



Social Media Influencer Attributes' Impact on Generation Z Filipino Consumers' Perceived Parasocial Relationships and Purchasing Behavior

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Received : September 25, 2025

Accepted : October 20, 2025

Published : January 31, 2026

Citation: Balatero, M.V., (2026). Social Media Influencer Attributes' Impact on Generation Z Filipino Consumers' Perceived Parasocial Relationships and Purchasing Behavior. *Ijomata International Journal of Management*. 7(1), 438-459. <https://doi.org/10.61194/ijjm.v7i1.1968>

ABSTRACT: This study investigates the role of social media influencers (SMIs) in shaping the purchasing behavior of Filipino Generation Z consumers, with particular emphasis on how influencer attributes foster parasocial relationships (PSRs) that drive online shopping. A quantitative-descriptive research design was employed using survey data collected from 380 Generation Z respondents in San Fernando, La Union. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Mann-Whitney U test, and Spearman's rho correlation. The results revealed that nano-influencers (with 0–10,000 followers) are the most effective in establishing trust and emotional connections with their audiences. Influencer attributes, including authenticity, content style, perceived fit, and popularity, were identified as key drivers of engagement. Gender differences were observed in the strength of PSRs, with higher levels reported among female respondents, although no significant differences were found in purchasing behavior. The study concludes that relatable and emotionally resonant influencers play a central role in influencing Generation Z's online purchasing decisions. It recommends that brands prioritize collaborations with credible nano-influencers to enhance consumer trust and loyalty. By situating these findings within the Philippine context, the research contributes to the literature on influencer marketing and offers practical implications for post-pandemic digital strategies.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers (SMIs), Parasocial Relationships (PSR), Generation Z, Online Purchasing Behavior, Nano-Influencers.



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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation globally, as lockdowns and disruptions prompted businesses to adopt e-commerce and digital marketing strategies, driving a surge in online shopping for essential and non-essential goods (Goldman, 2021). According to SellersCommerce, 2024, e-commerce grew 27.6% in 2020 to \$4.28 trillion and is projected to surpass \$8 trillion by 2028, with the Asia-Pacific region, particularly China and Southeast Asia, leading growth. Consumer expectations shifted toward speed, convenience, and digital integration, with mobile commerce, AI, and social commerce emerging as key trends (Kshetri, 2021).

Parallel to e-commerce growth, social media influencers (SMIs) became central to digital marketing, offering relatability and authenticity that surpass traditional celebrity endorsements

([Masuda et al., 2022](#)). Globally, influencer marketing is projected to exceed \$24 billion by 2025, integrating live streaming, affiliate marketing, and social commerce ([Boerman, 2020](#)). In the Philippines, with 86 million active social media users, micro- and nano-influencers are particularly effective among Millennials and Generation Z due to their authenticity and peer-like engagement.

In the Philippines, e-commerce expanded rapidly, driven by internet penetration, mobile payments, and government initiatives. Valued at \$17 billion in 2021, it is projected to reach \$24 billion by 2025, with mobile commerce dominating through platforms like Shopee and Lazada, as well as payment apps such as GCash and PayMaya. Government support through the Philippine E-Commerce Roadmap 2022 further strengthened infrastructure and consumer protection ([Department of Trade and Industry \(DTI\), 2022](#)).

A key mechanism underlying influencer effectiveness is the formation of parasocial relationships (PSRs). These one-sided emotional bonds serve to strengthen trust, foster loyalty, and enhance consumers' purchase intentions. Attributes such as expertise, relatability, and authenticity enhance PSRs, although they may also increase the risks of materialism and social comparison ([Masuda et al., 2022](#)). Generation Z, comprising nearly 40 million Filipinos, is highly digitally engaged, spending an average of 5.5 hours daily on platforms like TikTok and YouTube, and relies on influencers for product discovery, research, and purchase decisions. They respond strongly to micro-influencers who offer relatable, authentic content that fosters stronger PSRs. Emerging trends, such as de-influencing, highlight Generation Z's preference for mindful and sustainable consumption, further emphasizing the importance of credibility and consistency in influencer messaging.

This study addresses a research gap by focusing on micro-influencers in the Philippines and their impact on Generation Z's purchasing behavior through PSRs, complementing prior Western-focused studies on macro-influencers. Drawing on Social Media Marketing Theory, parasocial interaction theory, and consumer behavior frameworks, it highlights how influencer credibility, relatability, and content style drive online purchases, providing actionable insights for businesses seeking to engage Generation Z in the growing Philippine digital economy.

Research Objectives

This study examines how nano- and micro-influencers shape parasocial relationships (PSRs) and influence the purchasing behavior of Filipino Generation Z, addressing a gap in culturally specific research. Focusing on influencer credibility, relatability, and content style, the study integrates Source Credibility Theory, Social Proof, and influencer marketing models to analyze links between influencer attributes, emotional engagement, and consumer decision-making. By examining the behaviors of Filipino Gen Z on social media and e-commerce platforms, the research offers valuable insights for crafting authentic, culturally tailored influencer marketing strategies.

This study examines how SMIs employ PSRs to influence Generation Z's post-pandemic online purchasing behavior in the Philippines. Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

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1. What are the characteristics of Generation Z Filipino consumers following SMIs in terms of:
 - Gender
 - Social Media Platforms Used
 - Online Shopping Platforms Used
 - Online Shopping Account
 - Online Shopping Frequency
2. What is the extent of influence of the factors involving SMI on the parasocial relationship, as perceived by Generation Z consumers, in terms of the SMI attributes:
 - Type of SMI
 - perceived popularity
 - perceived fit, and
 - content creation/style
3. What is the extent to which Generation Z consumers perceive parasocial relationships?
4. What is the extent to which Generation Z consumers exhibit indicators of purchasing behavior?
5. Is there a significant difference in the perception of the Generation Z consumer on the following when gender is considered?
 - SMI attributes
 - Parasocial Relationship
 - Purchasing behavior
6. Is there a significant relationship between the purchasing behavior of Generation Z consumers and the following:
 - 6.1 SMI attributes
 - 6.2 Parasocial Relationship

H₁: There is no significant difference in the extent of influence of the factors involving SMI on the parasocial relationship, as perceived by Generation Z consumers when their gender is considered.

H₂: There is no significant relationship in the extent of influence of the factors involving SMI and parasocial relationships.

Conceptual Framework

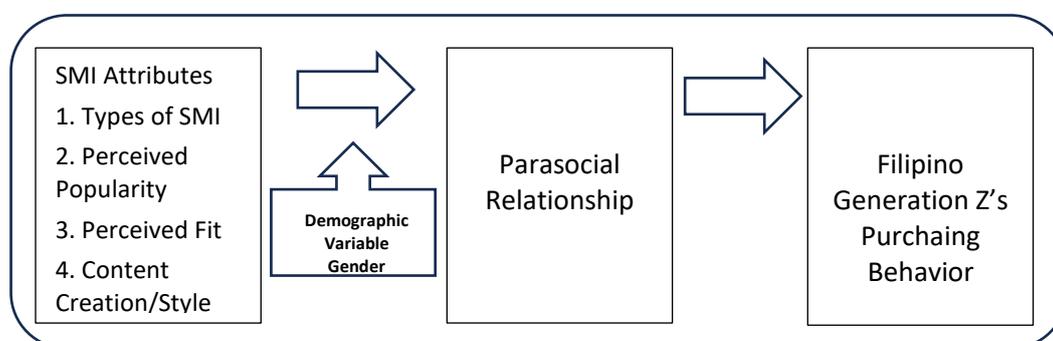


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm

With the SMI attributes, the Generation Z characteristics, and the influence of PSR on the purchasing behavior of Filipino Generation Z, the following conceptual paradigm was utilized as a guide in the study:

Social Media Influencer's Attributes

Type of Influencers. Social media influencers (SMIs) are effective marketing agents because they combine audience reach with perceived authenticity, enabling brands to build recognition, launch products, and drive sales. Influencers are categorized as nano, micro, or macro, each offering unique advantages: nano-influencers build trust within niche audiences, micro-influencers strike a balance between relatability and reach, and macro-influencers provide broad visibility and social appeal ([Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020](#)). Micro-influencers are particularly impactful for Millennials and Gen Z due to their authenticity, meaningful content, and relatability, fostering brand engagement, loyalty, and self-expression. Disclosure of sponsorship influences consumer responses, with transparency enhancing credibility; however, non-disclosure can sometimes increase the perceived desirability of the product. Overall, SMIs—especially micro-influencers—play a pivotal role in shaping Gen Z's purchasing behavior through trust, relatability, and credible content.

Perceived Popularity. Social media influencers rely on follower growth as a measure of popularity, with platforms playing a central role in amplifying visibility. Popularity cues—such as streamer engagement and product sales—have been shown to increase spontaneous purchases, as consumers often perceive streamers as both entertainers and trusted promoters. Streamer popularity is reflected in audience interactions, such as views, likes, comments, and subscriptions, whereas product popularity is indicated by visible sales numbers.

Although popularity enhances perceived product quality and reduces uncertainty ([Goedegebure et al., 2020](#)), its effect on purchase intention is mixed. Research suggests that popularity is a stronger cue than professionalism; however, in some cases, brand popularity has no significant or even negative influence, with price, perceived quality, and consumer need exerting a greater impact on buying decisions ([Rizaldi, 2024](#)). These findings indicate that while popularity can shape perceptions and encourage impulsive buying, need and value remain stronger predictors of purchase intention.

Perceived Fit. Research emphasizes that the perceived fit between an influencer or celebrity and a product is crucial, as a strong match enhances credibility, reputation, and the effectiveness of endorsements ([Lim & Young, 2021](#)). Credibility—rooted in expertise, trustworthiness, and charisma—significantly drives purchase intention, while attractiveness also shapes consumer choices.

Similarity and relatability strengthen endorsement outcomes, as consumers engage more with influencers who reflect their self-concept and values ([Nafees et al., 2021](#)). Emotional appeal and authenticity further enhance persuasion by fostering trust, motivation, and confidence ([Santora, 2022](#)).

Additionally, both source and message credibility are critical: trustworthiness matters in ambiguous online contexts, while specificity and verifiability increase perceived reliability. However, mismatches between endorser and product undermine authenticity and consumer trust.

Overall, literature highlights credibility, attractiveness, similarity, and fit as the main drivers of influencer effectiveness, particularly for Gen Z, who value authenticity and alignment with personal beliefs in shaping brand loyalty ([Santora, 2022](#)).

Content Style or Creation. Social media enables continuous, transparent interaction between businesses and consumers, generating vast amounts of user content that can shape brand strategies. The quality of influencer-generated content—measured through information, design, technological sophistication, and creativity—plays a critical role in fostering parasocial relationships (PSRs) and driving online brand-related actions ([Cheung et al., 2022](#)). Creative, original, and relatable content enhances consumer identification with influencers, while unappealing or overly promotional posts risk being ignored ([Hudders et al., 2021](#)).

Video content, particularly vlogs and live streams, has become especially powerful in building engagement, as audiences perceive influencers' authenticity and relatability through emotional expression and product reviews. Compared to traditional advertising, user-generated content is viewed as more credible, particularly when influencers are perceived as knowledgeable or domain experts.

For Generation Z, peer opinions, online reviews, and influencer recommendations play a significant role in shaping purchasing decisions. They tend to value relatability, authenticity, and shared identity, often trusting bloggers and micro-influencers more than traditional celebrities. Influencer endorsements are especially persuasive for this group, as they align with Gen Z's preference for self-expression, community-driven feedback, and admiration for relatable role models ([Santora, 2022](#)).

Parasocial Relationship Concept

Parasocial relationships (PSRs), first conceptualized by Horton and Wohl in the 1950s, describe one-sided yet psychologically real connections audiences form with media figures ([Masuda et al., 2022](#)). On social media, such relationships emerge when followers engage repeatedly with influencers' content, often perceiving the interaction as social despite its mediated nature. These ties influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, as credibility and parasocial engagement significantly shape followers' buying decisions on platforms like YouTube and Instagram ([Yuan & Lou, 2020](#)).

Research shows that PSRs enhance influencer credibility, sustain audience attachment, and encourage ongoing interactions. However, audience factors such as self-esteem also mediate these effects. Consumers with lower self-esteem demonstrate stronger reliance on PSRs in shaping purchase behavior, while those with higher self-esteem are less influenced by endorsements ([Bi & Zhang, 2023](#)). These findings highlight that PSRs, reinforced by influencer credibility and consumer psychology, are central to understanding how social media personalities drive brand engagement and purchasing behavior.

Generation Z Characteristics

Generation Z (born 1997–2012) is the first fully digital-native generation, comprising over 40% of global consumers and projected to reach \$33 trillion in income by 2030 ([Khadar, 2020](#)). Though many are early in their careers, they are already highly influential in the marketplace.

Spending up to 11 hours daily online, Generation Z gravitates toward YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, while showing less interest in Facebook and Twitter ([Djafarova & Bowes, 2021](#)). This heavy digital presence makes them especially responsive to social media influencers (SMIs), who shape their brand perceptions and purchase behaviors.

Generation Z values community, identity, and authenticity, often engaging with brands that foster loyalty and align with their beliefs. They are also socially and environmentally conscious, favoring sustainable and responsible companies ([Santora, 2022](#)). Financially, they are more cautious and data-driven, comparing prices, waiting for discounts, and making independent purchasing choices.

Gender differences appear: Generation Z women are more willing to pay premiums for socially responsible brands but report lower savings than men.

Online Shopping Behavior

Online shopping has become central to modern commerce, offering convenience and efficiency while driving rapid market growth, valued at \$300 billion in 2014 and projected to reach \$476 billion by 2024 in the U.S. ([Adibfar et al., 2022](#)). Consumer behavior in e-commerce is shaped by psychological factors throughout the purchase journey ([Miah et al., 2022](#)), with platforms streamlining inventory, payments, and fulfillment processes.

For Generation Z, online shopping increasingly merges with social commerce, where purchases occur directly on social media, enhanced by personalization, AR tools, live streaming, and influencer marketing ([Dalei, 2025](#)).

In the Philippines, adoption is accelerating: 61% of shoppers shopped online in Q3 2022, and the market is forecast to quadruple from 2019 to 2025, led by Shopee (70 million visitors) and Lazada (37 million) ([Statista, 2021](#)). Gen Z and Millennials dominate usage, supported by cash-on-delivery and e-wallets like GCash and PayMaya, given that 51% of Filipinos are unbanked and only 8% use credit cards.

While risks such as fraud create cautious behavior, e-commerce's accessibility, flexible payments, and influencer-driven social media integration make it especially appealing to Gen Z.

Theoretical Framework

Social Media Marketing – David Chaffey's Theory

Chaffey defines social media marketing as fostering customer connection, engagement, and sharing through digital media to build strong brand relationships and generate financial value. His theory emphasizes that company–customer interactions influence human behavior, thereby shaping consumer purchasing decisions, boosting sales, and maintaining brand loyalty. By enhancing long-

term client relationships, social media marketing contributes significantly to business performance ([Swallehe & Haule, 2021](#)).

Social media enables consumers to discover, follow, and purchase from brands, making it a powerful tool for firms of all sizes to create brand advocates and generate sales. Influencer marketing, as a subset of this approach, leverages the credibility and trust that influencers build with their followers, serving as social proof for potential customers. This study applies Chaffey's framework to explain how social media influencers (SMIs) establish parasocial relationships that shape consumer behavior and benefit businesses.

Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory posits that a communicator's persuasiveness depends on trustworthiness and expertise, with attractiveness later added as a supporting factor. In marketing, credible sources foster attitude change and influence consumer behavior. Applied to social media influencers, the theory explains their effectiveness: audiences perceive them as authentic, knowledgeable, and relatable, making endorsements persuasive. Findings indicate that micro-influencers, particularly among female respondents, are perceived as more trustworthy and relatable, thereby strengthening parasocial bonds and influencing purchase decisions. Trust and expertise thus remain key drivers of consumer acceptance.

Source Attractiveness Model

McGuire's (1985) Source Attractiveness Model explains persuasion through likability, similarity, familiarity, and physical attractiveness, with audiences more influenced when they find a source relatable. In social media, influencers build trust and strong parasocial relationships by sharing authentic experiences and values. Research indicates that authenticity and emotional appeal significantly influence Gen Z's engagement, shaping their brand perceptions and purchase behavior ([Yuan & Lou, 2020](#)). The model highlights how influencers' relatability and likability enhance credibility and marketing effectiveness.

Social Proof Theory

The Social Proof Theory posits that people model their decisions on the behaviors of others, particularly those of credible or influential figures. In marketing, this appears through trends, peer influence, and influencer popularity. For Filipino Gen Z, social proof plays a significant role in purchasing decisions: they trust influencers with high engagement and follower counts, using likes and shares as indicators of credibility. Perceived popularity thus boosts trust, emotional connection, and purchase intention, making social proof a central component of influencer marketing.

Significance of the Study

Predicting online purchasing behavior is crucial, as first impressions significantly influence attitudes. Social media influencers (SMIs) influence these impressions through parasocial relationships (PSRs), which can outweigh credibility factors like trust and expertise in driving purchase intentions ([Masuda et al., 2022](#)). While research often focuses on Western macro-influencers, micro-influencers are perceived as more authentic and relatable, making them

particularly effective in PSR cultivation. This is particularly relevant in the Philippines, where Gen Z collectivist values, high digital activity, and post-pandemic reliance on virtual ties foster PSR development ([Chua & Chou, 2023](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic further elevated micro-influencers as emotionally resonant figures, underscoring the need to study Southeast Asia's cultural context. This study fills that gap by examining how Filipino Gen Z individuals form PSRs with micro-influencers and how these relationships shape their purchase intentions.

METHOD

This study employs a cross-sectional descriptive survey with a quantitative approach to examine how social media influencers (SMIs) influence parasocial relationships and purchasing behavior among Filipino Gen Z consumers. A cross-sectional design captures current attitudes in the rapidly changing social media context, while the quantitative method provides objective, statistical measurements of engagement, trust, and purchasing behavior. The descriptive survey further documents patterns, providing generalizable insights into the impact that are valuable to marketers, businesses, and academics.

Data were gathered through a structured survey administered online and in person, with informed consent from respondents aged 13–26 and parental consent for minors ([Khadar, 2020](#)). The self-constructed questionnaire, adapted from prior studies, measured SMI attributes, PSR characteristics, and purchasing behavior ([Masuda et al., 2022](#)). Expert review and a pilot test with 30 participants ensured validity and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.723). The validated tool supports both the study's objectives and practical applications for enhancing marketing strategies and consumer engagement.

Generation Z (born 1996–2012) makes up about 45% of the Philippine population, including 31,427 residents in San Fernando City, La Union—an urbanized area with strong internet use—making it a suitable site for studying social media and e-commerce behaviors ([Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022b](#)). A sample of 380 Gen Z respondents, calculated at a 95% confidence level, was drawn through purposive sampling of those with internet access, exposure to SMIs, and online shopping experience, though this approach risks selection bias. Despite limitations, the locale and sample frame provide a relevant basis for analyzing how SMIs and parasocial relationships shape Filipino Gen Z's purchasing behavior within its cultural and technological context.

The study employed descriptive and inferential statistics to examine the relationship between social media influencers (SMIs), parasocial relationships (PSRs), and purchase behavior. Frequency counts and percentages were first used to profile respondents and identify the most commonly used social media and e-commerce platforms. For questions with multiple selections, multiple-response analysis captured the diversity of platform use. To assess perceptions of SMI attributes and PSRs, responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree), with the mode used for ordinal data interpretation.

Table 1. Four-point Rating Scale with Descriptive Equivalent or Interpretation

Numerical Rating	Descriptive equivalent
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Agree
4	Strongly Agree

Given the non-normal distribution of the data, the assumptions required for parametric statistical tests were not satisfied. Nonparametric methods are appropriate in such instances because they do not rely on normal distribution and are suitable for skewed or ordinal data. Accordingly, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to compare SMI rankings based on follower count, while Spearman's rho was used to examine the relationships among influencer attributes, PSRs, and purchasing behavior.

Data were analyzed in SPSS for reliable summaries and hypothesis testing, with responses grouped by followership intensity (MF, MDF, LF) to capture engagement differences. This framework revealed key patterns, validated hypotheses, and provided insights into how SMIs influence the behavior of Gen Z consumers in the Philippines.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical principles, including confidentiality, informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and respect for rights. Participants received detailed consent forms, with parental approval required for minors, and were free to withdraw at any time. Data security was ensured through restricted access and the proper disposal of records. Risks were minimized, fairness and integrity were upheld, and institutional review approval was obtained, ensuring the research met the standards of transparency, rigor, and "do no harm."

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examined how social media influencers (SMIs) use parasocial relationships (PSRs) to influence the online shopping behavior of Filipino Gen Z beyond the pandemic. Using purposive sampling, 380 digitally active respondents aged 13–26 from San Fernando City, La Union, were surveyed in May and June 2024, drawn from a Gen Z population of 31,427 ([Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022a](#)). The sample ensured participants had internet access, engaged with SMI content, and used e-commerce platforms, providing a representative basis for analyzing SMIs' impact on consumer behavior.

Filipino Generation Z Characteristics

Table 2. Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	126	33.2%
Female	254	66.8%
Total	380	100.0%

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Of the 380 respondents, 66.8% were female and 33.2% male, indicating a predominantly female sample. This skew reflects women's stronger engagement in digital spaces and influencer-driven platforms, as research shows they are more likely to interact with influencers, shape trends, and base purchasing decisions on social media content. Although a gender imbalance was present, the findings remain valuable because female consumers represent a key demographic in Generation Z's online activity and purchasing behavior.

Table 3. Social Media Platforms Used

No	SM Platforms Used	Response Rate (N=1123)	Percent of Cases (N=380)
1	Instagram	26.4%	77.9%
2	Facebook	25.8%	76.3%
3	Tiktok	20.2%	59.7%
4	Youtube	11.5%	33.9%
5	Twitter	10.9%	32.1%
6	Messenger	1.7%	5.0%
7	Snapchat	1.2%	3.7%
8	Discord	0.9%	2.6%
9	Tumblr	0.5%	1.6%
10	Reddit	0.4%	1.1%
11	Twitch	0.4%	1.1%
12	None	0.2%	0.5%
	Total	100.0%	295.5%

Analysis shows that Gen Z Filipinos are active across multiple platforms, led by Instagram (77.9%) and Facebook (76.3%), with nearly all (95.5%) using more than one. Niche sites like Tumblr, Reddit, and Twitch had minimal use. In e-commerce, Shopee dominated (92.1%) due to affordability, ease of use, and frequent sales, reflecting the Philippines' thriving online shopping culture.

Table 4. Online Shopping Platform Used

No	Online Shopping Platforms	Response Rate (N=824)	Percent of Cases (N=380)
1	Shopee	42.5%	92.1%
2	Lazada	20.1%	43.7%
3	Tiktok Shop	19.5%	42.4%
4	Shein	11.5%	25.0%
5	H&M	0.7%	1.6%
6	Uniqlo	0.7%	1.6%
7	Food Panda	0.8%	1.8%
8	E-bay	0.4%	0.8%
9	Instagram	0.8%	1.8%
10	Facebook	1.3%	2.9%
11	Amazon	0.5%	1.1%
12	Market Place	0.5%	1.1%
13	Temu	0.5%	1.1%
	Total	100.0%	216.8%

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Shopee's dominance is associated with its mobile-first design, which aligns with smartphone-centric shopping behaviors. Lazada (20.1%; 43.7%) remains a significant competitor, offering features comparable to those of its competitors, such as fast delivery and promotional deals. Notably, all respondents engaged in online shopping, reflecting the deep integration of e-commerce in Gen Z lifestyles. In contrast, eBay (0.4%) showed minimal relevance, as local platforms with tailored services like Shopee and Lazada are more trusted and preferred in the Philippines.

Table 5. Shops Online with Own Account

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	344	90.5%
No	36	9.5%
Total	380	100.00%

The survey found that 90.5% of Gen Z shop online, reflecting their digital fluency and preference for convenience, while the 9.5% who do not are mostly minors or financially dependent but expected to adopt e-commerce later. This shift from traditional retail highlights the need for businesses to invest in user-friendly, secure, and personalized platforms with fast delivery to meet Gen Z's expectations.

Table 6. Frequency of Online Shopping

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Sometimes	201	52.9%
Often	92	24.2%
Rarely	49	12.9%
Always	38	10.0%
Total	380	100.0%

Findings show that Gen Z's online shopping is irregular—only 10% shop consistently, while most do so occasionally or rarely. This suggests that e-commerce is part of their lifestyle, but is limited by financial constraints, product availability, and value preferences. The Gen Z views online shopping as convenient and cost-effective, but not a full substitute for traditional retail.

Influence of SMI Attributes on Generation Z's Parasocial Relationships

Table 7. Attributes as to Types of SMI on Factors Considered in Following SMI of Generation Z Consumers

No	Indicators	Percentage (%)	(Most Frequent Response)	Descriptive Result
1	I follow SMI, who is trustworthy.	100.00	4	SA
2	I follow the posts of bloggers and vloggers online.	18.28	3	A

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No	Indicators	Percentage (%)	(Most Frequent Response)	Descriptive Result
3	I follow SMI, and I can relate to their content.	17.71	3	A
4	I follow the posts of online celebrities on different social media platforms.	17.55	3	A
5	I follow experts with user experience.	17.47	3	A
6	I follow SMI with quality content.	15.19	3	A
7	I usually consider the number of followers of the influencer I follow.	13.81	3	A
Overall Most Frequent Response (MFR)			3	A

Findings from Table 7 indicate that Generation Z primarily follows social media influencers (SMIs) based on trustworthiness, quality content, relatability, and perceived expertise, with trustworthiness receiving the highest level of agreement. While follower count matters, credibility and authenticity remain more influential than popularity. While follower count plays a role, credibility and authenticity have greater influence on audience engagement. Nano- and micro-influencers are viewed as more effective than mass celebrities due to their authenticity and stronger parasocial connections. The effectiveness of influencer marketing among Generation Z is driven more by credibility, relatability, and meaningful digital interactions than by popularity or reach alone.

Table 8. Attributes as to Types of SMI on Type of SMI Followed by Most of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	(Most Frequent Response)	Descriptive Result
1. 0 - 10,000 followers	3	MF
2. 10,000 - 100,000 followers	2	MDF
3. 100,000+ followers	3	LF
Overall Most Frequent Response (MFR)	3	MF

Results from Table 8 reveal that Generation Z most frequently follows nano-influencers (0–10,000 followers), followed by micro-influencers, with macro-influencers being the least followed. This reflects Gen Z's preference for authenticity, relatability, and genuine interaction over celebrity appeal (Hudders et al., 2021), and their perception of macro-influencers as more commercialized and less credible (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020). Nano-influencers' trustworthiness and closer community ties foster stronger parasocial relationships and consumer loyalty, making them more effective for engaging Generation Z.

Table 9. Attribute as to Types of SMI on Perceived Popularity of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	Percentage(%)	Mode	DR
1. I find influencers' popularity based on the number of fans and audience.	22.19	3	A

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Indicators	Percentage(%)	Mode	DR
2. I find branded products endorsed more favorable.	17.52	3	A
3. I find products endorsed with multiple purchases more reliable.	15.99	3	A
4. I purchase products that SMIs popularly introduce	15.18	3	A
5. I do not care about the product's popularity at all	15.18	3	A
6. I most likely purchase products with numerous comments, likes, and views.	13.93	3	A
Overall Mode		3	A

Results from Table 9 (SOP 2.2) indicate that Generation Z consumers are strongly influenced by influencers' perceived popularity, with many respondents agreeing that they purchase products promoted by popular SMIs. Popularity cues such as likes, comments, and follower counts function as social proof, enhancing trust and encouraging purchase decisions. While popularity can boost credibility and reduce perceived risk, some respondents expressed indifference, suggesting that authenticity, product quality, and personal relevance may outweigh popularity signals ([Rizaldi, 2024](#)).

Table 10. Attributes as to Types of SMI on Perceived Fit of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	DR
1. I rely on influencers knowledgeable about the product.	22.28	3	A
2. The influencer's credibility influences product effectiveness.	20.16	3	A
3. I relate to the influencer's image, which is similar to mine.	20.06	3	A
4. I trust influencers who have significant experience with the product.	19.15	3	A
5. I find the products reliable if they match the influencer's image.	18.35	3	A
6. I do not care about the product's perceived fitness.		2	D
Overall Mode		3	A

Findings show that Generation Z places high importance on influencer-product fit, perceiving endorsements as more credible and products as more reliable when aligned with the influencer's image. Expertise, authenticity, and relatability were identified as crucial factors, while endorsements lacking congruence were often rejected. Relatability fostered stronger emotional connections, and transparency increased trust, reflecting Gen Z's preference for authentic, lifestyle-aligned influencers. Overall, the results highlight the importance of selecting influencers whose image genuinely matches the brand to build trust, credibility, and consumer loyalty.

Table 11. Attributes as to Types of SMI on Content Creation/Style of Generation Z Consumers

No	Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	DR
1	I favor content with high-quality and trustworthy information.	54	4	SA
2	I am attracted to content with creativity, design, and technological quality.	46	4	SA
3	I trust appealing content that disseminates brand-related information.	35	3	A
4	I follow video content regularly.	33	3	A
5	I relate to content with emotional appeal as if it sympathizes with the viewer.	31	3	A
6	I do not care about the content as long as I like the product.		2	D
	Overall Mode		3	A

Table 11 results show that Generation Z values high-quality, creative, and emotionally resonant content in influencer marketing, emphasizing trust, professionalism, and authenticity. More than half of the respondents strongly preferred trustworthy and well-produced content, while many also highlighted creativity, design, and emotional appeal. Authentic, polished content enhances credibility and strengthens trust, while emotional resonance fosters stronger parasocial connections and loyalty (Cheung et al., 2022).

Respondents rejected the notion that product desirability outweighs content quality, indicating that Gen Z prioritizes well-crafted messaging over mere product. Their preference for dynamic formats, particularly short videos on TikTok and Instagram Reels, reflects their engagement with visually appealing, emotionally compelling. These findings highlight that Gen Z's engagement is driven by content quality, emotional appeal, and authenticity, supported by social proof cues such as likes, shares, and comments.

Perception of Parasocial Relationships Among Generation Z Consumers

Table 12. Perception of Parasocial Relationships and the Influence of SMI Attributes on Generation Z's Followership

Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	Descriptive Result
1. I feel connected to the influencers when I view or listen to their posts.	16.38	3	A
2. I can relate to influencers who have credible and emotionally appealing content.	15.97	3	A
3. I feel more at ease with SMI based on their number of followers.	14.67	3	A
4. I believe in influencers who are experts in providing their product information.	14.67	3	A

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Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	Descriptive Result
5. I trust the influencers with numerous views, comments, likes, and shares.	14.05	3	A
6. I feel strongly connected to the SMI whenever I watch him/her.	12.89	3	A
7. I feel like the SMI's are my friends whom I trust with their opinions and reviews.	11.38	3	A
Overall Mode		3	A

Table 12 shows that Generation Z's engagement with social media influencers (SMIs) is strongly shaped by credibility, emotional appeal, expertise, and relatability. Respondents consistently identified these attributes as central to followership, viewing influencers as trusted figures who can shape personal identity and influence purchasing decisions.

Social proof also plays an important role: high visibility, engagement, and follower counts enhance perceived trustworthiness. However, emotional appeal and relatability go beyond popularity cues by fostering intimacy, trust, and loyalty. Expertise further strengthens credibility and reduces uncertainty, while shared values and authentic content deepen parasocial bonds (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

These findings highlight that Gen Z's connection with influencers is built on a combination of trust, emotional resonance, and perceived expertise, supported but not determined by popularity signals. Influencers who provide authentic and emotionally engaging content are more likely to foster loyalty, engagement, and purchasing behavior.

Extent of Purchasing Behavior Indicators Exhibited by Generation Z Consumers

Table 13. Purchasing Behavior of Generation Z Consumers

Indicators	Percentage (%)	Mode	DR
1. I feel secure in purchasing products endorsed by SMIs.		3	SA
2. I am more convinced to purchase after following SMIs who seem to be friends with their opinions and reviews.	28	3	A
3. I purchase products after watching an influencer's expert and trustworthy posts.	27	3	A
4. SMIs make me feel confident in making online purchases.	24	3	A
5. I asked my parents to purchase the product for me.	21	3	A
6. I purchase the products using my account.		4	D
Overall Mode		3	A

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Table 13 reveals that Generation Z's purchasing behavior is significantly influenced by influencer credibility, expertise, and relatability. Respondents indicated that endorsements from trustworthy and relatable influencers increase their confidence in online purchasing, with parasocial relationships enhancing the perceived authenticity and persuasiveness of these recommendations.

Strong agreement with statements emphasizing influencer trust and expertise further demonstrates the importance of these attributes in shaping purchase intentions (Bi & Zhang, 2023). However, a portion of respondents reported relying on parents to complete transactions, underscoring external factors such as financial dependence and concerns regarding payment security.

These findings suggest that while influencer credibility and emotional connection strongly drive purchase confidence and intention among Gen Z, actual purchasing behavior may be moderated by practical and situational constraints.

Significant Difference in the Perception of the Generation Z Consumer

Table 14. Significant Difference in Generation Z's Perception of SMI Attributes, Parasocial Relationships, and Purchasing Behavior by Gender

Indicators	Gender (N)		P-value	Interpretation
	Male	Female		
A. SMI Attributes				
1. Type of SMI				
1.1 Factors Considered in Following SMI			<0.001	S
1.2. Type of SMI Followed Most				
1.2.1 0 - 10,000 followers	173.87	198.75	0.027	S
1.2.2 10,000 – 100,000 followers	190.17	190.66	0.962	NS
1.2.3 100,000+ followers	202.90	184.35	0.090	NS
2. Perceived Popularity	174.23	198.57	0.022	S
3. Perceived Fit	171.00	200.17	0.005	S
4. Content Creation Style	197.23	187.16	0.340	NS
B. Parasocial Relationship	170.22	200.56	0.003	S
C. Purchasing Behavior	178.75	196.33	0.103	NS

Table 14 reveals distinct gender-based differences in Generation Z's perceptions of social media influencers (SMIs) and their influence on engagement and purchasing behavior. Female respondents place greater emphasis on emotional authenticity, relatability, and alignment with personal values, whereas male respondents prioritize expertise, entertainment, and aspirational qualities. Females also demonstrate a stronger preference for nano-influencers (0–10,000

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followers), perceiving them as more trustworthy and authentic, which in turn fosters stronger parasocial relationships.

Gender differences were also evident in perceptions of popularity and influencer–product fit. Females tend to value social validation and emotional resonance, while males focus more on content quality and perceived expertise. In contrast, no significant gender differences were observed in content style preferences or purchasing behavior, suggesting that both genders prioritize authenticity, credibility, and convenience in influencer content and social commerce interactions.

These findings indicate that while influencer credibility and trustworthiness are valued across genders, emotional connection and social alignment play a more prominent role for female audiences, whereas males demonstrate a more utilitarian, information-driven engagement with influencers.

Extent of Influence of the Factors Involving SMI on the Parasocial Relationship, as Perceived by Generation Z Consumers

Table 15. Relationship Between Purchasing Behavior of Generation Z Consumers and SMI Attributes and Parasocial Relationship

Indicators	Correlation Coefficient (Overall Purchasing Behavior)	Interpretation
A. SMI Attributes		
1. Type of SMI		
1.1 Factors Considered in Following SMI	0.158**	S
1.2. Type of SMI Followed Most		
1.2.1 0 - 10,000 followers	0.140**	S
1.2.2 10,000 - 100,000 followers	-0.179**	S
1.2.3 100,000+ followers	-0.012	NS
2. Perceived Popularity	0.245**	S
3. Perceived Fit	0.402**	S
4. Content Creation Style	0.017	NS
B. Parasocial Relationship	0.390**	S

Legend: **Significant at 0.01 (S)

Not Significant (NS)

The findings from Table 15 demonstrate that trustworthiness and expertise are significant factors influencing the purchasing behavior of Filipino Generation Z consumers ($r = 0.158$, $p < 0.01$). Nano-influencers (0–10,000 followers) also exhibit a positive correlation with purchasing behavior ($r = 0.140$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting their capacity to foster authentic, relatable, and community-

oriented engagement. In contrast, micro- and macro-influencers show negative or insignificant correlations ($r = -0.179$ and -0.012 , respectively), suggesting that increased follower size may be associated with lower perceived authenticity and weaker emotional connection.

Perceived popularity is positively associated with purchasing behavior ($r = 0.245$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that Filipino Gen Z relies on socially validated cues such as engagement metrics and follower counts in their decision-making. By contrast, content creation style shows no significant relationship with purchasing behavior ($r = 0.017$, $p > 0.01$), underscoring that production quality is less influential than credibility, authenticity, and relatability. Perceived fit emerges as the strongest predictor ($r = 0.402$, $p < 0.01$), followed by parasocial relationships ($r = 0.390$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the importance of alignment between influencer values and cultural norms, as well as the role of emotional connection in fostering trust and loyalty.

These results suggest that Filipino Generation Z places greater importance on authenticity, trustworthiness, and emotional engagement than on influencer size or content aesthetics. This underscores the effectiveness of nano-influencers in cultivating meaningful and culturally resonant relationships that enhance purchasing behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical role of social media influencers (SMIs) in shaping the purchasing behavior of Filipino Generation Z consumers during the post-pandemic e-commerce boom. Platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok dominate both online shopping and influencer engagement, illustrating the deep integration of commerce and digital social interaction. Filipino Gen Z, as digital natives, engage in hybrid consumption that blends online convenience with relational and cultural in-person values.

Key determinants of purchase behavior include authenticity, trustworthiness, relatability, and content quality, rather than follower count. Nano-influencers (0–10,000 followers) emerged as more persuasive than macro-influencers due to their perceived intimacy and authenticity, while parasocial relationships (PSRs) significantly correlated with loyalty and purchasing behavior ($\rho = .390$, $p < .01$), supporting Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness Theories. Gender differences further revealed that female respondents emphasize emotional authenticity and relational content, whereas male respondents prioritize expertise and entertainment.

Culturally, Filipino Gen Z favors influencers who embody *kapwa* (shared identity), *pakikisama* (social harmony), *utang na loob* (reciprocity), and *hiya* (modesty), valuing relational closeness over celebrity status. Influencers perceived as *ate/kuya* figures reinforce mentorship, guidance, and trust, reflecting collectivist cultural norms and extending PSR theory beyond its predominantly Western, professionalism-centered applications.

The analysis yields several theoretical propositions that extend existing models of influencer-consumer dynamics. First, PSR strength functions as a mediating mechanism between influencer attributes (e.g., authenticity and relatability) and purchasing behavior, reinforcing the applicability of Source Credibility and Source Attractiveness Theories in a Southeast Asian context. Second,

cultural alignment moderates PSR formation, as influencers who embody collectivist values foster stronger emotional bonds than those relying primarily on professional branding. Third, follower count is not a sufficient predictor of persuasive effectiveness, as perceived intimacy and similarity exert greater influence on consumer decision-making. Collectively, these propositions contribute to the refinement of PSR theory by integrating cultural authenticity and influencer typology into its explanatory framework, offering a more contextually grounded understanding of influencer marketing within the Philippine and Southeast Asian digital economies.

To effectively engage Filipino Generation Z, businesses should partner with nano-influencers, who are perceived as more authentic, relatable, and aligned with cultural values such as *kapwa* (shared identity), *hiya* (social propriety), and *pakikisama* (social harmony). Emotional, story-driven content that highlights real-life experiences resonates more strongly than glamorous or unattainable portrayals. Transparency is crucial—brands must ensure clear disclosure of sponsorships, promote responsible consumption, and avoid unrealistic depictions of success.

Content should be high-quality, creative, and platform-tailored, such as short-form videos on TikTok, personal stories on Instagram, and lifestyle messaging on Facebook. Influencers who embody humility and empathy foster deeper trust, while flexible payment options (e.g., cash-on-delivery, mobile wallets) address Gen Z's cautious spending habits. To strengthen long-term impact, brands should favor sustained influencer partnerships over one-off campaigns and promote content that supports a healthy self-image.

Finally, businesses must track engagement, conversions, and audience sentiment to refine strategies. By prioritizing authenticity, cultural relevance, and ethical practices, brands can foster stronger relationships with Filipino Gen Z, enhance trust, and establish a sustainable influence.

This study acknowledges two primary biases: self-reporting bias and selection bias. Self-reporting may have affected accuracy due to memory lapses, misinterpretation, or social desirability; this was minimized through the use of clear wording, anonymity, pilot testing, and confidentiality measures. Selection bias arose from purposive sampling, which, while ensuring relevance, limited generalizability beyond Generation Z in San Fernando, La Union. Other potential biases included acquiescence, interpretation issues, and priming effects. Future studies should use instrument validation, randomized question order, reverse-worded items, and mixed methods to reduce these biases.

The study also faced methodological limitations. Its focus on San Fernando Gen Z limits representativeness of the broader Filipino population. Reliance on self-reported survey data restricted depth, particularly for complex constructs like parasocial relationships (PSRs). The cross-sectional, quantitative design provided valuable statistical insights but could not capture longitudinal changes, emotional nuance, or contextual influences. Integrating qualitative approaches would yield a more comprehensive understanding.

The pandemic context further shaped findings, as COVID-19 heightened reliance on social media and e-commerce, possibly amplifying influencer effects beyond typical conditions. Results should thus be interpreted with caution when generalized to post-pandemic behavior.

Finally, the study raises ethical concerns about influencer marketing. The blurring of personal and commercial content risks deceptive advertising, reinforces idealized portrayals, and may harm Gen Z's self-esteem, autonomy, and mental health. Weak regulatory frameworks in the Philippines intensify these risks. Therefore, the study highlights the need for digital literacy education, stronger transparency standards, and culturally relevant policies to protect young consumers while ensuring influencer practices remain ethical and sustainable.

Future research should further investigate the development and dynamics of parasocial relationships (PSRs) across different platforms, content types, and product categories. It should also examine how factors such as gender, culture, and socioeconomic status influence consumer engagement and purchasing behavior. Comparative studies across generations (e.g., Gen Z, millennials, Gen Alpha) can also clarify evolving patterns in influencer marketing.

Methodologically, scholars are encouraged to adopt longitudinal and mixed-method designs—combining surveys with interviews, focus groups, or diary studies—to capture both statistical trends and nuanced, emotional aspects of PSRs. Examining dimensions such as emotional connection, authenticity, trust, perceived reciprocity, and content style will deepen insights into influencer effectiveness and consumer loyalty.

Contextual diversity should also be prioritized by conducting regional and cross-cultural studies in the Philippines and beyond, while integrating the role of emerging technologies (e.g., AI, AR, social commerce features) in shaping trust, engagement, and purchase decisions. Finally, attention should extend beyond consumerism to the psychosocial impacts of PSRs, including effects on mental health, identity, and social validation.

A multifaceted, culturally sensitive, and methodologically diverse approach will provide a more holistic understanding of influencer-consumer dynamics in the digital age.

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