

## Influencer Personal Branding and UGC Impact on Gen Z Consumer Trust: Perceived Authenticity Role

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### Abstract

This study investigates the intricate relationship among Influencer Personal Branding, User-Generated Content (UGC), Perceived Authenticity, and Consumer Trust among Generation Z in the beauty category on the Shopee marketplace. Amidst the rapid expansion of e-commerce in the beauty industry, digital marketing strategies heavily leverage influencers and UGC. However, critical issues such as product authenticity, influencer credibility, and the transparency of consumer reviews necessitate a deeper understanding of trust as a pivotal factor in purchasing decisions, particularly for the discerning and digitally-native Generation Z. This research integrates these variables to simultaneously examine their influence on consumer trust, with a specific focus on the mediating role of perceived authenticity, in the context of beauty marketplaces, a domain with limited prior study, especially concerning Gen Z in the Cirebon area. Employing a quantitative approach with an associative causal design, data were collected through an online questionnaire from 144 Generation Z respondents in Cirebon who had purchased beauty products on Shopee. The selection criteria focused on Gen Z's active engagement with e-commerce. The findings reveal that both Influencer Personal Branding and User-Generated Content have a positive and significant effect on Consumer Trust, and that Perceived Authenticity mediates these relationships. This underscores the importance of marketing strategies rooted in influencer credibility, transparent consumer reviews, and genuine authenticity for enhancing trust. Businesses and influencers are advised to cultivate an authentic image and foster honest reviews to solidify consumer trust in the digital beauty landscape.

**Keywords:** Consumer Trust; Personal Branding Influencer; Perceived Authenticity; Shopee Beauty; User Generated Content.

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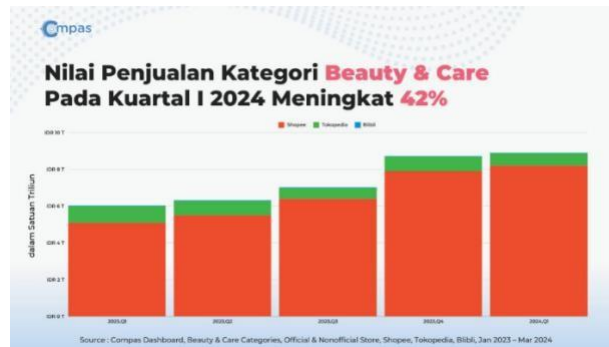
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### INTRODUCTION

The development of e-commerce in Indonesia is growing rapidly, especially in the beauty category. The Shopee platform has become the most widely used marketplace for purchasing beauty products because it offers

competitive prices, a wide selection, and strong marketing content. Consumer trust is a crucial factor in beauty product transactions on digital marketplaces such as Shopee Beauty, especially for Generation Z, who tend to be selective and rely on digital information when making purchases. The high risk associated with beauty products makes trust an important factor in consumer decisions amid the many choices of brands and sellers. Influencer personal branding and user-generated content (UGC) are believed to play a role in shaping this trust. Influencers with credible, authentic images can increase consumer confidence, while UGC, such as user reviews and ratings, is often considered more objective.



**Figure 1.** Shopee Beauty Online Sales Data

Based on Kompas data (2024), the sales value of the Beauty & Care category across major Indonesian marketplaces shows that Shopee has consistently had the highest sales value compared to other platforms from the first quarter of 2023 to the first quarter of 2024. This significant increase in sales value reflects the high demand for beauty products and Shopee's increasingly strong position in Indonesia's e-commerce ecosystem (Kompas, 2024). This condition emphasizes the importance of understanding the factors that influence consumer trust in the digital marketplace environment.

Digital influencers can engage in more direct dialogue with consumers than other spokespersons, allowing consumers to feel a sense of intimacy with the influencer and accept brand information more easily. (Deng & Messinger, 2022). Effective, well-chosen influencers help consumers intuitively understand brand value and foster positive brand attitudes. (Che et al., 2025). Within this framework, consumers increasingly rely on influencers to obtain relevant, timely, and experiential product information. (Ozdemir et al., 2025). Furthermore, influencers contribute significantly to shaping consumer perceptions, increasing engagement, and modulating purchasing behavior. (Hosen et al., 2025). However, certain influencers choose to reject commercial collaboration offers to maintain the integrity and authenticity of their content, thereby establishing a new paradigm in digital marketing methodology. (Olbermann & Schramm, 2025).

The collaborative dynamics between content creators and audiences on UGC platforms can significantly influence user motivation, perceived value, and engagement levels. (Nasrabadi et al., 2024). UGC refers to social media content created by users or the general public based on their experiences with products or services, rather than by professionals paid by companies to promote their products (Li et al., 2022). UGC is a source of information that can influence consumer interest and purchasing decisions. Consumers today increasingly rely on other users' experiences when deciding whether to purchase a product, and UGC has become a trusted medium because it is considered more authentic and relevant. (Santos & Vasconcelos, 2025). However, the existing literature primarily focuses on the impact of UGC on overall purchase intention, while the dimension of consumer trust in collaborative and live-streaming environments remains underexplored. (Sun et al., 2023).

When consumers demonstrate high relational value toward a brand, a deeper sense of acceptance and engagement is likely to materialize, thereby fostering brand loyalty and defensive behavior. (Chou & Chen, 2025). Trust plays an important role in strengthening consumers' perceptions of value, thereby positively impacting purchasing behavior and decision-making processes. (Pan, 2024). In the best interests of consumers, it is in the brand's best interest to develop successful relationships with them. Brand trust exists when consumers have confidence in the reliability and integrity of service providers. (Hanaysha, 2022).

When consumers develop a high relational value towards a brand, it often translates into deeper acceptance, engagement, and ultimately, brand loyalty. Trust is crucial for reinforcing consumers' perceptions of value and positively influencing purchasing behavior and decision-making. Brand trust is established when consumers have confidence in the reliability and integrity of service providers, aligning with their best interests for successful relationships.

Prior research often analyzes Influencer Personal Branding or UGC in isolation, without comparatively assessing their effectiveness in building consumer trust. For instance, studies have explored the impact of

influencer authenticity on purchase intentions among Gen Z, as well as the mediating role of trust between perceived UGC authenticity and purchase intentions. However, studies specifically targeting Gen Z in the Shopee Beauty category that integrate both influencer personal branding and UGC into a single comprehensive model are scarce. This leaves unclear which factor exerts a more dominant influence on their trust and how perceived authenticity mediates these relationships within this specific demographic and marketplace.

The novelty of this research lies in simultaneously testing influencer personal branding and UGC on consumer trust, with perceived authenticity as a mediating variable, specifically within the Shopee Beauty marketplace and focusing on Generation Z in Indonesia. This integrated approach provides a more nuanced understanding of trust formation in a highly dynamic and competitive digital beauty landscape, offering valuable insights that have been limited in previous studies, which generally examine e-commerce platforms or social media more broadly. Consequently, this study aims to analyze the simultaneous influence of Personal Branding Influencers and User Generated Content on Consumer Trust within the Shopee Beauty Marketplace among Gen Z, specifically examining the mediating role of Perceived Authenticity in these relationships.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Personal Branding Influencer

Personal Branding is a strategic process by which individuals, particularly influencers, cultivate an authentic, consistent self-image to communicate their unique value proposition to their target audience effectively. (Gohil et al., 2025). In the realm of influencer marketing, personal branding transcends mere logos or visual aesthetics, evolving into a Human Brand. (Lehto, 2025). Recent academic discourse emphasizes the significance of Self-Disclosure and Parasocial Interaction, a one-way relationship where audiences develop a sense of familiarity and connection with the influencer. (Nazara et al., 2025). The allure of celebrity appeal plays a crucial role in fostering emotional connections with brands, thereby influencing trust and product perception. Social media platforms further amplify the efficacy of celebrity endorsements, acting as primary drivers of perceived trust and quality. Studies by (Abbas et al., 2023) and (Akram et al., 2023) Highlight how social media's influence, particularly through factors like credibility and engagement, positively affects consumer trust, which in turn shapes perceptions of quality and purchase intentions. Influencers who successfully forge an authentic brand image are widely regarded as credible and reliable sources of information. Key dimensions underpinning effective influencer personal branding include Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Authenticity.

However, the effectiveness of influencer personal branding is not without its complexities. The increasing commercialization of influencer content can sometimes lead to a perceived loss of authenticity, potentially undermining the trust built with their audience. This highlights a critical tension between commercial objectives and the maintenance of a genuine personal brand. Despite these challenges, a consistent and authentic personal brand remains a powerful tool for establishing credibility. When influencers demonstrate genuine knowledge (expertise), act with integrity (trustworthiness), and remain true to themselves (authenticity), they are more likely to be perceived as reliable sources of information, especially for products that involve a high degree of personal relevance and perceived risk, such as beauty products. For Gen Z, who value transparency and genuine connections, an influencer's authentic personal brand serves as a strong signal of reliability, directly contributing to their willingness to trust product recommendations and, by extension, the brands associated with these influencers.

### User Generated Content

User-generated content (UGC) is content voluntarily created by non-professional users and disseminated through digital platforms, encompassing a wide array of formats, including reviews, ratings, photos, videos, and product testimonials. (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). UGC significantly contributes to expanding a brand's market reach. Sharing personal experiences with a brand's products on social media enhances brand visibility, aligning with findings that show how the creation and distribution of user-generated content aid consumers' brand recognition and recall. (Kao, 2022). Consequently, user-generated content can substantially elevate a product's brand awareness. On e-commerce platforms, online reviews, typically generated by buyers, are characterized by attributes such as review length, numerical ratings, and textual content. Numerical ratings offer quantitative summaries of consumers' experiences, attitudes, or emotions, often represented by star ratings, while review text provides open-ended qualitative descriptions. The dimensions of UGC frequently explored in research include information quality, review valence, review volume, and source credibility. (Henry Wasosa, 2025).

While UGC is often lauded for its objectivity and authenticity, stemming from genuine user experiences, its impact on consumer trust can be nuanced. The proliferation of fake reviews and sponsored content has led to increased consumer skepticism, making the perceived authenticity of UGC a critical factor (Younis, 2025). Nevertheless, when UGC is perceived as authentic, it serves as powerful social proof, allowing consumers to evaluate product reliability based on collective experiences (Santos & Vasconcelos, 2025). For Gen Z, who are highly influenced by peer opinions and seek transparency, authentic UGC can significantly reduce perceived risk and enhance confidence in purchase decisions. The sheer volume and positive valence of UGC can also signal

product popularity and satisfaction, further contributing to trust. Therefore, despite potential skepticism, high-quality and authentic UGC remains a vital component in building consumer trust in digital marketplaces. This leads to our second hypothesis:

### **Consumer Trust**

Consumer Trust refers to consumers' belief that a brand, seller, or platform is reliable, honest, and capable of fulfilling its promises regarding products or services. (Ünalmiş et al., 2024). In the context of digital marketplaces, trust is a foundational element due to the inherent uncertainties, limited physical interactions, and information asymmetry between buyers and sellers. (Tedjakusuma et al., 2025). Consumer trust is commonly assessed through several dimensions, including honesty, competence, and reliability. Honesty reflects the perception that sellers or influencers provide truthful information; competence pertains to their ability to deliver on promised performance; and reliability signifies consistency in meeting consumer expectations. Collectively, these dimensions determine consumers' confidence in engaging in online transactions. Therefore, within marketplace platforms such as Shopee Beauty, consumer trust is a multidimensional construct shaped by credibility signals, social influence, and experiential validation. Understanding the mechanisms of trust formation is crucial for explaining consumer behavior, especially among Generation Z, who meticulously evaluate digital information before making purchasing decisions.

### **Perceived Authenticity**

Perceived Authenticity is a critical construct in understanding consumer responses to influencer marketing and UGC, particularly among Generation Z. It refers to the extent to which consumers perceive an influencer or a piece of content as genuine, real, and true. In the context of influencers, perceived authenticity is often linked to the influencer's consistency in values, transparency in disclosures, and genuine passion for the products or services they promote. For UGC, authenticity stems from the belief that the content reflects genuine, unbiased user experiences rather than sponsored or fabricated endorsements. (Niu, 2025).

Several studies highlight the mediating role of perceived authenticity in influencing consumer trust and purchase intentions. For instance, research indicates that when Gen Z consumers perceive an influencer as authentic, this significantly enhances their trust in the influencer, which in turn affects their purchase intentions. (Henry Wasosa, 2025). Similarly, the perceived authenticity of UGC positively influences brand trust, as consumers tend to trust content that they believe originates from real users with genuine experiences. The dimensions of perceived authenticity can include originality, naturalness, genuineness, and consistency. In the digital age, where consumers are exposed to vast amounts of marketing content, the ability of influencers and UGC to convey authenticity becomes a powerful driver of credibility and, ultimately, trust.

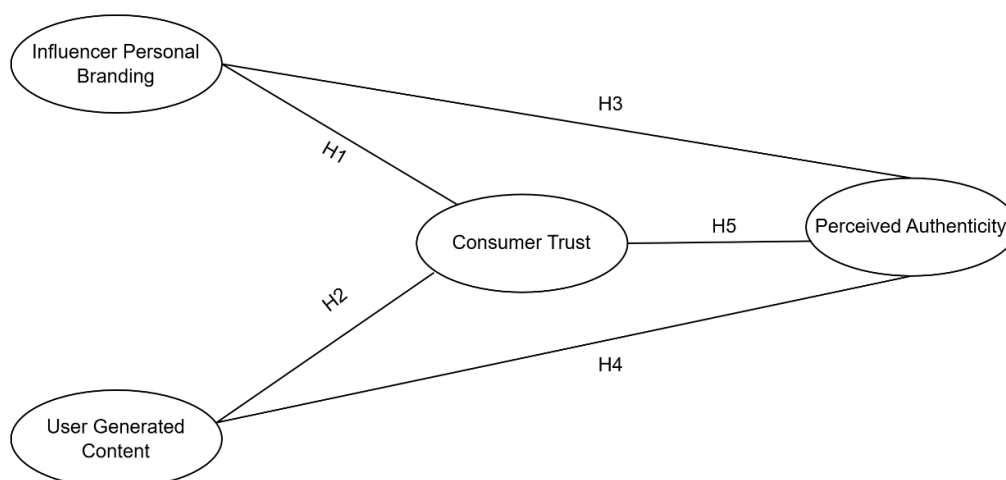
Building on this, we propose that perceived authenticity is a critical psychological mechanism through which influencer personal branding and UGC shape consumer trust. For influencer personal branding, consistent, genuine self-presentation fosters a perception of authenticity, which in turn enhances credibility and trustworthiness among Gen Z consumers. This heightened trust, mediated by perceived authenticity, then translates into greater consumer trust in the products or brands endorsed by the influencer. Thus, we hypothesize:

## **METHOD**

This study employs an explanatory quantitative approach to test the proposed research model, as depicted in Figure 2. The research instrument consists of a questionnaire with 18 statements, each variable measured by 6 indicators. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was utilized for measurements. The data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method. This method is particularly suitable for small- to medium-sized samples and is highly robust to non-normal data.

This study focuses on Gen Z, a demographic with significant potential for market segmentation in beauty products. The influence of peer recommendations on consumer trust among Gen Z is demonstrably significant, confirming the strong social dynamics and the need for connection and shared experiences within this group. Therefore, this study defines Gen Z as the target population. Gen Z comprises individuals born between 1997 and 2012, whose lifestyles are profoundly influenced by technological advancements in the digital era.

The population for this study consists of Gen Z individuals residing in the city and regency of Cirebon, aged between 15 and 30 years. Purposive sampling was employed for sample selection, where respondents were chosen based on specific criteria: being Gen Z individuals aged 15–30, residing in Cirebon City or Regency, and actively using social media platforms and having purchased beauty products on Shopee. Data collection was carried out through an online survey using Google Forms, distributed via social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok, from November 2025 to January 2026. The sample size of 144 respondents meets the minimum requirement based on the ten times rule in PLS-SEM analysis.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework

In the context of digital marketing, influencers and user-generated content play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions. Consumers not only receive information but also evaluate the credibility of the source and the authenticity of the information. Therefore, the variables of Influencer Personal Branding and User-Generated Content are assumed to influence Consumer Trust and Perceived Authenticity.

### **The Relationship Between Influencer Personal Branding and Consumer Trust**

The results of the hypothesis testing show that influencer personal branding has a positive effect on consumer trust. This indicates that the better an influencer's personal branding, the higher the level of consumer trust. Strong personal branding reflects credibility, consistency, and a positive image that can convince the audience of the information being conveyed. Consumers tend to trust influencers with a good reputation and perceived competence in their field. Additionally, the clarity of an influencer's identity and communication style also contributes to building a connection with the audience. Thus, personal branding is a key factor in creating and enhancing consumer trust.

H<sub>1</sub>: Influencer personal branding has a positive impact on consumer trust.

### **The Relationship Between User-Generated Content and Consumer Trust**

User-generated content has a positive impact on consumer trust. This means that user-generated content, such as reviews, testimonials, and product usage experiences, can increase consumer trust. Such content is generally perceived as more objective and lacks direct commercial interests. Consequently, consumers tend to view information from fellow users as more honest and trustworthy. The more abundant and high-quality the User-Generated Content available, the greater the likelihood of building consumer trust. Thus, UGC serves as an effective source of information for fostering trust in the digital age.

H<sub>2</sub>: User-Generated Content has a positive Impact on Consumer Trust

### **The Relationship Between Influencer Personal Branding and Perceived Authenticity**

Influencer personal branding positively affects perceived authenticity. This indicates that strong personal branding can shape consumers' perceptions of the authenticity of the information influencers convey. Influencers who project a consistent, transparent, and authentic image are more likely to be viewed as honest sources of information. Consumers tend to perceive the content shared by such influencers as genuine. Additionally, alignment between an influencer's self-image and the content they share further reinforces the perception of authenticity. Therefore, personal branding plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' perceptions of authenticity.

H<sub>3</sub>: Influencer personal branding has a positive effect on Perceived Authenticity.

### **The Effect of User-Generated Content on Perceived Authenticity**

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that User-Generated Content has a positive effect on Perceived Authenticity. This means that user-generated content can enhance the perceived authenticity of information or a product. Content derived from real-life experiences tends to be perceived as more natural and less contrived. Consumers typically place more trust in reviews or testimonials from other users than in promotional content from companies. The more authentic and relevant the content is, the higher the perceived authenticity. Thus, UGC is a key factor in building authenticity in the digital environment.

H<sub>4</sub>: User-generated content has a positive effect on Perceived Authenticity.

### The Influence of Consumer Trust on Perceived Authenticity

The results of the hypothesis testing indicate that Consumer Trust has a positive effect on Perceived Authenticity. This suggests that the level of consumer trust plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of authenticity. Consumers who have a high level of trust in a particular information source tend to view that information as more authentic. This trust stems from the belief that the information received is honest and reliable. Furthermore, the stronger the consumer's trust, the less doubt they have about the information's truthfulness. Thus, Consumer Trust is a key factor in enhancing perceived authenticity.

H<sub>5</sub>: Consumer Trust has a positive effect on Perceived Authenticity.

### RESULT

Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents in this study were women (68%), aged 20-25 years (74%), and were predominantly students (86%). This composition indicates that the most active users of the Shopee Beauty platform in responding to beauty trends are young adults who are highly familiar with social media and online shopping.

**Table 1.** Respondent Demographics

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
- Male	48	32%
- Female	96	68%
Usia		
- 15-20 years	28	18,7%
- 20-25 years	112	74%
- 25-30 years	4	8%
Occupation		
- Mahasiswa	120	86%
- Karyawan Swasta	15	9%
- Pegawai	9	5%

In Table 2, all measurement indicators show Outer Loading values consistently above the set threshold of 0.70. Table 2 shows that for each latent construct, the value is higher than the minimum requirement of 0.50 (AVE). This indicates that the constructs have convergent validity. In addition, the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) scores for each construct exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70. Overall, these statistical results strongly support the validity and reliability of the constructs used in this study.

**Table 2.** Outer Loading

	Consumer Trust	Perceived Authenticity	Personal Branding Influencer	User Generated Content
CT 1	0.806			
CT 2	0.747			
CT 3	0.836			
CT 4	0.819			
PA 1		0.820		
PA 2		0.825		
PA 3		0.831		
PA 4		0.775		
PBI 1			0.809	
PBI 2			0.790	
PBI 3			0.855	
PBI 4			0.773	
PBI 5			0.805	
UGC 2				0.775
UGC 3				0.726
UGC 4				0.779
UGC 5				0.718
UGC 1				0.799

**Table 3.** Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted	Result
CT	0.816	0.82	0.879	0.645	Valid & Reliable
PA	0.829	0.829	0.886	0.661	Valid & Reliable
PBI	0.866	0.867	0.903	0.651	Valid & Reliable
UGC	0.818	0.824	0.872	0.578	Valid & Reliable

All measurement indicators show outside-loading values consistently above the 0.70 threshold. Table 3 shows that for each latent construct, the value is higher than the minimum requirement of 0.50 (AVE). This demonstrates that the constructs possess convergent validity. Also, the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) scores for each construct exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70. When considered as a whole, these statistical results strongly support the conclusion that the constructs used in this study are both valid and reliable.

**Table 4.** R-Square of Latent Variable

	R-square	R-square adjusted
CT	0.753	0.750
PA	0.723	0.717

Based on Table 4, the R-Square value for the CT (Consumer Trust) variable is 0.753, with an adjusted R-Square value of 0.750. This indicates that the independent variables in the model explain 75.3% of the variance in Consumer Trust, while the remaining 24.7% is attributable to other factors not included in this research model. This result suggests that the model has a strong explanatory power for the Consumer Trust variable.

Meanwhile, the R-Square value for the PA (Perceived Authenticity) variable is 0.723, with an adjusted R-Square value of 0.717. This means that the model's independent variables explain 72.3% of the variance in Perceived Authenticity, while variables outside the model explain the remaining 27.7%. This also indicates that the model has a strong ability to explain Perceived Authenticity.

**Table 5.** F-Square of Latent Variable

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics ((O/STDEV))	P values	Category
CT -> PA	0.010	0.025	0.035	0.296	0.768	Weak
PBI -> CT	0.040	0.049	0.047	0.853	0.394	Weak
PBI -> PA	0.281	0.299	0.111	2.533	0.011	Moderate
UGC -> CT	0.554	0.585	0.131	4.237	0.000	Moderate
UGC -> PA	0.038	0.045	0.034	1.121	0.263	Weak

Based on the results of the F-square test in Table 5, the effect of the Consumer Trust (CT) variable on Purchase Decision/Behavior (PA) is 0.010, indicating a weak influence. The Personal Branding Influencer (PBI) variable on Consumer Trust (CT) has a value of 0.040, which also falls into the weak category. However, the PBI on PA is 0.281, which falls into the moderate category; thus, PBI has a fairly significant influence on PA.

Furthermore, the User-Generated Content (UGC) variable on Consumer Trust (CT) has a value of 0.554, which falls into the moderate category and indicates a fairly strong influence compared to the other variables. Meanwhile, the influence of UGC on PA is 0.038, which falls into the weak category. Thus, it can be concluded that the greatest influence in this model lies in the relationship between UGC and CT, followed by the relationships between PBI and PA, both of which are moderate. In contrast, the other relationships show relatively weak influence.

**Table 6.** Discriminant Validity

	CT	PA	PBI	UGC
CT				
PA	0.758			
PBI	0.697	0.837		
UGC	0.866	0.962	1.008	

Based on Table 6, the discriminant validity evaluation using the HTMT method indicates that most correlation coefficients between variables are acceptable; however, some exceed the recommended thresholds. The HTMT values obtained between the Consumer Trust (CT) and Purchase Intention (PA) variables were 0.758,

and between CT and Personal Branding Influencer (PBI) were 0.697, indicating that both relationships remained below the 0.85 threshold and thus met the criteria for discriminant validity.

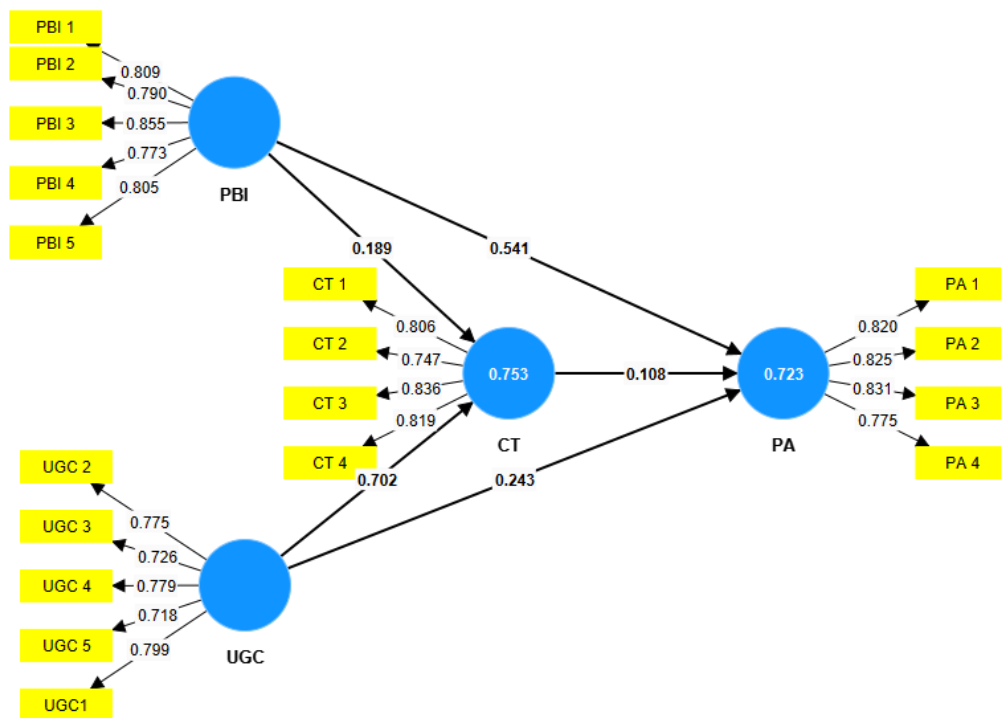
Furthermore, the relationship between PA and PBI has a value of 0.837, which is still close to the maximum threshold but remains acceptable. On the other hand, the relationships between User-Generated Content (UGC) and CT (0.866) and between UGC and PA (0.962) exceed the 0.85 threshold, suggesting potential issues with discriminant validity or a lack of clear distinction between these constructs. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient between UGC and PBI of 1.008 is extremely high and exceeds 1, suggesting potential multicollinearity or constructs that are not well discriminated.

Thus, it can be concluded that although some constructs have met the criteria for discriminant validity, several relationships between variables, particularly those involving UGC, have not yet met the criteria, necessitating further evaluation of the measurement model.

**Table 7.** Path Coefficient

	CT	PA	PBI	UGC
CT		0.108		
PA				
PBI	0.189	0.541		
UGC	0.702	0.243		

Based on the path coefficient analysis, User-Generated Content (UGC) has the strongest influence on Consumer Trust (CT), making it the primary factor in building consumer trust. Additionally, Personal Branding Influencer (PBI) strongly influences Perceived Authenticity (PA), indicating that purchase intent drives perceptions of a product's or brand's authenticity. Meanwhile, the influence of UGC on PA, as well as CT on PA and PBI on CT, is classified as weak to moderate, making them non-dominant factors in the model. Overall, these findings confirm that UGC and PBI are key variables in shaping consumer trust and perceptions of authenticity.



**Figure 3.** Measure Model

Based on the figure, if the path coefficient is positive, then the effect of that variable is unidirectional. If an exogenous variable is found to increase, the value of the endogenous variable will also increase. The significance criteria used are the P-value and the T-statistic; if the P-value is  $< 0.05$  and the T-statistic is  $> 1.96$ , then the result is classified as significant.

## DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the influence of influencer personal branding and user-generated content (UGC) on consumer trust, with perceived authenticity serving as a mediating variable, among Gen Z users of Shopee

Beauty. Based on the results of the hypothesis testing, not all relationships between variables were significant, yielding more in-depth findings than previous studies and highlighting the unique characteristics of Gen Z consumers in the Indonesian e-commerce landscape.

### **The Impact of Influencer Personal Branding on Consumer Trust**

The results indicate that influencer personal branding does not have a significant direct effect on consumer trust among Gen Z. This finding suggests that although influencers may have strong visibility and a well-developed personal image, these factors alone are not sufficient to build trust. Gen Z consumers tend to be more critical, especially toward content that appears overly commercial or sponsored. This implies that trust is no longer formed based solely on credibility cues such as popularity or aesthetic branding, but rather on deeper evaluations of honesty and transparency. In the context of Shopee Beauty, where product risk is relatively high, consumers require more convincing evidence beyond personal branding before trusting a product recommendation.

Personal branding among influencers does not have a significant direct impact on consumer trust in this study (P-value: 0.394; T-statistic: 0.853). This finding differs from some previous studies, such as Abbas et al. (2023), which suggest that an influencer's credibility and image can directly enhance consumer trust. This discrepancy indicates that Gen Z tends to be more critical of influencer content, particularly in the context of paid endorsements. This phenomenon aligns with growing consumer awareness of digital commercialization practices, meaning that trust is no longer easily established based solely on personal branding. (Olbermann & Schramm, 2025). For Gen Z, who prioritize transparency and authenticity, a polished personal brand alone may not suffice to build trust if it is perceived as overly commercialized or lacking a genuine connection.

The field findings in Cirebon suggest that Gen Z consumers are increasingly wary of "perfect" influencer personas. They often perceive high-production personal branding as a marketing tactic rather than a genuine recommendation. This is supported by research by Gohil et al., which indicates that Gen Z's ability to identify inauthentic content reduces the persuasive influence of traditional influencer marketing. Furthermore, the beauty category on Shopee is highly saturated, leading to "influencer fatigue," in which consumers become desensitized to repetitive endorsements. Consequently, while personal branding is essential for visibility and reach, its direct translation into trust among Gen Z in this context appears limited without other validating factors.

### **The Impact of User-Generated Content on Consumer Trust**

In contrast, user-generated content (UGC) has a positive and significant effect on consumer trust and is the dominant variable in this study. This result confirms that Gen Z places greater trust in information derived from real user experiences, such as reviews, ratings, and testimonials. UGC functions as social proof that reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, particularly in beauty products where individual compatibility varies. The abundance and quality of UGC further strengthen trust, as consumers can compare multiple perspectives before making decisions. This finding highlights the crucial role of peer influence in shaping trust within digital marketplaces.

User-generated content has been shown to have a positive and significant impact on consumer trust (P-value 0.000, T-statistic 4.237). It is the most dominant factor in this research model with an F-square value of 0.554. These findings strongly support the theory that UGC is a more trusted form of electronic word-of-mouth because it stems from users' real-life experiences (Santos & Vasconcelos, 2025). For Gen Z, information based on collective experiences, such as reviews, unboxing videos, and star ratings, is considered more relevant and helps reduce uncertainty when purchasing products, particularly in high-risk categories like beauty products, where skin compatibility is a major concern.

The dominance of UGC over influencer personal branding in directly influencing trust underscores Gen Z's preference for peer-driven, authentic information over potentially commercialized endorsements. This aligns with recent studies showing that 69% of consumers trust beauty influencers less than traditional customer reviews. In the context of Shopee Beauty, the "Review" feature—which includes photos and videos from actual buyers serves as a critical "social proof" mechanism. Field observations indicate that Gen Z respondents often scroll past the product description and influencer ads to read the 1-star and 5-star reviews first. This behavior is consistent with (Nasrabadi et al., 2024), who found that UGC significantly influences user motivation and perceived value by providing a realistic expectation of the product's performance.

### **The Effect of Influencer Personal Branding on Perceived Authenticity**

The findings reveal that influencer personal branding has a positive and significant effect on perceived authenticity, indicating that consistent and genuine self-presentation enhances perceived authenticity. However, user-generated content does not significantly influence perceived authenticity. This suggests that not all UGC is automatically considered authentic, as consumers are increasingly aware of fake reviews and manipulated content. As a result, authenticity is more strongly associated with how consistently influencers present themselves than with the mere presence of user-generated content. This demonstrates that authenticity is a selective perception that depends on credibility signals rather than content volume alone.

This study indicates a positive and significant relationship between an influencer's personal branding and perceived authenticity (P-value 0.011, T-statistic 2.533). This suggests that the consistency and genuineness of the image the influencer projects strongly influence consumers' perceived authenticity. This finding aligns with the concept of the "human brand," in which individuals who present themselves authentically are more readily perceived as genuine sources of information. (Lehto, 2025). Thus, while it does not directly increase trust, personal branding still plays a crucial role in shaping the foundational perceptions of authenticity.

The ability of influencers to maintain integrity and genuineness despite commercial pressures is crucial for fostering this perceived authenticity. For Gen Z in Cirebon, influencers who share both the "pros and cons" of a product are perceived as more authentic than those who only provide positive praise. This is supported by Nazara et al. (2025), who emphasize that self-disclosure and parasocial interaction are key drivers of authenticity in the social media age. When an influencer's personal brand is built on honesty and vulnerability, it creates a sense of "realness" that Gen Z values, even if it does not immediately result in a transaction.

### **The Effect of User-Generated Content on Perceived Authenticity**

User-generated content does not have a significant impact on perceived authenticity in this specific model (P-value 0.263). These findings indicate a shift in consumer perceptions of UGC, which is not always viewed as authentic. The emergence of "fake reviews," "review bombing," and incentivized content on digital platforms like Shopee can lead consumers to become more skeptical. Not all UGC automatically enhances perceived authenticity; in fact, overly generic or repetitive reviews are often flagged as suspicious by savvy Gen Z users. (Younis, 2025).

This finding highlights a critical nuance in digital marketing. While UGC builds trust through volume and social proof, it does not necessarily equate to "authenticity" if the source is perceived as biased or manipulated. Field data suggests that Gen Z consumers are becoming experts at spotting "fake" UGC, such as reviews that use identical phrasing or stock photos. This aligns with research by Niu (, which suggests that the proliferation of sponsored UGC has diluted its perceived authenticity, forcing consumers to look for more nuanced signals of truthfulness.

### **The Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity**

The relationship between consumer trust and perceived authenticity is not significant in this model (P-value 0.768). This indicates that in the context of Gen Z and Shopee Beauty, authenticity is not a direct result of trust, but rather an independent antecedent or a parallel construct. Consumers first assess whether information is authentic before ultimately building trust in it, but the path is not always linear.

Overall, this study contributes by demonstrating that, in the context of Gen Z, UGC plays a more dominant role than influencers in building trust. Furthermore, while authenticity is a key factor in personal branding, it does not always serve as a strong mediator in all relationships. The practical implication is that businesses must ensure the quality and credibility of UGC, while influencers must maintain consistency and transparency. Brands targeting Gen Z in the beauty e-commerce sector should prioritize fostering genuine reviews and testimonials, as these "real-world" findings carry more weight than polished marketing campaigns.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aims to analyze the influence of influencer personal branding and user-generated content (UGC) on consumer trust, with perceived authenticity serving as a mediating variable among Gen Z users of Shopee Beauty. The results indicate that UGC is the primary factor in building consumer trust, whereas influencer personal branding does not directly influence trust but shapes perceptions of authenticity. Furthermore, perceived authenticity has not yet fully functioned as a strong mediating variable in the model. These findings confirm that, in the context of Gen Z, trust is shaped more by users' real-life experiences than by the image influencers' construct. Therefore, businesses need to prioritize managing credible, transparent UGC and maintain authenticity in their digital marketing strategies. Future research is recommended to include additional variables, such as e-WOM, brand image, and perceived risk, and to consider different research methods or subjects to strengthen and expand upon the findings of this study.

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