



## ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL MARKETING INFLUENCERS IN INCREASING CONSUMER TRUST IN WARDAH PRODUCTS IN MEDAN CITY THROUGH INSTAGRAM

Caya Aulia Br Ginting<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Husni Ritonga<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [caya0603222058@gmail.com](mailto:caya0603222058@gmail.com)

### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received :

Revised :

Accepted :

Available online

<http://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/analytica>

E-ISSN: 2541-5263

P-ISSN: 1411-4380



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### ABSTRACT

*The development of digital marketing has encouraged the use of Instagram influencers as a marketing communication strategy that not only expands promotional reach but also builds consumer trust in the brand. This study aims to analyze the role, obstacles, and successes of digital influencer marketing in increasing consumer trust in Wardah products in Medan City through the Instagram account @bravebeautydmn. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques including interviews, observation, and documentation. The research informants included influencers and consumers who follow the account and have experience accessing Wardah promotional content. The results show that influencers act as communicators, delivering product education, user experiences, and soft-selling-based promotions that build authentic, credible, and relatable perceptions with the audience. Key obstacles include differences in consumer characteristics, the audience's tendency to compare reviews from various sources, and the emergence of negative comments. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the local context of Medan City and the use of unofficial promotional accounts, thus enriching the study of digital marketing communication based on consumer trust in the halal cosmetics industry.*

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, Influencer, Consumer Trust, Wardah, Instagram

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed the way companies build relationships with consumers. Marketing no longer relies solely on conventional media, but is moving toward a digital ecosystem that emphasizes interactivity, speed of message distribution, and direct audience engagement. In this context, digital marketing has become a crucial strategy because it enables companies to reach consumers more broadly, measurably, and personally through various internet-based platforms (Purwana et al., 2021). This transformation also requires companies to not only promote products but also to build consumer perception, closeness, and trust sustainably (Sinaga & Ritonga, 2024).

One rapidly growing form of digital marketing communication is the use of influencers on social media. Influencers are no longer merely promotional figures but have become intermediaries between brands and consumers through content that is perceived as more intimate, personal, and authentic. From a marketing communications perspective, the effectiveness of a message is determined not only by its content but also by the credibility of the source delivering it. Therefore, influencer marketing is relevant in shaping consumer perceptions and attitudes, especially for products that rely heavily on user experience, image, and social recommendations, such as beauty products (Mulyono, 2022). At this point, consumer trust becomes a central element, determining both the acceptance of promotional messages and the decision to try or purchase a product.

In the cosmetics industry, trust plays an increasingly important role as consumers consider not only a product's functional benefits but also its safety, suitability, brand image, and inherent value. Wardah, as a local halal cosmetics brand, has a strong position in the Indonesian market thanks to its ability to build a brand identity that closely aligns with the needs of Muslim consumers, simultaneously offering a modern and religious image (Muslih, 2025). Within this framework, the halal concept serves not only as a legal-formal label but also as a symbol of quality, safety, and ethical compliance, which can strengthen consumer trust. These values align with the principles of halal consumption in Islam, as outlined in Surah Al-Maidah, verse 88, which emphasizes the importance of consuming what is halal and good. In an academic context, this verse can be understood as a normative basis that product consumption, including cosmetics, is not merely a matter of material needs but also involves ethical and faith aspects, which in modern marketing practices intersect with building trust in brands.

وَكُلُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي أَنْتُمْ بِهِ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

Meaning: "And eat of what Allah has provided for you as good and lawful sustenance, and fear Allah as you believe in Him."

Wardah is a manufacturer of cosmetics and beauty care products manufactured by the largest cosmetics manufacturing company in Indonesia. The company has been operating since 1995 and offers a variety of products, including skincare, body care, hair care, and cosmetics to meet various consumer needs. The continued widespread use of Wardah products demonstrates the high level of consumer interest in Wardah products in Indonesia. To support its marketing strategy, Wardah uses advertising to introduce its products to the public as part of its marketing plan. Consumers can obtain important information from advertising regarding a product's benefits and drawbacks. Therefore, advertising needs to be carefully designed so that the intended message is well received and understood by the target consumers. (SIAHAAN, 2022).

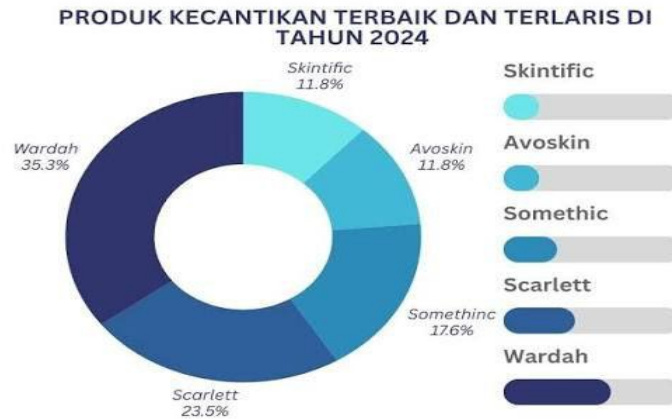


Figure 1.1 Best and Most Popular Beauty Products of 2024

The figure above shows that Wardah products experienced significant sales growth in 2024. This data indicates that Wardah remains the most sought-after and trusted brand among consumers compared to other beauty brands. High consumer interest in Wardah indicates the success of the implemented marketing strategy.

Amidst increasingly fierce competition in the cosmetics industry, Instagram has emerged as a strategic platform for beauty product marketing communications. This platform enables brands and influencers to build strong visual communications, presenting product reviews, tutorials, testimonials, and engaging with audiences more intensively. Instagram also provides companies with the opportunity to present promotional messages in a more communicative, persuasive, and targeted manner tailored to the characteristics of their target market (Alfandy & Fauziah, 2022). In this context, the use of influencers on promotional accounts or beauty content creators is crucial because they are able to translate brand messages into everyday narratives that are more easily understood by their followers.

Theoretically, marketing communications aim to inform, persuade, and remind consumers about a brand through specific communication channels, thereby fostering a positive relationship between the company and its audience. However, in the era of social media, this relationship has become more complex because audiences are no longer passive recipients of messages, but rather actively assess the communicator's credibility, compare information from various sources, and respond openly through comments, likes, and sharing. Therefore, the success of influencer marketing cannot be explained solely by high exposure or content reach, but must also be seen in its ability to build consumer trust through credibility, authenticity, consistency, and message relevance (Adrianto, 2021; Ishak, 2021). In other words, influencers are effective not simply because they are popular, but because they are able to deliver a communication experience that is perceived as honest and trustworthy.

Several previous studies have shown that studies on influencer marketing for Wardah products generally focus on increasing brand awareness, social media promotional strategies, and influencing purchasing decisions. Shofi and Kholilurrohman (2025) emphasize that influencer content and the use of Instagram features contribute to attracting consumer attention and loyalty. Other research also shows that influencer marketing is often positioned as a strategy to strengthen brand visibility and shape

audience purchasing intention (Yunianto, 2025). Furthermore, a study by Iwan et al. (2025) highlighted the importance of influencer credibility in influencing consumer perceptions of a brand. However, these studies tend to position consumer trust as a supporting variable, rather than as the primary focus of analysis examined in depth within the context of digital marketing communications.

Based on these studies, there are research gaps that need to be filled. First, previous research has primarily examined influencer marketing at the level of brand awareness and purchase intention, while the aspect of building consumer trust as a gradual and relational communication process has not been widely analyzed. Second, most previous studies have focused on official brand accounts or large-scale influencers, resulting in limited research examining locally-based promotional accounts such as the Instagram account @bravebeautymdn. Third, the local context of Medan City has not been widely explored, even though local audience characteristics can influence how consumers interpret promotional messages, build perceptions of authenticity, and determine levels of trust in products. Therefore, research is needed that specifically analyzes how digital influencer marketing plays a role in increasing consumer trust in Wardah products through Instagram in a more concrete and contextual local context.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the role of digital marketing influencers in increasing consumer trust in Wardah products in Medan City through Instagram, while simultaneously identifying the obstacles and successes of this strategy. This research is important because it provides theoretical contributions to the development of digital marketing communication studies, particularly those related to the relationship between influencer credibility, promotional message characteristics, and the formation of consumer trust. Practically, this study also provides input for cosmetics industry players and digital promotion managers so they can design influencer marketing strategies that are more authentic, contextual, and effective in building consumer trust at the local level.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the research focused on an in-depth understanding of the role of digital marketing influencers in building consumer trust in Wardah products through Instagram, including how this process is perceived, experienced, and interpreted by informants in the local context of Medan City. Descriptive qualitative research is relevant when researchers want to describe social phenomena in a naturalistic way, interpret subjects' experiences, and understand the meaning behind communication interactions that occur in specific situations (Abdussamad, 2021).

The research was conducted in Medan City, focusing on Wardah product promotional activities through the Instagram account @bravebeautymdn, a digital marketing communication platform that connects influencers and consumers. This context was chosen based on the consideration that the account actively shares promotional content, product reviews, and interacts with audiences related to beauty products, making it relevant for analysis as a medium for building consumer trust. In qualitative research, the

location was determined purposively, based on the location's suitability to the focus of the problem and the potential for in-depth data collection (Sugiyono, 2022).

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, a deliberate selection of subjects based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The primary informants consisted of three influencers/content creators involved in promotional activities or reviews of Wardah products through the @bravebeautymdn account. The informant criteria included: (1) direct involvement in the production or consumption of Wardah product promotional content on Instagram, (2) understanding the nature of the content shared through the @bravebeautymdn account, and (3) willingness to provide information openly as needed by the research. Purposive selection of informants enabled researchers to obtain rich, relevant data that aligned with the focus of the study (Miles et al., 2014).

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were used to explore informants' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations regarding the role of influencers in building trust in Wardah products. Through this technique, researchers were able to obtain data that was not only factual but also reflective and contextual. Observations were conducted on the content, interaction patterns, communication styles, and audience responses on the @bravebeautymdn Instagram account, particularly those related to Wardah product promotions. Documentation was used to supplement the data, including content screenshots, audience comments, post archives, and other documents supporting the analysis of influencer digital marketing practices. The combination of these three techniques resulted in more comprehensive and complementary data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data analysis in this study refers to the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data condensation stage, researchers selected, focused, simplified, and coded data from interviews, observations, and documentation based on relevant themes, such as the role of influencers, message credibility, forms of consumer trust, barriers, and indicators of promotional success. In the data presentation stage, the findings were systematically organized into a thematic narrative to more clearly understand the relationships between categories. Next, at the conclusion-drawing stage, researchers critically interpret the patterns of findings to answer the research focus, while simultaneously carrying out continuous verification of the data so that the conclusions produced remain consistent with the empirical evidence found in the field.

### 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

#### **The Role of Digital Marketing Influencers in Increasing Consumer Trust in Wardah Products in Medan via Instagram**

Research findings indicate that digital marketing influencers play a significant role in shaping consumer trust in Wardah products through Instagram. However, this role is not merely instrumental as a conveyor of promotional messages, but also as a mediator of meaning between the brand and its audience. From a marketing communications perspective, influencers function as "third-party endorsers" capable of transforming

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commercial messages into more personalized and contextual experiences (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This aligns with field findings that content delivered by influencers includes not only product information but also user experiences packaged in a narrative manner, thereby strengthening consumers' perceptions of authenticity.

The informants in this study consisted of consumers and influencers involved in digital marketing activities for beauty products through the @bravebeautymdn account. Consumer informants are active followers of the account and have experience accessing promotional content, product reviews, and beauty events featuring Wardah products. Therefore, they were able to provide information regarding their perceptions, levels of trust, and experiences with influencer content. Furthermore, this research also involved influencers as supporting sources who play a direct role in the creation and delivery of promotional content for beauty products.

According to Tania Novianti (27), an influencer interviewed on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, influencer involvement in digital marketing for beauty products plays a crucial role in building consumer trust. Her journey as an influencer began with consistently creating skincare review content, ultimately leading to collaborations with various beauty brands, including Wardah. In promoting products, she focuses not only on conveying promotional messages but also on building the product's personal branding through informative and relevant content. The content creation process is structured, from idea planning and script writing to video shooting and editing, ensuring the message is well-received by the audience.



Source: Instagram @taniaovianti99

Theoretically, the effectiveness of influencers in building trust can be explained through Source Credibility Theory, which emphasizes that message reception is strongly influenced by the audience's perception of the communicator's credibility, which includes expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Hovland et al., 1953). In the context of this study, the influencers involved in the @bravebeautymdn account were deemed credible because they demonstrated real-life experiences using Wardah products and conveyed information deemed relevant to the needs of local audiences. This finding strengthens the argument that consumer trust is not solely built through product quality, but also through the quality of the communicator delivering the message.

The soft-selling approach used by influencers in promotional content indicates a shift in marketing communication strategies from direct persuasive models to experience-based communication and storytelling. In modern communication theory, this approach can be linked to the concept of narrative persuasion, where messages conveyed through personal stories are more effective in influencing audience attitudes and beliefs than explicit and instructive messages (Green & Brock, 2000). Field findings indicate that content integrating personal experiences, usage tutorials, and honest reviews can reduce audience resistance to promotional messages, thereby increasing trust in Wardah products.

Furthermore, the research also shows that consumer trust is formed through social interactions that occur in the digital space. This aligns with the social proof perspective in consumer behavior theory, which states that individuals tend to trust information or products when they see endorsements from others, particularly in the form of comments, likes, and testimonials (Cialdini, 2009). In the context of Instagram, interactions such as positive comments, the number of views, and audience responses to influencer content serve as social indicators that strengthen the legitimacy of promotional messages. Thus, consumer trust is built not only by individual influencers but also by the digital interaction ecosystem that forms around that content.

However, this study also found that the effectiveness of influencer marketing is not absolute. Barriers, such as over-promotional promotional content, indicate the potential for a decline in message credibility. In persuasive communication theory, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of persuasion knowledge, where audiences who perceive commercial intent in a message tend to be more critical and resistant to it (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This finding indicates that transparency and authenticity are key factors in maintaining consumer trust, as today's audiences have increasingly high levels of digital literacy.

Furthermore, differences in consumer characteristics, such as skin type and product needs, also limit the universality of influencer influence. From a consumer behavior perspective, this relates to the concept of consumer heterogeneity, which emphasizes that each individual has different preferences, experiences, and perceptions of a product (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Therefore, although influencers can provide recommendations, the final decision is still influenced by the consumer's personal evaluation of the product's suitability to their needs. This suggests that trust built through influencers is relative and cannot be absolutely generalized.

On the other hand, the success of the influencer digital marketing strategy in this study was demonstrated by increased consumer interest, interaction, and tendency to recommend Wardah products to others. This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of relationship marketing, which emphasizes the importance of building long-term relationships between brands and consumers through ongoing, trust-based communication (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In this case, influencers not only act as promoters but also as facilitators of the relationship between brands and consumers, enabling the creation of emotional attachment and loyalty to the product.

Conceptually, the findings of this study indicate that digital influencer marketing operates through three main mechanisms: (1) the credibility of the communicator as the basis for message acceptance, (2) narrative experience as a persuasive strategy, and (3) digital social interaction as a trust reinforcement. These three mechanisms interact to

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shape consumer trust in Wardah products in Medan. Thus, this study not only confirms the relevance of classical marketing communications theory in a digital context but also broadens the understanding that consumer trust in the social media era is the result of a multidimensional, dynamic, and contextual communication process.

### **Barriers and Successes of Digital Influencer Marketing in Increasing Consumer Trust in Wardah Products in Medan via Instagram**

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of digital marketing through influencers to promote Wardah products in Medan is not without various obstacles that affect the effectiveness of building consumer trust. One major obstacle is the emergence of audience perceptions of promotional content as excessive or overly commercialized. In the context of marketing communications, this condition can be explained through the concept of persuasion knowledge, where consumers who recognize commercial interests in a message tend to be more critical and skeptical of the information conveyed (Friestad & Wright, 1994). These findings indicate that audiences are no longer passive but rather have the ability to evaluate and assess the authenticity of messages conveyed by influencers.

Another barrier identified is the differences in consumer characteristics, particularly regarding needs and skin conditions when using beauty products. From a consumer behavior perspective, this relates to the concept of consumer heterogeneity, which emphasizes that individual preferences and experiences with a product are highly diverse and cannot be standardized (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Consequently, positive experiences shared by influencers cannot always be replicated by the entire audience, potentially raising doubts about the product's effectiveness. This demonstrates that influencer influence has limits determined by the relevance of consumers' personal experiences.

Another barrier is consumers' tendency to compare information from multiple sources before making a decision. This phenomenon demonstrates that the process of trust formation in the digital age is complex and non-linear. In modern communication theory, this can be understood through a multi-step flow of communication approach, where information is received not only from a single source but through various interacting communication networks (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Thus, influencer influence does not stand alone, but rather forms part of a broader information ecosystem that contributes to shaping consumer perceptions and decisions.

On the other hand, the success of digital influencer marketing in this study was evident in their ability to build more persuasive communication through a soft-selling approach. This strategy places experience, education, and storytelling at the core of the message, thus avoiding the impression of forcing the audience to purchase the product. Within the framework of narrative persuasion, messages conveyed through personal experiences tend to be more easily accepted because they can create emotional engagement between the communicator and the audience (Green & Brock, 2000). Field findings indicate that content featuring actual product use, tutorials, and honest reviews can increase perceptions of authenticity, ultimately contributing to the formation of consumer trust in Wardah products.

Another key factor in this success is the influencer's credibility as an information source. According to Source Credibility Theory, message effectiveness is strongly influenced by the communicator's level of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Hovland et al., 1953). Influencers perceived as having real-life experience, consistent content delivery, and close ties to their local audience have been shown to build stronger relationships with their followers. This is reinforced by digital interactions such as positive comments, views, and audience responses, which serve as a form of social proof, further strengthening the legitimacy of promotional messages (Cialdini, 2009). Thus, consumer trust is built through a combination of the influencer's individual credibility and social support from the digital community.

The findings of this study indicate that the success of digital influencer marketing in increasing consumer trust is determined not only by the intensity of promotion, but also by the quality of communication built consistently and authentically. Emerging barriers, such as audience skepticism and consumer heterogeneity, emphasize that trust is the result of a complex and multi-layered evaluation process. From a relationship marketing perspective, trust is the primary foundation for building long-term relationships between brands and consumers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, an effective influencer marketing strategy must be able to integrate credibility, message authenticity, and ongoing interaction to maintain and enhance consumer trust in an increasingly competitive digital marketing context.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that digital influencer marketing functions not only as a promotional instrument, but also as a mediator of trust that bridges the relationship between brands, messages, and consumer experiences in the digital space. In the context of Wardah product promotions in Medan City via Instagram, influencer effectiveness is proven to be determined by the credibility of the communicator, the authenticity of the experience displayed, the consistency of the message, and the ability to build closeness with the local audience. These findings strengthen the argument that consumer trust in the social media era is not formed instantly through promotional exposure alone, but rather through a communication process that is relational, interactive, and contextual. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of digital marketing communication studies by demonstrating that the success of influencer marketing must be understood through the integration of the dimensions of source credibility, narrative persuasion, and digital social interaction as a mechanism for building trust. Practically, this study provides implications that cosmetics industry players, brand managers, and content creators need to design promotional strategies that are more authentic, educational, and based on audience needs, rather than emphasizing overly explicit and uniform promotions. Thus, this study positions influencer marketing not merely as a tool to increase brand visibility, but as a communication strategy that determines the quality of long-term relationships between brands and consumers.

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