencers to promote realistic and optimistic content that supports healthy self-image, counteracting the adverse mental health effects often associated with idealized influencer lifestyles. Long-term partnerships with influencers, rather than one-off campaigns, can help build lasting relationships that foster trust and loyalty among followers. Tailoring content to each platform is also crucial—optimizing for short-form video on TikTok, more intimate content on Instagram stories, and lifestyle-oriented messaging on Facebook. Lastly, businesses should continuously monitor and measure the success of their campaigns using analytics tools to track engagement, conversion rates, and audience sentiment, refining strategies as needed to ensure effectiveness and alignment with consumer expectations. Businesses can build stronger, more meaningful relationships with Filipino Generation Z consumers by focusing on authenticity, emotional connection, and cultural relevance.

To optimize marketing strategies, brands are encouraged to collaborate with nano-influencers who maintain strong authenticity and emotional resonance with their audiences. For example, Jollibee's 2024 TikTok campaigns leveraged college-based content creators to boost relatability and strengthen brand loyalty among Gen Z consumers (Villanueva, 2024). Similarly, Sunnies Face has tapped into local beauty nano-influencers to drive sales of its lip products, generating high engagement rates due to their accessible and community-driven content (Medina, 2024). In the fashion sector, Zalora Philippines successfully integrated niche influencers into its TikTok Shop campaigns, which not only increased conversions but also demonstrated the effectiveness of live-selling formats in appealing to young Filipino buyers (Lopez, 2025). These case studies illustrate that smaller-scale influencers can outperform celebrity endorsers when it comes to building trust and fostering parasocial relationships, as their relatability resonates more deeply with Gen Z's preference for authentic, value-driven content. Hence, Philippine businesses should prioritize influencer partnerships that emphasize transparency, authenticity, and cultural alignment with local audiences.

LIMITATIONS

This study acknowledges two primary sources of bias that could influence the results: self-reporting bias and selection bias. Self-reporting bias is a common challenge in survey-based research, where participants may provide inaccurate responses due to misinterpretation of questions, memory recall issues, or the desire to present themselves in a socially desirable light. Clear and neutral wording was used in the survey questions to minimize this bias and avoid leading responses. Additionally, participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, which helped encourage honesty and reduce the likelihood of socially desirable answers. The survey also underwent pilot testing to identify issues with question clarity or structure, ensuring the questions effectively captured the necessary information without introducing bias.

Given the use of a self-constructed survey instrument, several other potential biases may have influenced responses. Interpretation bias may have occurred where respondents misunderstood abstract constructs like parasocial relationships, authenticity, or content fit. Acquiescence bias (agreement bias) might have inflated agreement scores, as some participants tend to agree with statements regardless of their true feelings. Priming or order effects could also have subconsciously influenced responses depending on question sequencing.

Selection bias is another potential concern, as the study relied on purposive sampling to select participants based on specific criteria, such as age, internet access, and social media exposure. While purposive sampling allows for a focused investigation of the target population, it can limit the diversity of the sample and exclude individuals who do not meet the criteria, potentially affecting the generalizability of the findings. To address this, the study explicitly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure participants were relevant to the research focus. However, it also acknowledges that the sample may not fully represent the broader Generation Z population in San Fernando, La Union, or the Philippines. By transparently recognizing these limitations, the study provides readers with a clear understanding of the context in which the findings apply.

To minimize these biases in future studies, instrument validation through factor analyses and expert reviews, mixed-methods approaches incorporating qualitative data, randomized item order, inclusion of reverse-worded items, and pilot testing across diverse demographics are recommended. These refinements will improve clarity, cultural sensitivity, and reduce response biases. Ensuring participant anonymity and neutral question framing will also encourage honest responses.

In summary, while self-reporting and selection biases were recognized as potential challenges, steps were taken to mitigate their impact. The survey design and measures to ensure privacy and transparency in participant selection help ensure the findings are as accurate and reliable as possible within the study's constraints.

This study also has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample was limited to Generation Z consumers from San Fernando City, La Union, which may not fully represent the broader population of Generation Z in the Philippines. The findings, therefore, may lack generalizability to other regions or demographic groups. Additionally, the data collection method relied on self-reported survey responses, which could be influenced by social desirability bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of the results. Furthermore, while the study captured various aspects of social media influencer (SMI) attributes and parasocial relationships, it did not explore deeper psychological or contextual factors that may shape consumer perceptions and behavior. Lastly, the cross-sectional design of this study only provides a snapshot of the respondents' attitudes and behaviors at a single point in time, limiting the ability to conclude changes in consumer behavior over time.

Another limitation is the use of a purely quantitative approach. While offering valuable insights through numerical data and statistical analysis, it has inherent limitations that can restrict the depth of understanding. One key limitation is that quantitative methods often fail to capture the complexity and nuances of human behavior, particularly the emotional and psychological aspects of parasocial relationships between social media influencers and consumers. While the study can quantify how social media influencers affect purchasing behavior, it cannot delve into the reasons behind these decisions or explore the personal motivations that drive consumer trust and engagement with influencers. Furthermore, quantitative research is often rigid, relying on pre-designed surveys that may not adapt to emerging trends or unexpected responses, thus limiting flexibility. It also tends to overlook subjective experiences, such as the feelings and emotions of participants, which can provide crucial context for understanding the full impact of influencers on purchasing behavior.

Additionally, there are concerns about generalizability, especially when using purposive sampling, as the findings may not represent the broader population. While large sample sizes improve statistical significance, they do not necessarily ensure that the sample accurately reflects diverse consumer perspectives. Therefore, while a quantitative approach provides valuable data for identifying patterns, it may not fully capture the complexities and contextual factors that influence consumer behavior. It suggests a more integrated research approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods to offer a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

This study acknowledges that the findings may have been significantly shaped by the unique conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily altered online consumer behavior, particularly among Generation Z. The pandemic led to an unprecedented surge in social media engagement and reliance on e-commerce platforms due to mobility restrictions and social distancing measures. Consequently, the heightened dependence on online interactions and digital retail experiences during this period may have amplified the

influence of social media influencers (SMIs) and the formation of parasocial relationships (PSRs) beyond what might occur in a more normalized, post-pandemic environment. This temporal context presents a limitation, as the consumer behaviors observed may not fully reflect long-term patterns once traditional shopping behaviors and offline social interactions are fully restored. Therefore, caution must be exercised when generalizing these results to future periods unaffected by similar external disruptions. Future research is encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies or comparative analyses across different timeframes to better understand the evolving nature of Generation Z's engagement with influencers and online shopping behaviors in post-pandemic conditions.

This study's exclusive reliance on survey data presents several inherent limitations that may affect the depth and accuracy of its findings. While surveys are valuable for capturing quantitative trends and generalizable patterns across a broad population, they inherently restrict the exploration of complex emotional and psychological processes involved in parasocial relationships (PSRs). Survey instruments depend heavily on self-reported data, which is vulnerable to biases such as social desirability, recall inaccuracies, and respondents' interpretations of questions. Additionally, surveys often lack the contextual sensitivity required to understand how PSRs develop, evolve, and influence behavior in dynamic, real-world social media environments. As PSRs are inherently subjective and nuanced, shaped by ongoing interactions and personal meaning, surveys alone may fail to capture these subtle relational dynamics and the evolving nature of consumer-influencer connections, especially within diverse cultural and socio-economic settings.

The exploration of parasocial relationships (PSRs) and influencer marketing among Filipino Generation Z raises several ethical concerns that merit critical reflection. One significant risk is the increasing commercialization of online interactions, where influencers, who are often perceived as relatable and authentic figures, may blur the lines between genuine self-expression and strategic brand promotion. This blending of personal and commercial content can lead to deceptive advertising practices that exploit the emotional bonds formed through PSRs, particularly among young audiences with developing critical media literacy. The emotional investment of Filipino Gen Z in digital personalities can also render them more susceptible to idealized portrayals of lifestyle, beauty, and success, which may contribute to unrealistic expectations, social comparison, and negative effects on self-esteem and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the performative nature of influencer content risks obscuring authenticity, making it difficult for followers to discern between sincere engagement and monetized influence. Such dynamics not only raise concerns about manipulation and consumer autonomy but also about the long-term implications for identity formation and mental health. These ethical challenges are compounded by the absence or inconsistency of regulatory frameworks governing influencer transparency, sponsorship disclosure, and digital accountability in the Philippine context. Hence, this research advocates for heightened ethical awareness among scholars and practitioners, emphasizing the importance of digital literacy education, stronger platform accountability, and culturally relevant policy interventions to ensure that influencer marketing practices do not undermine the psychological welfare or agency of Filipino Generation Z consumers.

Implications for Future Research

In addition to the recommendations for businesses and marketers, future researchers can further explore the evolving role of parasocial relationships (PSR) in influencing Generation Z's behavior, specifically focusing on how these relationships develop across various social media platforms and content types. Further research could also investigate the impact of different product categories and service types on the strength of PSR, as certain products or services may elicit stronger emotional connections than others.

Additionally, gender differences in parasocial relationships and purchasing behavior warrant more in-depth exploration. Future researchers could explore how gendered preferences impact engagement, brand loyalty, and repeat purchasing behavior across different product sectors. There is also an opportunity to examine the intersectionality of gender with other factors, such as cultural background or social class, which may further shape how Generation Z engages with influencers.

Moreover, comparative studies between Generation Z and other demographic groups, such as millennials or Generation Alpha, could provide valuable insights into how influencer marketing strategies should evolve.

This would also allow for a more comprehensive understanding of generational shifts in consumer behavior, providing businesses with forward-thinking strategies to maintain relevance in a rapidly changing digital marketing landscape. Future research should examine how various demographic factors beyond gender, such as age, socioeconomic status, educational background, and cultural context, interact with influencer attributes and parasocial relationships. Understanding these intersections can reveal more nuanced patterns of consumer engagement and purchasing behavior across diverse segments of Generation Z and beyond.

Finally, there is a growing need to examine how e-commerce platforms like Grab, Shopee, Lazada, and Instagram integrate new technologies (such as augmented reality or AI-driven personalized content) into their shopping experiences and how these innovations influence Generation Z's trust, engagement, and purchase decisions. Future research into the technological advancements in social commerce will be essential in staying ahead of the curve and optimizing marketing efforts in the digital age.

To advance the understanding of parasocial relationships (PSRs) with social media influencers, future research should embrace a multifaceted and methodologically diverse approach. Longitudinal studies are essential to track how PSRs form, strengthen, or diminish over extended periods, providing critical insights into the temporal dynamics and long-term behavioral and psychological effects of influencer engagement. Complementing this, qualitative diary studies can capture rich, day-to-day consumer reflections and emotional fluctuations related to influencer interactions, revealing the micro-level processes that underlie evolving PSRs in naturalistic settings. Furthermore, conducting regional comparative research across various Philippine provinces would address the significant socio-cultural and economic heterogeneity within the country, highlighting how local contexts shape consumers' receptivity to influencers and the nature of their parasocial bonds. Beyond consumption-focused outcomes, future investigations should also explore the broader psychosocial consequences of PSRs, such as impacts on mental health, self-esteem, social identity, and peer validation, especially in the post-pandemic era where digital engagement has intensified and become a crucial source of social connection. Such comprehensive research designs would not only deepen theoretical frameworks but also inform culturally sensitive and context-specific marketing strategies in Southeast Asia's rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Furthermore, a more diverse methodological approach could enrich the findings and deepen the understanding of parasocial relationships (PSRs) and their impact on purchasing behavior. Specifically, future studies could benefit from employing a mixed-methods design by integrating qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions alongside quantitative surveys. This would allow researchers to capture more nuanced perspectives on why Generation Z consumers form emotional attachments to influencers and how these attachments translate into purchasing decisions.

Future research should explore the multidimensional nature of parasocial relationships (PSRs) to gain a deeper understanding of how these emotional bonds influence Generation Z consumers' behavior. Specifically, studies could investigate how dimensions such as emotional connection, perceived intimacy, and perceived friendship develop across various social media platforms and content formats. Emphasis should be placed on understanding the role of authenticity and trust in sustaining long-term PSRs, as well as how identification and relatability shape consumers' perceptions of influencer credibility and product fit. Further research could also examine perceived reciprocity, or the illusion of mutual interaction, and its role in fostering loyalty and consumer responsiveness. Moreover, future studies may benefit from longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to capture how these PSR dimensions evolve over time and influence behavioral loyalty and purchasing commitment in different cultural and technological contexts. By investigating these interrelated psychological and emotional constructs, future research can provide a more nuanced and holistic understanding of influencer-consumer dynamics in the digital age.

Future studies should consider a deeper analysis of influencer attributes beyond broad categories such as credibility and attractiveness. Specifically, exploring how nuanced traits like content style, posting consistency, and interaction frequency affect the formation and strength of parasocial relationships (PSRs) would enhance the understanding of influencer effectiveness.

Additionally, integrating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, can provide richer contextual insights into the emotional bonds between influencers and consumers, revealing underlying motivations and the complexity of these relationships that quantitative data alone may miss.

Finally, given that this study employed a cross-sectional design, future research would benefit from longitudinal approaches to capture the dynamic nature of influencer impact and parasocial relationships over time. Understanding how these connections develop, strengthen, or wane would offer a more comprehensive picture of influencer marketing's long-term effects on consumer behavior.

These recommendations aim to provide future researchers with avenues for broadening the understanding of Generation Z's relationship with influencers and social media marketing, offering a more nuanced perspective on the factors driving consumer behavior and enabling businesses to adapt and thrive in an increasingly digital-first world.

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