

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AS A DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY IN GENERATION Z

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Abstract. Digital marketing has replaced conventional marketing strategies and has been widely adopted by companies to promote their brands and reach a wider audience. Marketing through the use of Social Media Influencers is a growing trend in the digital era. Gen Z as a tech-savvy generation utilizes the power of social media to get information related to a brand. Gen Z's trust in the expertise of Social Media Influencers is crucial for marketing effectiveness as a digital marketing strategy. This study aims to provide an overview of the use of Social Media Influencers as a digital marketing strategy in Generation Z. This research uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method and systematically identifies and evaluates directly from previous research. The results of this literature review explain that currently, the use of Social Media Influencers has a significant impact on the marketing results carried out by a brand.

Keywords: digital marketing; social media; Influencer; generation z

I. INTRODUCTION

Technological developments with the internet that have broadly affected aspects of people's lives. The impact of the advancement of this technological flow is the emergence of a marketing strategy that is currently entering the digitalization era. Digital marketing, also known as Digital Marketing, has replaced conventional marketing strategies and has been widely adopted by companies to promote their *brands* and reach a wider audience. Digital marketing can take the form of *mobile* marketing, display advertising, social media, search engines, and other forms of digital marketing (Sundaram et al. [1]). Through digital media, consumers are given the convenience to get access to information from anywhere and at any time efficiently and effectively. Digital marketing can disseminate various promotional activities from a *brand* that are transferred with the help of digital media. Companies channel their efforts to bring brands and consumers closer together (Yasmin et al. [2]). Social media is a term that is often used to refer to new forms of media that involve participation, are interactive (Manning [3]). Kaplan & Haenlein [4] assumes that social media consists of a set of internet applications that allow users to create and share information with others with quick and easy access. Ease of accessing the internet is one of the factors for the high number of social media users. Social media has been able to realize human collaboration without time and place limitations (Ridwan Kamil [5]). Social media is a way for customers to express brand loyalty, as well as providing unofficial support in the form of user-generated content (UGC) which can then be re-uploaded and shared.

Currently, one of *the tools* used on social media as a form of digital marketing platform is the use of social media influencers. The use of social media influencers in the scope of marketing is increasingly widespread and is considered

important by business stakeholders. Currently, social media influencers have become a common way for *brand* or product owners to promote their brand, goods or services by displaying a good image of the influencer on goods or brands to attract the attention of their followers to buy or use the supported product or service (Schouten et al. [6]). *Brand or product* owners have found the enormous and important impact of social media influencers in promoting their products and in this process, companies are abandoning traditional marketing techniques such as using celebrities and are adopting a new wave of influencer use. This is because social media social media influencers are seen as trustworthy and credible electronic word of mouth (WOM) providers rather than paid endorsements. (Dewangan et al. [7]).

Social media influencers can take advantage of content from various social media platforms to be able to influence public opinion on a product which can ultimately increase the sales value of a company. The use of Influencers as a form of digital marketing is the result of a culture of word of mouth that has trusted support for its listeners (Munsch [8]). Today, social media is a powerful tool for reaching out to the younger generation (Heather A. Fischer et al. [9]). In today's era, almost everyone is tied to social media, especially generation Z. Gen Z is considered the first global first global generation because they were born in the digital era from 1995 to 2010 and are a generation of digital natives, highly educated, innovative creatives, and technology literate (Priporas et al. [10]). Generation Z (or Gen Z for short) is a very tech-savvy generation that it is possible to attract their attention by using social media marketing (Pinto & Paramita [11]). Gen Z also dominates the use of social media and it is undeniable that this generation is the most active in using the internet for social media (Saputro et al. [12]). In Indonesia, according to We Are Social's research results, there are 153.7 million users aged 18

years and over who in this case belong to Gen Z use social media in early 2023, which is equivalent to 79.5 percent of the total population (Simon Kemp [13]). According to Pinto & Paramita [11], 85% of Gen Z know new products through social media and are not reluctant to buy goods online. Understanding how Gen Z uses social media to find out about different products is a way to engage them with the right platform and the right message. Marketing through the use of *Social Media Influencers* is a growing trend in the digital era (Kemp et al. [14]). Based on the previous description of the characteristics of Gen Z, the use of *Social Media Influencers* as a digital marketing strategy for consumers who fall into the Gen Z category can be the right choice, especially social networks that have a viral effect (Miller [15]). Gen Z considers them peers and treats them as more trustworthy and reliable than celebrities (Martínez-López et al. [16]). In addition, Kantar.com in 2020 found that 44% of Gen Z make purchasing decisions based on recommendations from influencers they trust. Businesses are also recognizing the power of these influencers on Gen Z consumption patterns and are increasingly seeking to leverage the power of influencer recommendations as their digital marketing strategy to promote their brands, goods or services. Based on this, this article wants to analyze more deeply regarding the role of social media influencers as a digital marketing strategy for Gen Z.

According to Philip Kotler & Kevin Lane Keller [17] marketing communications are the various ways companies use to inform and remind consumers, either directly or indirectly, about the products and brands they offer. On the one hand, marketing communications is the voice of brand or product owners to establish dialogue and build relationships with consumers. The most common elements of marketing communications are: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and personal selling (Zatwarnicka-Madura et al. [18]). According to Zatwarnicka-Madura et al. [18], over time, additional tools began to be exchanged including direct marketing, digital marketing, event marketing and communication on social media one form of marketing communication in this era of digitalization are digital marketing *tools* (digital marketing). Digital marketing tools are considered as the best way to interact with customers and maintain organizational reliability because they match the pace of dynamic customer needs (Wymbs [19]). Digital marketing is an umbrella term that encompasses all digital techniques that are efficient in acquisition, relationship building, brand promotion and customer retention and ultimately increase sales. (Sundaram et al. [1]). Digital marketing implements various promotional activities which are transferred with the help of digital media (Sundaram et al. [1]). Digital media has been reconfigured with the emergence of social media which can carry out a wider dissemination of information because it has helped in combining innovation and creativity in increasing sharing through social networks (Schwartz [20]). Social media has gained popularity in recent years, and almost half of internet users are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram users who are active on these platforms on a daily basis (Sundaram et al.

[1]). As the field of social media advertising is evolving, new potentials are being discovered and the challenge is to exploit them effectively. maximum. Intuit co-founder Scott Cook says that brands don't depend on what companies communicate to their customers, but depend on what consumers talk to each other. The company has only one power, namely controlling information (Lipsman et al. [21]).

The digital marketing channel that is currently in vogue is the *influencer marketing strategy* (Sudha & Sheena [22]). An influencer is someone who attracts a large number of followers on social media and becomes a source of advice for them (Vrontis et al. [23]). *Social Media Influencers* as independent social media experts who have built their brand *personality based on their reliability and credibility as specialists or experts in creating and conveying authentic messages to their followers and they usually will not create advertisements openly, they will start with interactions or dialogues in their community* (Nugroho et al. [24]). *Influencers* are more likely to be micro-celebrities who may engage in advocating for products and services through paid sponsorship by collaborating with brands and providing opinions (Martínez-López et al. [16]). *Social Media Influencers* as *Key Opinion Leaders* (KOL) should ideally upload original content so that their current followers and their potential followers perceive it differently (Casaló et al. [25]). Therefore, the narrative strategy of social media *influencers* will enable e-WOM on online *platforms* where customers can also interact by sharing their ideas and opinions (Zhou et al. [26]).

Consumers buy a brand or product based on quality, image and price (Suhaily & Darmoyo [27]). The strategy of the brand or product owner to attract consumers must also be considered. *Marketing* strategies with *influencers* are believed to be able to make a product or *brand* last in the minds of consumers (Bashir [28]). The experience gained by the public when viewing *influencer reviews* creates curiosity and great purchase intention for the product or *brand*. Then a good buying experience can create loyal customers. With an interesting experience, consumer confidence in the product increases, bringing consumers to the next purchase and not hesitate to talk about the product to others (Pinto & Paramita, [11]).

Generation Z is defined as those born after 1995, the year the commercialization of the internet started (Mowery & Simcoe [29]). Living with digital technology since birth, Gen Z has different characteristics from previous generations. Gen Z tends to rely on modern technology, so that online platforms such as social media, online games, and online education and online communication are the media most often used (Greydanus & Greydanus [30]). Raised on social networks, their existence is more connected to the electronic and digital world (Dangmei et al. [31]). Gen Z consumes and uses it as a medium to provide or disseminate information (Berkup, [32]).

Some of the characteristics of Gen Z include *multitasking users*, fair-minded, faster information processors, and change seekers (Jacobsen & Barsen [33]). These characteristics influence how Gen Z social media users consume content and establish relationships with brands.

They expect companies to use individualized personalized messaging based on shopping preferences. Social media platforms can play an important role in helping consumers make purchasing decisions (Hazari & Sethna [34]). Gen Z is familiar with technology for shopping and is highly engaged with brand product stories throughout their shopping journey. Gen Z is the most likely to shop through social media and engage in more research to find reliable sources of information about products before making a purchase decision (Chiu & Ho [35]).

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method to be used is Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Fink in 2007 said that the systematic Literature Review (SLR) is “a systematic, explicit, comprehensive, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners” (Dobbins et al. [36]). Selected literature studies are in the form of articles and research journals. This research method is used to compile articles that examine the use of Influencers as Digital Marketing on Social Media in Generation Z. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines will also be used in this study. There are four phases of this guideline, namely: identification, screening, eligibility and criteria for inclusion of reports that fall within the scope of the topic (Page et al. [37]). In compiling this article, several strategies were used to conclude the results of the content analysis. The first is to identify a topic or problem that is the source of keyword searches to find data from online sites. Next is filtering or filtering the data sources that have been found by determining criteria such as year of publication, discipline, and assessment of the feasibility of research quality. The next stage is data collection according to predetermined criteria and then extracted to analyze the application of the concept to elaborate on the research results found.

The journals found are journals in English and with international academic journal standards. The search process is carried out by searching for the keywords Digital Marketing, Influencer on search engines, which will then be sorted to find those that are appropriate and relevant to the needs of this research. The keywords used are: Digital Marketing, Influencers, Social Media, and Generation Z. Data collection was carried out by searching and selecting academic journals online at several Google Scholars. The time range selected for searching academic journals is 2020-2023. Through searching for journals with international standard academic journal criteria, and using the main keywords, 13,700 journals were found. Then a limitation process was carried out with time limit restrictions, 347 journals were found. Furthermore, the selection process is carried out according to the scientific discipline, as well as an assessment of the feasibility of research quality as many as 30 journals. Then, through the selection process in accordance with the research topic, there were 10 selected journals and analyzed in the PRISMA Guidelines

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using Social Media Influencers as a Digital Marketing Strategy

The emergence of social media in the digital era has transformed tremendously and created enormous opportunities such as brand promotion, customer management, protecting brand reputation and the benefits of network marketing (Sundaram et al. [1]). Marketing using *Social Media Influencers* is the latest innovation in digital advertising. *Social Media Influencers* are those who use images, videos and other posts on social media (Pawar [38]) platforms to influence consumer impressions of companies or products. Pawar [38] also mentioned that *influencer marketing* has a wider audience reach than conventional marketing techniques. The use of *Social Media Influencers* is now widely practiced by brand owners to market their products with the aim of increasing sales and buying interest of the public. The effectiveness of using *Social Media Influencers* as brand advocates can be determined by the content shared by *influencers* and customer purchase intentions (Pawar [38]). In this digital era, the most effective instrument for influencing business marketing tactics is social media. Based on research conducted by Pawar [38] mentioned that product marketing using *influencers* is becoming more popular as a result of word-of-mouth marketing trends. The credibility of *Social Media Influencers* is significantly influenced directly by trustworthiness, quality of information, and entertainment value, and significantly influenced indirectly by these factors and consumer intentions to make purchases. In addition, consumers' desire to make purchases is directly influenced by the credibility and trust of an *influencer* (Pawar [38]). The majority of Gen Z consumers use social media, and they follow various *Social Media Influencers*. Brand owners consider the feelings of Gen Z consumers who will guide their purchasing decisions (Dabija et al. [39]). Support from influencers creates a favorable attitude towards the brand that influences consumers' desire to make a purchase. Some of the factors that determine an *influencer's* influence include knowledge, popularity, and fan base. According to research conducted by Pawar [38], influencers can be used effectively to target Gen Z.

Gen Z towards a product can be increased through *Social Media Influencers* by including interesting messages and the benefits of products that match the interests and lifestyle of Gen Z. Research conducted by Hazari & Sethna [34] shows that the attention and attitude of Gen Z is a significant determinant of the purchase of a product. So with this the use of *Social Media Influencers* that suit the style and interests of Gen Z can influence their decision to buy a product. If the brand owner is able to create a good disposition towards consumers, in this case Gen Z, towards advertising through *Social Media Influencers*, it will cause consumers to be more involved and pay attention to the advertisement, so that the message conveyed becomes more effective (Hazari & Sethna [34]). Messages conveyed by Social Media Influencers are considered more relevant to Generation Z consumers. In addition, from a marketing and advertising perspective, digital marketing with this approach is

considered more authentic than digital marketing communications and advertising without *social media influencers*. (Munsch [8]). Research conducted by Munsch [8] Social Media Influencers can help Generation Z consumers pay more attention to digital advertising stimuli. Apart from that, *Social Media Influencers* can also help Generation Z minds to understand new information in advertisements which helps them to be perceived as relevant and authentic. This study also shows from a qualitative perspective that a similar priming effect occurs when digital marketing communications and digital marketing communications and advertisements are shared by Generation's social media connections, for example, from their followers.

The Role of Social Media Influencers on Gen Z's Buying Interest

The research conducted by Chiu & Ho [35] Outlines seven managerial implications that must be considered by a *brand owner* to optimize the use of *Social Media Influencers* in order to be able to engage the Gen Z market. These implications include that brand owners must understand how *Social Media Influencers* form an emotional bond with Gen Z which is very important for developing an effective social media advertising strategy. The second implication is that brand owners should use local *influencers* or ethnic/cultural groups that are the same as Gen Z target consumers somewhere so that the goals to be achieved are well conveyed. The third implication is that brand owners must be able to customize the content provided by *Social Media Influencers* to Gen Z consumers by using quality content production to increase purchasing decision making. The fourth implication is that *brand owners* must choose social media influencers who have physical attractiveness that can attract attention. Balaban & Mustăţea [40], stated that attractiveness, credibility, knowledge, and likeness are seen as important elements of the perceived trust towards influencers on social media. But according to research, Gen Z is more concerned with influencer credibility than good looks (Pinto & Paramita, [11]). So *brand owners* must choose the right *Social Media Influencer* to support their product because a good *influencer* image can affect the image of the brand itself.

The selection of *influencers* who are credible and experts in conveying product-related information is the fifth implication that a *brand owner* must pay attention to. Earning Gen Z's trust in *influencer expertise* is critical to marketing effectiveness. Attractiveness, credibility, knowledge and likeness are seen as important elements of the perceived trust of influencers on social media (Zatwarnicka-Madura et al. [18]). However, social media credibility ratings are often biased, and false feedback results from the deliberate manipulation of (Berhanu & Raj [41]) *online reviews*. In order to effectively influence Gen Z followers, *influencers* must have skills that enhance their credibility in a particular area, for example, expert knowledge (Zatwarnicka-Madura et al. [18]). The trust of a given influencer plays a major role in changing consumer perceptions about the level of honesty, sincerity and truthfulness, which are fundamental elements in determining their purchase intention (Alyahya [42]). *Influencers* who are believed to have a positive and significant

influence on purchase intention through the image of a *brand* (Nugroho et al. [24]).

The sixth implication, *brand owners* who want to increase purchase intention, they must choose influencers who have emotional closeness to Gen Z such as famous *public figures* /celebrities that are supported by many Gen Z people, and the last implication, *brand owners* can prioritize certain marketing activities based on support objectives, making it possible to gain a better perspective on understanding Gen Z opinions of purchasing supported products. This is in line with research conducted by Zatwarnicka-Madura et al. [18] which states that the impact of *Social Media Influencers* on Generation Z consumer behavior on purchase intention is an important key. Purchase intention measures consumers' willingness to buy a product or service. *Social Media Influencers* have a significant influence on Generation Z's purchase intention. It can be said that the use of *Social Media Influencers* can be a potential strategy to attract Generation Z's interest, as long as *the influencer* chosen does not only have an attractive appearance but has high credibility.

Nugroho et al. [24] in his research also states that expertise has a positive and significant effect on Gen Z buying interest, and this credibility also has the greatest influence on Gen Z buying interest. The credibility of an *influencer* who can be trusted has a direct and significant influence on Gen Z buying intentions. Attractiveness as a one of the attributes of *influencer credibility* has a direct and significant influence on the brand image of the endorsed product (Nugroho et al. [24]). Research conducted by (Pinto & Paramita [11]) *Social Media Influencers* significantly influences the loyalty of Generation Z in using a *brand*. Generation Z is identified as a generation that gets bored very quickly. However, if given something a little more unique, they can become loyal customers. Research conducted by shows that Pham et al. [43] *influencer* features such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness have a significant impact on the information they provide such as the quality of arguments, usability, or influence, and have a positive impact on attitudes and behavior of Gen Z in buying a product. .

The Contradiction of Using Social Media Influencers in Gen Z

On the other hand, there are contrasting views of Gen Z on the use of *Social Media Influencers*, which are highly dependent on the control of a *brand*. Research conducted by (Pradhan et al. [44]), which explains why Gen Z avoids using Social Media Influencers as a trusted source in choosing a product. They consider influencers who upload content at the behest of a *brand* to be seen as dishonest because this can be seen as taking commercial advantage as an act that is insincere and immoral. In addition, this goes against Gen Z's expectations of *influencers*, who are believed to be honest content creators who do not depend on orders from a *brand*.

To avoid rejection from Gen Z of a product for uploads made by an influencer, *brand owners* are expected not to exercise excessive control over influencer uploads when targeting Gen Z. Social media can facilitate interaction between an influencer and consumers. Therefore, brands should focus on developing networks based on creative and

informal relationships (Pradhan et al. [44]). Brands should adapt their *influencer* marketing strategy for Gen Z as they are perceived as more skeptical of covert advertising and aware of a brand's control over influencers and product-related content. Therefore, brands must understand that their credibility and *influencer credibility* takes precedence over any commercial goals (Pradhan et al. [44]).

IV. CONCLUSION

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) in this study has collected several journal articles regarding the use of Social Media Influencers and their application to digital marketing strategies for Gen Z. This research reviews previous research and from this research it is concluded that increasingly in today's digital era, the use of Social Media Influencers have a significant impact on the results of marketing carried out by a brand. In this digital era, increasing competition among social media platforms to attract users and the short attention span of Gen Z users who want to interact with as much content as possible, this makes a brand owner to recognize the potential added value of marketing campaigns and advertisements in the media. which can increase the return on investment. The use of Social Media Influencers can influence the beliefs of Gen Z, who are a generation that is very close to social media. The use of Social Media Influencers as a digital marketing strategy has many positive impacts for brand owners to increase awareness and buying interest from Gen Z for a product. This can help build brand loyalty to Gen Z, because repeat buying of the same brand leads to commitment (Mao et al., 2014). Generation Z tends to buy products after seeing reviews from influencers, especially influencers they already trust and have high credibility for a product. If the information from the influencer meets expectations, then generation Z will show their loyalty and won't even hesitate to recommend and discuss it with those closest to them. However, regarding the use of Social Media Influencers, brand owners are expected to pay attention to and appreciate the influencer's honesty and creativity in the products to be marketed. Gen Z as a social media literate generation realizes that influencers who are too dependent and only rely on instructions and control from a brand mark dishonesty and insincerity. So this causes the perception that the Social Media Influencer only wants to reap commercial benefits which has an impact on distrust and negative perceptions in the eyes of consumers. Future research can be considered to conduct a deeper study related to the use of Social Media Influencers to increase the reputation of a brand through the concept of a digital marketing strategy for generation Z. The use of the Digital marketing concept in the future will not only focus on increasing sales, awareness and purchase intentions by brand owners to consumers, which in this case is generation Z, but can also be used to improve or enhance the reputation of a brand that previously had a bad image and was not trusted by the public. Future research is expected to present valid research using quantitative methods based on industrial data that can be tested for validity and validity. The effectiveness of using Social Media Influencers as a digital marketing

strategy for Gen Z in the digital era is still interesting for further research.

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