

**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER AUTHENTICITY ON BRAND
PERCEPTION AND CONSUMER TRUST**

**MENGEKSPLORASI DAMPAK KEASLIAN INFLUENCER TERHADAP
PERSEPSI MEREK DAN KEPERCAYAAN KONSUMEN**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of influencer authenticity on brand perception and consumer trust, with consumer engagement as a mediating variable, specifically focusing on Wardah consumers in Padang. Using a quantitative approach, data was collected from 100 respondents aged 20-30 years who use Wardah products, applying a simple random sampling technique. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS was used to analyze relationships among variables. The findings indicate that influencer authenticity has a significant and direct impact on both brand perception and consumer trust, with higher levels of authenticity enhancing consumer perceptions and trust in the brand. Although consumer engagement partially mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and brand perception, it has a weaker mediating effect on consumer trust. This suggests that while consumer engagement reinforces brand perception, trust in the brand primarily stems from perceptions of influencer authenticity. The results underscore the importance of genuine influencer partnerships for brands like Wardah to foster strong, trust-based connections with their audience, especially in culturally specific markets. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how influencer marketing dynamics affect consumer attitudes, offering practical implications for brand positioning and trust-building strategies.

Keywords: Innovative HR Management Strategies; Employee Performance; Digital Competency Development; Employee Experience

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dampak dari keaslian influencer terhadap persepsi merek dan kepercayaan konsumen, dengan keterlibatan konsumen sebagai variabel mediasi, secara khusus berfokus pada konsumen Wardah di Padang. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 100 responden berusia 20-30 tahun yang menggunakan produk Wardah, dengan menggunakan teknik simple random sampling. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) dengan Smart PLS digunakan untuk menganalisis hubungan antar variabel. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keaslian influencer memiliki dampak yang signifikan dan langsung terhadap persepsi merek dan kepercayaan konsumen, dengan tingkat keaslian yang lebih tinggi meningkatkan persepsi dan kepercayaan konsumen terhadap merek. Meskipun keterlibatan konsumen secara parsial memediasi hubungan antara keaslian influencer dan persepsi merek, hal ini memiliki efek mediasi yang lebih lemah pada kepercayaan konsumen. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun keterlibatan konsumen memperkuat persepsi merek, kepercayaan terhadap merek terutama berasal dari persepsi keaslian influencer. Hasil penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya kemitraan influencer asli bagi merek seperti Wardah untuk membina hubungan yang kuat dan berdasarkan kepercayaan dengan audiens mereka, terutama di pasar yang memiliki budaya tertentu. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang bagaimana dinamika influencer marketing memengaruhi sikap konsumen, menawarkan implikasi praktis untuk positioning merek dan strategi membangun kepercayaan.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Manajemen SDM Yang Inovatif; Kinerja Karyawan; Pengembangan Kompetensi Digital; Pengalaman Karyawan

INTRODUCTION

In the age of digital marketing, influencer authenticity has become a critical factor influencing consumer behavior, brand perception, and trust. Authenticity in influencers not only

fosters a stronger connection with their audience but also enhances consumer trust and brand loyalty (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2018). Prior studies suggest that when influencers are perceived as genuine, their endorsements

can lead to more positive brand evaluations, impacting brand perception and increasing consumer trust (Ki & Kim, 2019). Additionally, authenticity is linked with heightened consumer engagement, which acts as a mediator, enhancing the influence of the endorsement on brand trust (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). However, balancing genuine content with commercial interests poses a challenge, as any indication of insincerity can lead to skepticism and erode trust (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019). Understanding the impact of influencer authenticity on these outcomes is essential for brands seeking to navigate the nuanced dynamics of influencer marketing (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017).

Brand perception is a crucial component in marketing, reflecting how consumers interpret and feel about a brand based on their interactions, values, and experiences. It plays a significant role in determining consumer attitudes, loyalty, and purchasing behavior, as consumers often rely on their perceived image of a brand when making purchase decisions (Keller, 2013). A positive brand perception not only enhances customer retention but also attracts potential consumers, as it fosters a trustworthy image that resonates with consumers' values and lifestyles (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Research highlights that brand perception is significantly shaped by social media interactions and online brand experiences, where the transparency and authenticity of brand messages are key factors (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013). Moreover, the alignment between consumer identity and brand values strengthens brand perception, creating a deeper psychological connection and emotional attachment (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). The emergence of

influencer marketing has further impacted brand perception, as consumers are increasingly influenced by endorsements from relatable and credible figures who can shape perceptions through authentic content (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019). Consequently, brand perception is a dynamic construct influenced by various factors, from digital engagement to psychological alignment, that collectively shape consumer loyalty and advocacy.

Consumer trust is a fundamental element in the relationship between a brand and its customers, influencing long-term loyalty, purchase intentions, and brand advocacy. Trust emerges when consumers perceive a brand as reliable, transparent, and consistent in its communications and actions, fostering a sense of security in their interactions with the brand (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Studies have shown that consumer trust is built through positive past experiences, brand authenticity, and the perceived integrity of the brand, especially in digital and online contexts where trust can be fragile (Gefen, 2002). The rise of e-commerce has highlighted the importance of trust even further, as consumers must rely on brand representations without physical verification of products or services (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). Furthermore, trust is significantly affected by brand responsiveness and transparency in handling consumer feedback, especially through social media channels where real-time interactions can either build or diminish trust (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). Consumer trust also plays a critical role in influencer marketing, as consumers place value on endorsements from influencers they view as credible and honest, which strengthens their trust in the associated brand (Lou & Yuan,

2019). Ultimately, consumer trust is a complex, multifaceted construct that requires brands to consistently demonstrate integrity, authenticity, and responsiveness to maintain strong consumer relationships.

Influencer authenticity is a critical factor in shaping audience engagement, trust, and the effectiveness of marketing efforts. Authenticity refers to the extent to which influencers are perceived as genuine, relatable, and trustworthy, qualities that help build a loyal and engaged audience (Stewart, 2019). Consumers are increasingly savvy and often skeptical of overly polished or promotional content, so authenticity has become a key asset for influencers seeking to foster genuine connections (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2020). Research shows that when influencers openly share personal experiences and insights, audiences are more likely to trust their endorsements and perceive their brand associations positively (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). Additionally, the alignment of an influencer's personal values and lifestyle with the brands they endorse enhances their perceived authenticity, making followers feel more connected and likely to act on their recommendations (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget, 2020). However, maintaining authenticity can be challenging as influencers navigate commercial partnerships; any perceived lack of genuineness may quickly lead to skepticism and diminish their influence (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Therefore, influencer authenticity plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and can significantly impact the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

Consumer engagement refers to the emotional and behavioral connection consumers have with a brand, often characterized by active participation,

loyalty, and advocacy. It encompasses a range of interactions that extend beyond simple transactions, fostering a deeper involvement with the brand that can lead to long-term relationships and brand loyalty (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). Engaged consumers are more likely to participate in brand-related activities, share their experiences on social media, and influence others through word-of-mouth, amplifying the brand's reach and credibility (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Studies have shown that consumer engagement is significantly driven by the brand's ability to create meaningful, personalized experiences that resonate with the individual values and preferences of consumers (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). The rise of digital and social media platforms has expanded opportunities for brands to interact with consumers in real-time, making responsiveness and interactivity critical elements in fostering engagement (Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014). Additionally, brands that effectively communicate authenticity and relevance tend to see higher engagement levels, as consumers feel a sense of community and connection that goes beyond the transactional nature of traditional marketing (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). As a result, consumer engagement is an essential strategy for building brand loyalty and enhancing customer satisfaction in today's competitive market landscape.

In the context of Wardah products in Padang, the variables of brand perception, consumer trust, influencer authenticity, and consumer engagement take on specific roles within the local beauty market. Brand perception for Wardah in Padang is shaped by how consumers view its values, quality, and commitment to halal beauty products, aligning with local cultural and religious

expectations. A positive brand perception enhances Wardah's appeal and reinforces its image as a trusted brand among consumers. Consumer trust plays a critical role, as trust in Wardah's product efficacy, safety, and ethical branding influences purchasing behavior and long-term loyalty. This trust is often reinforced through Wardah's transparent communications and consistency in delivering quality, halal-certified products. Influencer authenticity becomes vital in this market, as local influencers or beauty bloggers who genuinely advocate for Wardah and share relatable, personal experiences with the brand can greatly enhance consumer perceptions and trust. Authentic endorsements are particularly effective, as consumers in Padang tend to resonate more with influencers who align with their values and lifestyle. Finally, consumer engagement is an essential driver of loyalty, with Wardah actively engaging with its audience through social media platforms and local events, encouraging consumers to share feedback, testimonials, and beauty routines. By fostering meaningful interactions, Wardah strengthens its relationship with Padang's consumers, creating a supportive community around its brand and enhancing consumer loyalty in this region.

The phenomenon surrounding Wardah products in Padang highlights challenges in maintaining consumer trust and engagement amidst evolving consumer expectations and the influence of social media. Although Wardah has established itself as a trusted halal beauty brand, the increasing impact of digital platforms and influencers has made authenticity a crucial factor in shaping brand perception. Many consumers now seek not only quality and ethical products but also transparency and genuine connections with brands, often

mediated through influencers they trust. However, the rise of paid promotions and inconsistent endorsements can undermine influencer credibility, potentially weakening consumer trust in both the influencers and Wardah itself. Additionally, while Wardah has made strides in engaging its Padang audience through social media and local events, ensuring ongoing, meaningful consumer engagement is a challenge as competition in the beauty market grows. This situation highlights the need for Wardah to reinforce its brand perception, maintain authenticity in influencer partnerships, and enhance consumer trust to sustain loyalty and competitive advantage in Padang's dynamic beauty market.

While existing literature extensively covers the role of influencer authenticity and brand perception in shaping consumer trust and engagement, there remains a specific gap in understanding how these dynamics play out in culturally specific markets, such as Padang, where religious and cultural values strongly influence consumer preferences (Arlı, Grace, Palmer, & Pham, 2017). Many studies focus broadly on the impact of authenticity and consumer trust within general markets, yet few explore these variables in the context of a halal-certified beauty brand like Wardah, whose brand identity aligns closely with cultural and ethical standards (Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, 2014). Additionally, research on consumer engagement has shown its critical role in brand loyalty, yet there is limited empirical investigation on how localized engagement strategies influence long-term loyalty in niche markets (Barger, Peltier, & Schultz, 2016). Furthermore, while influencer marketing is well-studied in urban contexts, little is known about its effectiveness and challenges in regional

markets like Padang, where consumer expectations around authenticity may differ (Chen & Lin, 2018). This study aims to fill these gaps by examining the impact of influencer authenticity, brand perception, and consumer engagement on consumer trust specifically for Wardah products in Padang, providing valuable insights into localized consumer behavior in the beauty industry.

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of influencer authenticity, brand perception, and consumer engagement on consumer trust specifically for Wardah products in the city of Padang. This study aims to understand how these variables interact in a culturally unique market where religious and ethical considerations strongly influence consumer behavior. By focusing on a halal-certified beauty brand like Wardah, this research seeks to determine how authentic influencer endorsements and localized engagement strategies shape brand perception and trust among consumers in Padang. Additionally, the study intends to fill existing gaps in the literature by exploring how these dynamics manifest in a regional context, providing insights that can help Wardah and similar brands enhance their marketing strategies to build stronger connections with culturally specific audiences.

RESEARCH METHODS

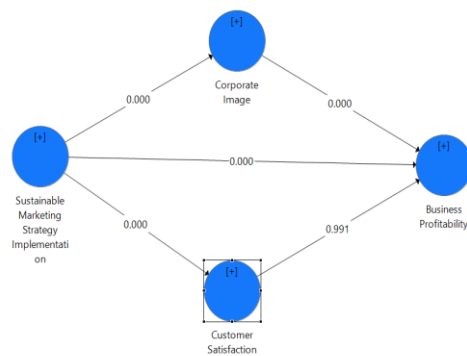
This study employs a quantitative research design to analyze the impact of influencer authenticity on brand perception and consumer trust, with consumer engagement as an intervening variable, targeting Wardah consumers in Padang. Using a simple random sampling technique, a sample of 100 Wardah consumers aged between 20-30 years has been selected to represent the population, capturing

insights from a demographic that is highly engaged with digital platforms and responsive to influencer marketing. Data collection is conducted through structured questionnaires, allowing for precise measurement of each variable. Influencer authenticity is treated as the independent variable, influencing brand perception and consumer trust as dependent variables, while consumer engagement serves as an intervening variable, potentially mediating the effect of influencer authenticity on consumer outcomes. To analyze the data, this study utilizes the Smart PLS (Partial Least Squares) method, which is suitable for examining complex relationships between latent variables and providing insights into the direct and indirect effects within the model. This methodology aims to generate reliable statistical results that reveal how influencer authenticity impacts brand perception, trust, and engagement among Wardah's consumers in Padang.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Since the validity and reliability of the measurement model have met the required standards—indicating that the constructs and items are both accurate and consistent in measuring the intended variables—the next step in this research is to proceed with hypothesis testing. Hypothesis testing in this study will be conducted using Smart PLS, which is well-suited for examining complex, multivariate relationships within the structural model. This step involves assessing the direct effects of influencer authenticity on brand perception and consumer trust as well as the indirect effect mediated by consumer engagement. By analyzing path coefficients and t-statistics, the study will determine the significance of each hypothesized relationship within the model. Additionally, the coefficient of

determination (R^2) for each dependent variable will be examined to understand the extent to which the independent variable and mediator explain the variance in brand perception and consumer trust. By doing so, the study seeks to confirm whether the proposed relationships hold true and to what degree influencer authenticity impacts consumer trust and brand perception directly and through consumer engagement as an intervening variable. This hypothesis testing phase is essential in providing empirical evidence that supports or refutes the research model, offering valuable insights into how these constructs interact in the context of Wardah's consumer base in Padang.



Picture 1. Structural Model

The following are the results of hypothesis testing in table form:

Table 1. Path Analysis

Description	Original Sample	T Statistic	P Values
Consumer Engagement -> Brand Perception	0,337	3,206	0,001
Consumer Engagement -> Consumer Trust	0,305	1,752	0,080
Influencer Authenticity -> Brand Perception	0,638	6,551	0,000
Influencer Authenticity -> Consumer Engagement	0,754	12,068	0,000
Influencer Authenticity -> Consumer Trust	0,641	4,192	0,000
Influencer Authenticity -> Consumer Engagement -> Brand Perception	0,254	2,859	0,004
Influencer Authenticity -> Consumer Engagement -> Consumer Trust	0,230	1,679	0,094

The analysis reveals that influencer authenticity has a strong direct impact on both brand perception and consumer trust. Specifically, the path coefficient between influencer authenticity and brand perception ($O = 0.638$, $T = 6.551$, $p < 0.001$) shows a highly significant relationship, indicating that consumers who perceive influencers as authentic are more likely to develop a positive perception of Wardah's brand. This aligns with prior studies indicating that authentic influencer endorsements enhance brand credibility, which, in turn, shapes brand perception positively (Jin, Muqaddam, & Ryu, 2019). Authenticity from influencers, who often resonate with consumer values, fosters a strong brand association, especially in the beauty sector where trust in product claims is essential (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Guidry Moulard, 2018).

Influencer authenticity also demonstrates a direct and significant effect on consumer engagement ($O = 0.754$, $T = 12.068$, $p < 0.001$). This high path coefficient suggests that authentic influencers not only boost brand perception but also actively engage consumers, encouraging them to interact with and trust the brand more deeply. Previous studies support this finding, showing that authenticity in influencer marketing encourages consumers to engage more frequently with brand content, as they perceive the endorsements as genuine and trustworthy (Alves, Fernandes, & Raposo, 2016). Engagement driven by perceived authenticity can lead to higher levels of consumer loyalty and brand advocacy (Morhart, Malär, Guevremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015).

The results indicate that consumer engagement partially mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and both brand perception

($O = 0.254$, $T = 2.859$, $p = 0.004$) and consumer trust ($O = 0.230$, $T = 1.679$, $p = 0.094$). While the mediating effect of engagement on brand perception is significant, the mediation effect on consumer trust is marginally non-significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that while consumer engagement amplifies the effect of influencer authenticity on brand perception, it has a weaker influence on consumer trust. This finding aligns with research by Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek (2013), which suggests that engagement enhances brand perception more strongly than it does trust, as perception often precedes trust in consumer decision-making.

Furthermore, the direct path from consumer engagement to brand perception is significant ($O = 0.337$, $T = 3.206$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that engaged consumers tend to develop a more favorable perception of the brand. Engagement can manifest as interactions, shares, or comments that reinforce consumers' positive experiences with the brand, leading to stronger brand perceptions (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). Engaged consumers often feel a sense of community and connection with the brand, which further strengthens positive perceptions (Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012).

However, the relationship between consumer engagement and consumer trust is weaker and non-significant ($O = 0.305$, $T = 1.752$, $p = 0.080$), implying that while engagement can positively impact brand perception, it does not directly translate into higher levels of consumer trust. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that trust in a brand requires more than just engagement; it necessitates consistent positive experiences and transparency over time (McKnight, Choudhury, &

Kacmar, 2002). Trust often involves deeper relational aspects, whereas engagement can be more surface-level and momentary (Barger, Peltier, & Schultz, 2016).

Additionally, the direct influence of influencer authenticity on consumer trust is strong and significant ($O = 0.641$, $T = 4.192$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting that authenticity plays a direct role in building consumer trust. When consumers perceive influencers as authentic, they are more likely to trust the brand being promoted, especially in an industry where product quality and safety are paramount. This finding is supported by Lou and Yuan (2019), who argue that influencer credibility, rooted in authenticity, is crucial for building consumer trust in the brand, as it reduces perceived risk associated with the product.

Overall, these findings underscore the pivotal role of influencer authenticity in shaping consumer engagement, brand perception, and trust. They suggest that while engagement enhances brand perception, influencer authenticity is a more substantial driver of both trust and perception, especially in markets that value genuine, relatable brand advocates. This research contributes to the body of literature by illustrating that influencer authenticity has both direct and indirect impacts on consumer attitudes in culturally sensitive markets, providing actionable insights for brands aiming to strengthen their positioning and relationship with consumers.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The findings of this research highlight the critical role of influencer authenticity in shaping brand perception, consumer trust, and consumer engagement among Wardah consumers in Padang. Influencer authenticity significantly and directly influences both

brand perception and consumer trust, underscoring that genuine and relatable endorsements foster a stronger connection between the consumer and the brand. Although consumer engagement partially mediates the relationship between influencer authenticity and brand perception, its mediating effect on consumer trust is less substantial, suggesting that trust requires more than mere engagement. These results emphasize that while consumer engagement boosts brand perception, authenticity is the primary driver of trust and positive brand associations. For brands like Wardah operating in culturally specific markets, these insights underscore the importance of partnering with authentic influencers to build a loyal and trusting consumer base, leveraging influencer relationships to strengthen both engagement and brand perception effectively. This research contributes valuable insights into the nuanced dynamics of influencer marketing and consumer attitudes in a culturally aware context, offering practical implications for enhancing brand positioning and consumer trust.

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