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THE INFLUENCE OF AUTHENTIC CONTENT ON PURCHASE INTENTION THROUGH BRAND AWARENESS AS A MEDIATING VARIABLE AMONG GENERATION Z TIKTOK USERS

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Abstract. In today's digital marketing, the demand for authentic communication between brands and consumers has grown significantly, especially on social media platforms such as TikTok. Consumers, particularly Generation Z, are increasingly skeptical of highly polished advertising and respond more positively to content that conveys honesty, transparency, and emotional genuineness. However, there remains a research gap in understanding how authentic content directly and indirectly affects purchase intention, particularly through the mediating role of brand awareness. This study aims to empirically analyze the effect of authentic content on purchase intention, with brand awareness as a mediating variable. This research employed a quantitative explanatory design using an online questionnaire distributed to 400 active TikTok users aged 17-28. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS to examine both the direct and indirect relationships among the studied variables. The findings reveal a positive and significant relationship between authentic content and purchase intention. Furthermore, brand awareness was found to partially mediate this relationship, indicating that authentic content effectively enhances consumer familiarity, recognition, and recall of the brand factors that ultimately increase their willingness to purchase. The results confirm that authenticity in digital communication strengthens emotional connections and trust, which are essential drivers of consumer decision-making in the digital age. This study provides valuable theoretical and managerial implications, emphasizing the importance of genuine brand storytelling in fostering brand awareness and motivating purchase behavior.

Keywords; Authentic Content, Brand Awareness, Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

In recent years, social media has shifted and changed its function from being merely a communication channel to becoming the main arena for product information search and purchasing decisions. Platforms that use short videos, especially TikTok, have become the center of attention due to their ability to present content that is fast, visual, and easy to share, thereby influencing the modern consumer journey (Luo et al., 2025).

The rapid growth and development of TikTok users has made this platform the most relevant for researching the behavior of younger generations. Recent studies show that Gen Z's penetration and engagement on short video platforms is much higher than other age groups, meaning that all forms of content on TikTok have the potential to directly impact their purchase intentions (Thi Nguyet Trang et al., 2025). Research on short-form video content reports numerous positive relationships between exposure to short-form video content and purchase intention, and shows that engagement metrics (views, likes, comments, shares) are strongly correlated with increased purchase intention among young people (Luo et al., 2025).

Currently, the concept of authentic content is a key differentiator in determining the effectiveness of messages in the digital realm. This content is defined as material that is considered natural, transparent, and not heavily edited or controlled by conventional marketing approaches. Research analyzing advertisements and content from influencers proves that when audiences perceive content as authentic, it increases followers' trust and strengthens their emotional reactions, which then encourages purchasing behavior (Ünalmiş et al., 2024). Authentic content can be defined as a type of material that is seen by the audience as a true reflection of the personal life and personality of its creator (influencer). This type of content is produced through transparent self-expression, in line with the creator's identity, and presents pure intentions, rather than being solely promotion-oriented (Andonopoulos et al., 2023). Due to its genuine nature, authentic content can foster trust, create emotional closeness, and ultimately increase the influencer's credibility in the eyes of the audience. The main dimension that shapes this perception is personal authenticity, which refers to the extent to which the content is consistent with the influencer's true self and real experiences (Andonopoulos et al., 2023).

The relationship between authentic content and purchase intention is not always directly related. Several studies show that cognitive constructs such as brand awareness play an important role when audiences recognize or remember a brand, and that the emotional/affective effects of authentic content are more easily translated into purchase intention. In other words, brand awareness can function as a mediating mechanism that strengthens or explains how the authenticity of content leads to purchasing decisions (Kim & Wang, 2024). Brand awareness is an important element in building brand equity, as it not only reflects consumer memory but also interactions with the brand on online platforms. Indicators such as share of search, digital brand awareness levels, and sentiment formed in the virtual world are key metrics in assessing a brand's strength in the digital ecosystem (France et al., 2025).

Although much research has been conducted, studies tend to examine influencer variables, brand awareness, or purchase intention individually. Only a handful of studies have successfully integrated these three variables into a comprehensive theoretical model, particularly when sampling Generation Z TikTok users (Wirandamukti & Setyaning, 2025). Given the rapid development of digital marketing, research opportunities have emerged to examine consumer responses to marketing tactics that utilize authentic content, with brand awareness acting as a mediating variable. Therefore, this study aims to explore the influence of these two variables on purchase intention. This study will be conducted using a descriptive quantitative approach that relies on questionnaires as the main instrument for collecting public perception data.

2. Research Method

This study uses a quantitative approach to obtain objective data that can be generalized. Quantitative research facilitates researchers in testing hypotheses or theories by analyzing the relationship between constructs, where data collection is carried out

using standardized instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study is categorized as explanatory research, because its purpose is to describe and explain the causal relationships (effects) between antecedent, mediating, and consequent variables in the conceptual model. As a data collection technique, this study utilizes a survey method with a questionnaire as its main instrument. The data collected is cross-sectional, which means that the data is taken at only one point or period of time that has been determined (Johnston, 1974).

The target population in this study was all users of the TikTok social media platform who had purchased a product based on a recommendation from an influencer. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, in which respondents were selected based on specific criteria in line with the main objectives of this study (Etikan, 2016). The required sample criteria include being at least 17 years old; being an active user of TikTok social media; having made a purchase due to the influence of influencer content; and being willing to complete the questionnaire.

The minimum sample size was determined based on SEM requirements, with 9 indicators, resulting in 23 estimated parameters. To meet the minimum standard, this number was multiplied by 5 (Hair, 2009). Therefore, a minimum of (23 x 5) or 115 respondents was required. However, to improve the reliability of the results and anticipate invalid data, this study targets 200 respondents, which is considered sufficient for SEM analysis.

The research instrument used a structured questionnaire compiled based on variable indicators from the literature review and distributed online via Google Forms. Each item is measured on a 10-point semantic differential scale, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", which is considered effective in measuring respondents' perspectives on"" (Countryman & Jang, 2006; Osgood, 1957). Furthermore, the data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), with the help of AMOS software to test direct and indirect relationships between variables and the suitability of the research model (Byrne, 2012)



Fig 1. Research Model

3. Result and Discussion

Information for this study was successfully obtained from 208 Tik Tok users who met all the study inclusion criteria. The focus of this study was on authentic content and

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brand awareness. Participants reported that they were at least 18 years old, used Tik Tok, and had made at least one purchasing decision influenced by recommendations or content from the application.

Tabel 1. Characteristic Respondent

Characteristic	Atribute	Total	%
Gender	Male	93	44,72%
	Female	115	55,28%
Age	Gen Z	208	100%
	Gen Milenial	-	-
	Gen X	-	-

Sourche: Reserch Result, 2025

The composition of respondents in this study (referring to Table 1) was dominated by women, with a percentage of 54.67% compared to 43.93% men. In addition, age data shows that 100% of respondents are Generation Z (17-28 years old). This means that no participants from the Millennial or Generation X groups are represented in this research sample.

Tabel 2. Meansuring, Loading Factor, CR, and VE

No	Question Statement	Construct	Indicator	Loading Factor	CR	VE
1.	I believe the content delivered by the influencer appears trustworthy.	Authentic Content	AC1	0,864	0,746	0,704
2.	I feel that the messages conveyed by the influencer are consistent over time.		AC2	0,794		
3.	I think the emotions expressed by the influencer in the content feel natural and not fabricated.		AC3	0,761		
4.	I can easily recognize the brand when I see its logo or packaging.	Brand Awareness	BA1	0.814	0,760	0723
5.	I can recall the brand after watching its content on TikTok.		BA2	0,817		
6.	I feel familiar with the brand just by hearing its name.		BA3	0,839		
7.	I intend to purchase the product promoted by the influencer on TikTok.	Purchase Intention	PI1	0,854	0799	0,774
8.	I plan to buy products that I frequently see in TikTok content.		PI2	0,829		

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No	Question Statement	Construct	Indicator	Loading Factor	CR	VE
9.	There is a high possibility that I will purchase products recommended on TikTok.		PI3	0,896		

Source: Research Future, 2025

In the Authentic Content construct, a strong loading factor range (0.761-0.864) was obtained, supported by a CR value of 0.746 and an AVE of 0.704. This score indicates that the Authentic Content variable is strongly explained by its indicators. Thus, the aspects of trust in influencers, message consistency, and natural emotions are proven to be valid and reliable as tools for measuring the perception of Tik Tok content authenticity. The higher the perception of authenticity, the greater the audience's trust in the influencer's message.

Meanwhile, the Brand Awareness construct recorded a loading factor between 0.814 and 0.839, with a CR of 0.760 and an AVE of 0.723. These values confirm the significant contribution of brand recognition, brand recall, and familiarity indicators. This shows that brand exposure via TikTok content effectively builds brand recognition and recall in users' minds.

As for Purchase Intention, this construct has a loading factor in the range of 0.829 to 0.896, with a CR of 0,799 and an AVE of 0.774. These values confirm the reliability of the three indicators used: intention to purchase the promoted product, purchase planning, and likelihood of making a purchase. It can be concluded that the more Tik Tok users are exposed to authentic and relevant promotional content, the higher the probability that they wall want to buy.

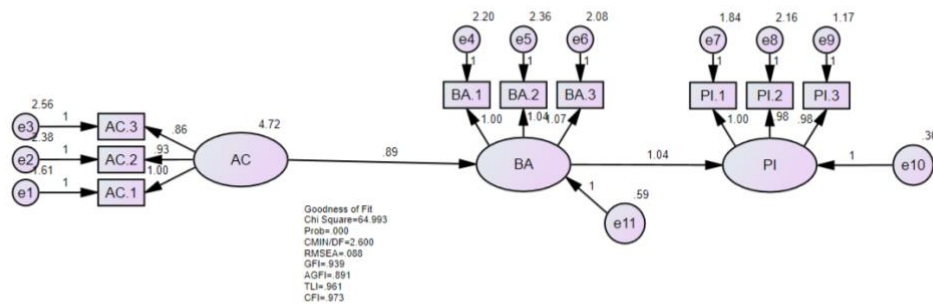
In conclusion, all constructs in this study were proven to be valid and reliable. This measurement model was also declared eligible to proceed to the structural model analysis stage, which aims to test the causal relationships between the research variables

Table 3. Model Fit Test Results (Goodness of Fit)

Goodness of Fit	Hasil Analisis	Cut of Value	Evaluasi Model
Chi-Square	64,993	Diharapkan kecil	Marginal Fit
CMIN/DF	2,600	< 2,0	Tidak Fit
AGFI	0,891	> 0,90	Marginal Fit
GFI	0,939	> 0,90	Good Fit
TLI	0,961	> 0,95	Good Fit
CFI	0,973	> 0.95	Good Fit
RMSEA	0,088	< 0,80	Good Fit

Source: Reseach Future, 2025

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Source: Reseach Future, 2025

Fig 2. Research Model

After confirming the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the next step is to test the model's goodness of fit. This test is important to assess the suitability of the research model with the empirical data obtained.

The analysis results (Table 3) show a Chi-Square value of 64.993, which reflects the level of model mismatch. In addition, the CMIN/DF ratio is recorded at 2.600, which is slightly above the recommended ideal limit (below 2.0).

However, other indicators show strong results. The GFI value (0.939) is categorised as a good fit, indicating that this model is able to explain the data variance well. Excellent results are also shown by the TLI (0.961) and CFI (0.973), both of which exceed the threshold of 0.95. Meanwhile, the AGFI value (0.891) falls into the marginal fit category, and the RMSEA (0.088) is still considered within the acceptable range (good fit).

Overall, although there are several indices that are marginal, most of the main indicators have met the criteria for good fit. Based on these findings, the research model is declared feasible and can proceed to structural model analysis to test the hypothesis of the relationship between variables.

Tabel 4. Hasil Pengujian Hipotesis

Influence Relationship	Estimate	CR	P	Decision
Brand Awareness < ---AC	0,891	12,691	0,00	Accepted
Purchase Intention < --- BA	1,037	13,985	0,00	Accepted

Source: Reserch Result, 2025

Referring to the test results in Table 4, the first hypothesis was proven to be accepted. It was found that Authentic Content (AC) has a positive and significant influence () on Brand Awareness (BA). This finding is supported by an estimate value of 0.891, a Critical Ratio (CR) value of 12.691, and a p-value of 0.00 (which is smaller than 0.05).

This means that an increase in the authenticity and consistency of content presented by influencers on the Tik Tok platform will directly contribute to an increase in brand awareness among audiences, especially Generation Z.

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Furthermore, Brand Awareness (BA) was also proven to have a positive and significant effect on Purchase Intention (PI). The second hypothesis test recorded an estimate value of 1.037, CR 13.985, with a p-value of 0.00 (<0.05). This indicates that the stronger the consumer awareness of a brand, the higher their motivation or intention to make a purchase

Tabel 5. Mediation Testing

Parameter	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P
AC > BA > PI	0,828	0,758	0,939	0,019

Source: Reserch Result, 2025

The analysis results in Table 5 confirm that Brand Awareness (BA) acts as a significant mediator in connecting Authentic Content (AC) with Purchase Intention (PI). This mediating effect is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.019 (less than 0.05)

The estimated value for this indirect path is 0.828, with a lower bound range of 0.758 and an upper bound range of 0.939. These findings indicate that the authenticity of content displayed by TikTok influencers does not work directly, but rather builds brand awareness first. It is this brand awareness that ultimately drives an increase in consumer purchase intention.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight a significant pathway: authentic content has been proven to positively and substantially increase brand awareness. This relationship is confirmed by an estimate value of 0.891, CR 12.691, and a significance p-value of 0.000. Simply put, the more honest and consistent the content presented by influencers, the stronger the brand awareness embedded in the minds of the audience.

Furthermore, this established brand awareness has been proven to play a significant mediating role in driving purchase intention among Generation Z Tik Tok users. This mediating role is confirmed as statistically significant ($p0.019$) with an estimate value of 0.828 and a confidence interval between 0.758 and 0.939.

5. Recommendation

The findings of this study yield several practical and academic recommendations:

1. For Marketing Practitioners: It is recommended that content marketing strategies focus on highlighting authenticity, message consistency, and transparency. Content that appears "fake" or overly edited tends to be disliked by Generation Z., who value emotional and honest messages more.
2. For Content Creators/Influencers: Authentic identity should be built by showcasing real experiences and personal values in content. It has been proven that this authenticity contributes directly to increased brand awareness, which is the main trigger for audience purchase intent.

3. For Further Research: It is recommended that this research be expanded. The research model can be enriched by adding other variables (e.g., trust, engagement, or e-WOM) to investigate additional psychological mechanisms that may explain how authentic content can lead to purchasing decisions.
4. For SMEs and Local Brands: The power of the TikTok platform should be leveraged to present authentic narratives that reflect local cultural affinity and brand values. This strategy will not only strengthen brand awareness, but also effectively foster consumer loyalty in the digital ecosystem..

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