

Visual Storytelling and Micro-Influencer Collaboration: Driving Purchase Intent in Fashion E-commerce

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the influence of visual storytelling and micro-influencers on fashion purchase intention among Generation Z in Indonesia. The research employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a self-administered online questionnaire. The findings of the study reveal that both Visual storytelling and micro-influencer visual storytelling and consumer collaboration: Driving purchase intent in engagement significantly impact purchase fashion e-commerce. Visual storytelling, particularly when engaging and relevant, positively influences consumer perception and, subsequently, purchase intent. However, consumer engagement emerges as a stronger predictor, emphasizing the importance of fostering interaction and community around the brand. While micro-influencers were expected to play a significant role, the results indicate a limited impact on purchase intention. This suggests that while micro-influencers can contribute to brand awareness and credibility, their influence may be less pronounced compared to other factors such as visual storytelling and consumer engagement. The study concludes by highlighting the importance of creating visually appealing and engaging content that fosters active consumer participation.

Keywords: Consumer Engagement, E-commerce, Fashion, Generation Z, Micro-Influencer, Phurchase Intention, Visual Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z, born in the mid-1990s to early 2010s, grew up with digital technology as an integral part of their lives (Twenge, 2021). This makes them have different characteristics than previous generations. Generation Z is highly responsive to visuals (Poushter & Rainie, 2020). They are more easily influenced by images, videos, and animations than text (Hwang & Kim, 2023). They are very active on social media and often seek social validation from friends and influencers. Generation Z values authenticity and transparency (Smith & Duggan, 2020). They are more likely to trust recommendations from people they know or follow, such as friends or micro-influencers. They want personalized experiences. They want to feel unique and cared for as individuals. Given the above characteristics, it is not surprising that visual storytelling and micro-influencers are very effective in influencing Generation Z's purchasing decisions. Visual storytelling uses images, videos, and compelling narratives to convey messages more effectively. This makes it easier for Generation Z to engage and remember the message. Visual storytelling can evoke emotions in consumers, such as happiness, sadness, or desire. Positive emotions can encourage consumers to buy products. Unique and creative visual storytelling can help brands differentiate themselves from competitors. Micro-influencers are considered more authentic and relatable because they have smaller followings and tend to be closer to their audience (De Veirman et al., 2021). Recommendations from micro-influencers are often considered as suggestions from friends, so they are more trusted by Generation Z. Micro-influencers often have specific expertise or interests, so they can provide more relevant and trustworthy recommendations. Fashion brands often use visual storytelling on Instagram to showcase their products in an interesting and aspirational lifestyle (Kim & Ko, 2022). They also work with fashion micro-influencers to promote their products to a more specific audience.

Marketplaces offer a variety of products from various brands on one platform (Kurniawan et al., 2022). This makes it very easy for Generation Z, who have high mobility and a preference for online shopping. The user-friendly interface and features such as advanced search and product recommendations enhance the online shopping experience. The presence of numerous sellers also creates healthy price competition, allowing Generation Z consumers to find products at competitive prices (Kurniawan et al., 2022). Reviews from other users serve as an important source of information before consumers decide to purchase a product. As more sellers compete for consumer attention, competition within online marketplaces becomes increasingly intense (Kurniawan et al., 2022). This competitive environment encourages sellers to continuously innovate their marketing strategies, including the use of visual storytelling and micro-influencers. In a marketplace crowded with similar products, unique and engaging visual storytelling helps products differentiate themselves. Visual storytelling not only presents product features but also communicates the story behind the product, creating an emotional connection with consumers. Furthermore, consistent visual storytelling strengthens brand awareness and brand recognition. Micro-influencers are generally perceived as more authentic and trustworthy because they maintain closer relationships with their followers. They typically focus on specific interests or niches, making their recommendations more relevant to their target audiences. Although they usually have fewer followers than celebrities, micro-influencers are able to reach highly engaged audiences.

Instagram, as a visually oriented social media platform, provides an ideal environment for fashion brands to communicate the stories behind their products (Ahn & Kim, 2022). Most fashion brands in Indonesia utilize Instagram to showcase their products through

various Outfit of the Day (OOTD) concepts (Rahman & Sari, 2023). By combining attractive visual elements, lifestyle themes such as casual, formal, or sporty looks, and creative editing techniques, brands successfully create the desired brand image (Kim & Ko, 2021). Showing the product creation process, designers' inspirations, or behind-the-scenes activities also enhances brand authenticity and strengthens consumer relationships (Hwang & Kim, 2022). Many Indonesian fashion brands launch thematic campaigns based on seasons, trends, or special events (Supriyadi & Nugroho, 2023). These campaigns are generally supported by compelling visuals and engaging storytelling (Kurniawan & Setyowati, 2022). Collaborating with fashion influencers further expands brand reach while offering consumers fresh perspectives on products (De Veirman et al., 2021). Many local Indonesian fashion brands have successfully established strong brand identities through visual storytelling on Instagram (Prabowo & Santoso, 2023). They frequently incorporate Indonesian cultural elements, such as batik, tenun, and the country's natural landscapes, into their visual content (Sari & Rahman, 2022). Likewise, international fashion brands actively use Instagram to engage Indonesian consumers (Choudhury & Dasgupta, 2023). These brands often adapt their visual storytelling strategies to align with local culture and consumer preferences (Lee & Kim, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of visual storytelling and micro-influencers on the purchase intentions of fashion products offered through online marketplaces among Generation Z consumers in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual Storytelling

Visual storytelling is the art of conveying messages or narratives through images, videos, or a combination of both (Ahn & Kim, 2022). In a marketing context, visual storytelling is used to build a strong emotional connection between brands and consumers (Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2020).

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), engaging and creative visual storytelling can increase consumer engagement, encourage deeper information processing, and ultimately influence attitudes and purchasing behavior (Hwang & Kim, 2022). Cognitive Load Theory suggests that simple and easy-to-understand visuals reduce consumers' cognitive load, making marketing messages easier to comprehend and remember (Sweller & Chandler, 2020). Likewise, Semiotic Theory explains that each visual element carries symbolic meanings capable of triggering specific emotional responses and associations among consumers (Koller & Kress, 2021).

Based on Classical Conditioning Theory, repeated exposure to visual storytelling increases consumers' familiarity with a brand, thereby enhancing brand awareness and product preference (Pavlov & Rescorla, 2020). Social Learning Theory also suggests that individuals learn by observing the behaviors of others, including influencers, and may imitate those behaviors in similar contexts (Bandura & Walters, 2022). As consumers are repeatedly exposed to positive visual storytelling related to a product, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the brand (Balakrishnan & Sundaraj, 2023).

Previous studies have also shown that frequent exposure to visual storytelling improves brand recall and recognition while enhancing consumers' perceived value of a product in terms of both aesthetics and functionality (Kim & Ko, 2021). Furthermore, attractive and relevant visual storytelling can stimulate consumer interest and strengthen purchase intention (Lee & Choi, 2022).

Micro-Influencers

Micro-influencers are individuals who have fewer followers than celebrity influencers but maintain higher levels of engagement with their audiences. According to Social Proof Theory, recommendations from trusted micro-influencers can create a social proof effect, encouraging consumers to follow the purchasing behavior of individuals they perceive as credible (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2021; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2020).

Source Credibility Theory suggests that micro-influencers with expertise and credibility in the fashion industry are more likely to gain consumers' trust and positively influence their purchasing decisions (Freberg et al., 2020). Similarly, Attribution Theory explains that consumers tend to evaluate the reasons behind influencers' recommendations. When micro-influencers are perceived as knowledgeable and experienced, their endorsements are considered more reliable and persuasive (Hwang & Kim, 2022).

Furthermore, Cognitive Dissonance Theory proposes that individuals strive for consistency between their attitudes and behaviors. Consumers who admire or trust a micro-influencer are therefore more likely to purchase products recommended by that influencer to maintain consistency in their beliefs and actions (Hsu & Lin, 2020).

Previous studies have shown that higher micro-influencer credibility positively affects consumer purchasing decisions (Lou & Yuan, 2021). In addition, a high level of audience engagement reflects stronger interaction and responsiveness to influencer-generated content, thereby enhancing marketing effectiveness. Recommendations from trusted micro-influencers have also been found to increase consumers' purchase intentions, particularly when the influencers are perceived as authentic and relevant to their audiences (Casaló et al., 2020).

Consumer Engagement Level

Consumer engagement refers to the level of consumers' emotional and cognitive involvement with a brand or product (Brodie et al., 2020). It can be measured through various indicators, including the number of likes, comments, shares, and the amount of time consumers spend interacting with related content (Malthouse et al., 2021).

According to Social Response Theory, consumers tend to respond more positively to messages that are relevant and engaging, and a high level of engagement indicates that the content is perceived as valuable and appealing (Pansari & Kumar, 2020; Alhabash & Ma, 2020). Similarly, Uses and Gratifications Theory explains that consumers actively use social media to satisfy various needs, such as obtaining information, seeking entertainment, and maintaining social interaction. Therefore, higher engagement reflects the ability of content to fulfill these consumer needs (Whiting & Williams, 2021; Hwang & Kim, 2022).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) further suggests that high levels of engagement indicate deeper cognitive processing of information, which increases the likelihood of changes in consumers' attitudes and behaviors (Petty & Cacioppo, 2020). Previous studies have also demonstrated that greater consumer engagement is associated with more positive perceptions of product value because highly engaged consumers tend to perceive products as more valuable (Hollebeek & Macky, 2020). Furthermore, strong consumer engagement has been found to increase purchase intention, as engaged consumers are more likely to remember a brand and consider it during the purchase decision-making process (Kumar & Pansari, 2021).

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to an individual's willingness or intention to purchase a particular product (Ajzen, 2020). According to the Behavioral Intention Model, purchase intention is one of the strongest predictors of actual purchasing behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2021). Similarly, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains that purchase intention is influenced by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of social media marketing, visual storytelling and recommendations from micro-influencers can shape consumers' attitudes and subjective norms, thereby strengthening their purchase intentions (Hsu & Lin, 2020; Kim & Ko, 2021).

Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: The frequency of exposure to visual storytelling positively influences the purchase intention of fashion products among Generation Z on Instagram.

H2: The credibility of micro-influencers positively influences the purchase intention of fashion products among Generation Z on Instagram.

H3: Consumer engagement mediates the relationship between the frequency of exposure to visual storytelling and the purchase intention of fashion products among Generation Z on Instagram.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach to examine the influence of visual storytelling and micro-influencer collaboration on consumers' purchase intention in the fashion e-commerce sector. The target population consisted of Generation Z individuals in Indonesia who actively used Instagram and had an interest in fashion-related content. Generation Z was defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s.

A non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, was adopted to recruit respondents. Participants were invited through Instagram and several online communities frequently accessed by Generation Z users in Indonesia. The minimum sample size was determined using statistical power analysis to ensure sufficient representation for hypothesis testing.

Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale. The frequency of exposure to visual storytelling was assessed by asking respondents how often they encountered fashion-related visual storytelling on Instagram. The perceived credibility of micro-influencers was measured based on respondents' evaluations of the trustworthiness of fashion micro-influencers. Consumer engagement was evaluated through respondents' frequency of interacting with fashion-related content, including liking, commenting, and sharing posts. Purchase intention was measured by respondents' willingness to purchase fashion products after viewing visual storytelling or recommendations provided by micro-influencers.

The proposed hypotheses were tested using multiple linear regression analysis to investigate the relationships between visual storytelling exposure, micro-influencer credibility, consumer engagement, and purchase intention. In addition, the mediating role of consumer engagement was examined to determine its influence on the relationship between exposure to visual storytelling and purchase intention.

Prior to the analysis, the collected data were screened and coded to ensure completeness and accuracy. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize

respondents' characteristics and variable distributions, while inferential statistical analysis was conducted through linear regression. All statistical tests were performed at a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$).

RESULTS

A brief description of the characteristics of the 100 respondents, the majority of whom were female (69.2%), all of whom had a high school education (100%), were students (95%), and had an average monthly expenditure on fashion/cosmetics of Rp. 319,300. As a brief description of the research variables, the majority of respondents stated that they often see visual storytelling related to fashion products on Instagram (75%), fashion micro-influencers on Instagram tend to be credible in my opinion (52%), and still want to buy fashion immediately (59%). Meanwhile, the majority of respondents (not the majority) stated that they often Like, Comment, & Share fashion-related content on Instagram (47%).

Table 1. Summary of F-value, Signification and Determination Coefficient (Partial Regression)

Independent Variable	F-value	Sig.	Adjusted R ²
Visual Storytelling	61.974	0.000	0.381
Consumer Engagement	75.356	0.000	0.429
Micro-Influencer	19.728	0.000	0.159

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

In the three Independent Variables, the F value is very high and the significance is very low (0.000) indicating that the overall regression model is very significant. Approximately 38.1% of the variability in purchase intention can be explained by the visual storytelling variable. This means that visual storytelling has a significant contribution in influencing consumer intention to buy fashion products. Approximately 42.9% of the variability in purchase intention can be explained by the level of consumer engagement. This means that consumer engagement has a greater contribution than visual storytelling in influencing purchase intention. Approximately 15.9% of the variability in purchase intention can be explained by the micro-influencer variable. This means that although micro-influencers have an influence, their influence is smaller than visual storytelling and consumer engagement.

Table 2. Summary of Determination Coefficient and Signification (Partial Regression)

Independent Variable	Standardized Coefficients (β)	Sig.
Visual Storytelling	0.622	0.000
Consumer Engagement	0.659	0.000
Micro-Influencer	0.409	0.000

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

The positive and statistically significant coefficient indicates a strong positive relationship between visual storytelling and purchase intention. This means that the better the quality and relevance of visual storytelling, the higher the consumer's intention to purchase the product. The level of consumer engagement has a stronger influence than visual storytelling on purchase intention. These results strengthen previous findings that social interaction and perceptions of product popularity greatly influence purchasing decisions. Micro-influencers also have a significant influence on purchase intention, although the influence is smaller than visual storytelling and consumer engagement.

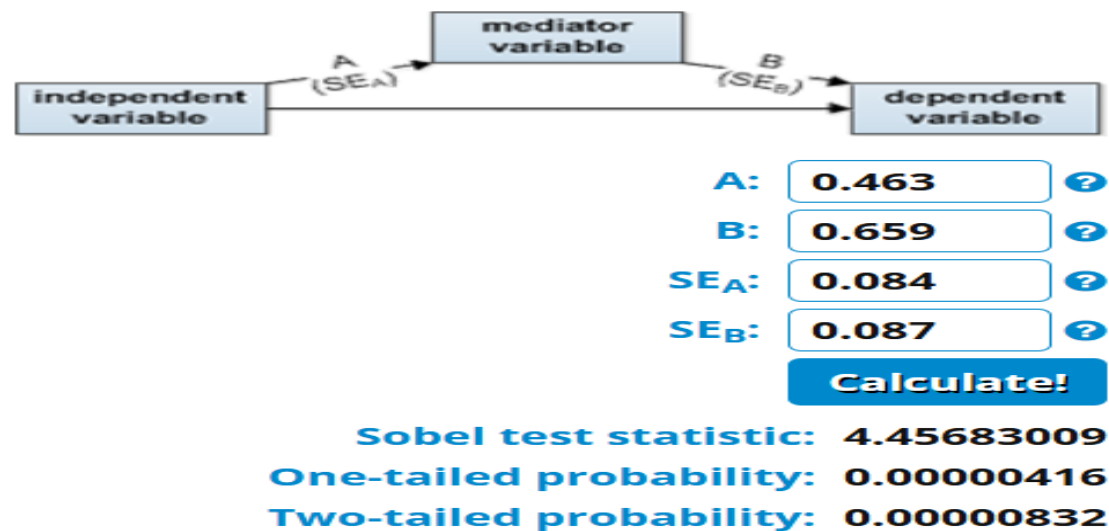
Table 3. Summary of Standardized Coefficient, t-value, F-value and Signification (Multiple Regression)

Model		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.		
		Beta			F	Sig.
1	(Constant)	–	0.557	0.579	41.445	0.000
	Visual Storytelling	0.432	4.782	0.000		
	Consumer Engagement	0.479	6.230	0.000		
	Micro Influencer	-0.050	-0.572	0.569		

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

In overall regression model is highly significant. This means that at least one of the independent variables (visual storytelling, consumer engagement, or micro-influencers) has a significant effect on purchase intention. Visual storytelling has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. Any increase in the quality of visual storytelling will increase purchase intention. This shows that attractive and relevant visuals are very important in influencing purchase decisions. The level of consumer engagement has a stronger positive effect than visual storytelling on purchase intention. The higher the level of consumer interaction with the content, the more likely they are to buy the product. There is insufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that micro-influencers have a significant influence on purchase intention. The small t-value and large significance value (more than 0.05) indicate that the relationship between the micro-influencer variable and purchase intention is not statistically significant. In other words, the influence of micro-influencers in this study is not proven.

Figure 1. Sobel's Test.



Source: danielsoper.com/statcalc/calculator.aspx?id=31

The value of 4.45683009 indicates the strength of the relationship between the variables in the mediation model. This large value indicates a significant relationship. The probability value of 0.00000416 is very small (far below 0.05), which means that it is very unlikely to get results like this if there is no causal relationship between the variables. The value of 0.00000832 is also very small, indicating that the relationship between the variables is very significant, both in positive and negative directions. Based on the results of the Sobel test, it can be proven that Consumer Engagement acts as a significant mediator between Visual Storytelling and Purchase Intention. This means that the

influence of Visual Storytelling on Purchase Intention occurs mostly through increasing the level of consumer engagement.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that visual storytelling has a positive and significant effect on Generation Z consumers' purchase intention toward fashion products promoted through Instagram. Engaging, creative, and relevant visual content enhances consumers' emotional connection with products, thereby increasing their intention to make a purchase. This finding is consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of visual communication in influencing consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior through social media platforms. Effective visual storytelling enables brands to create memorable experiences and strengthen consumers' trust in the promoted products.

Consumer engagement also demonstrates a positive and significant influence on purchase intention, making it the strongest predictor among the examined variables. Higher levels of engagement, reflected in consumers' interactions such as liking, commenting, and sharing fashion-related content, increase the likelihood of purchase decisions. This result supports previous research suggesting that active consumer participation on social media serves as a form of social proof, which enhances consumers' confidence and encourages purchase intentions. Therefore, increasing user engagement should be considered an essential marketing strategy for fashion businesses operating in digital environments.

In contrast, the effect of micro-influencers on purchase intention was not found to be statistically significant. This finding differs from several previous studies that reported a positive relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchasing behavior. One possible explanation is the growing saturation of influencer-based marketing, where consumers are increasingly exposed to promotional content from numerous micro-influencers, reducing its persuasive impact. In addition, the selected influencers may not have been sufficiently aligned with the preferences and characteristics of the target audience, limiting their credibility and effectiveness. Another possible reason is advertising fatigue, whereby consumers become less responsive to repetitive promotional messages delivered through influencer collaborations. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of micro-influencers depends not only on their popularity but also on the relevance, authenticity, and compatibility between the influencer, the product, and the target market.

CONCLUSION

Visual storytelling and consumer engagement have a significant positive influence on the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers toward fashion products. Engaging visual content and high levels of consumer interaction can effectively increase consumers' willingness to purchase. In contrast, the influence of micro-influencers was not found to be statistically significant. This finding suggests that other factors, such as content quality, influencer relevance, and the saturation of influencer marketing, may play a more important role in shaping consumers' purchase decisions.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations. First, the findings are limited to Generation Z Instagram users in Indonesia and may not be generalizable to other consumer groups or social media platforms. Second, other factors such as price, promotions, brand image, and fashion trends were not included in the research model. Finally, purchase intention

was measured using self-reported responses rather than actual purchasing behavior. Future research is encouraged to include additional variables, broader samples, and more direct measurement methods, such as experiments or purchase simulations, to strengthen the findings.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest related to this research. The study was conducted independently, and the authors did not receive any funding or financial support from organizations with a commercial interest in the research outcomes. Furthermore, the authors have no personal or business relationships that could have influenced the results of this study.

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