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## Parasocial Intimacy, Perceived Authenticity, and Scarcity Prestige in Creator-Led Commerce: Drivers of Premium Food Purchase Decisions

Kadek Indira Savitiri<sup>1\*</sup>, Dewi Alesha Miller<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Central Jakarta, Indonesia

Correspondence: [24072210046@lspr.edu](mailto:24072210046@lspr.edu)<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This study examines purchase decision making in creator led premium food commerce by analysing how parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and product scarcity shape consumer behaviour in Indonesia's influencer driven market. Despite high prices and limited functional differentiation, creator led products often generate strong demand, yet empirical explanations remain limited. This study addresses how symbolic and psychological factors translate into purchase decisions within this context. Extending social commerce and influencer marketing literature, this research integrates parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and scarcity prestige within a single model, with intention to purchase as a mediating variable. Data were collected from 420 social media users aged 20 to 45 in Jakarta and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. The results indicate that intention to purchase has a strong and significant effect on purchase decisions, while parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and product scarcity influence purchase decisions only indirectly through intention, indicating full mediation. These findings suggest that premium food consumption in creator led markets follows a deliberative pathway rather than a purely impulsive one, where emotional closeness, authenticity perceptions, and credible scarcity cues must first shape purchase intention before translating into behaviour. This study highlights the central role of intention formation in premium social commerce and provides strategic implications for creators and brands to prioritise authentic relationships and credible value construction over direct sales pressure.

#### KEYWORDS

creator led commerce; parasocial intimacy; perceived authenticity; product scarcity; purchase intention.

### Introduction

The rapid expansion of influencer-led commerce has become a defining feature of contemporary digital markets in Southeast Asia, with Indonesia emerging as one of the most dynamic contexts. Recent data indicate that influencers contributed approximately ten percent of total e-commerce sales in Southeast Asia in 2024, signalling a substantial shift in how value creation and consumption are structured in digital environments (Ahdia, 2024). Rather than functioning merely as promotional intermediaries, influencers increasingly act as trust carriers whose personal narratives and social capital directly shape consumer decision making. This transformation reflects a broader reconfiguration of marketing logic, where social interaction and commercial exchange are deeply intertwined.

Indonesia's position within this transformation is particularly salient. The country has been identified as setting the pace for influencer led sales in the region, driven by high social media penetration, mobile first consumption patterns, and seamless integration between content and transaction platforms (Furness, 2025). In this environment, the consumer journey no longer follows a linear awareness to action model, but instead unfolds within compressed and socially mediated pathways. Purchasing

decisions are frequently embedded within moments of entertainment, interaction, and perceived intimacy, blurring the boundaries between social engagement and economic exchange.

Empirical evidence further demonstrates the magnitude of influencer impact on Indonesian consumers. Surveys show that approximately seventy six percent of Indonesian consumers report purchasing products due to influencer recommendations, the highest proportion in ASEAN (Nadira, 2025; Tim Leet Media, 2025). This finding highlights the growing dominance of psychosocial drivers in consumption behaviour, where trust, relatability, and perceived authenticity often outweigh traditional considerations such as price or functional utility. As a result, consumption increasingly reflects symbolic alignment with influencers rather than purely rational evaluation of products.

These patterns are consistent with prior research in social commerce, which shows that short form, visually driven content can trigger impulsive buying tendencies. Azad Moghddam et al. (2024) demonstrate that the combination of scrolling behaviour, affective cues, and social endorsement significantly increases the likelihood of spontaneous purchases. Such findings suggest that influencer content operates as a powerful situational stimulus that bypasses extensive cognitive deliberation, especially when purchasing opportunities are immediate and frictionless.

Alongside impulsivity, scarcity has been identified as a critical mechanism in shaping consumer purchase intentions. Meta analyses confirm that limited availability enhances perceived value and urgency, thereby increasing purchase likelihood across product categories (Barton et al., 2022; Ladeira et al., 2023). However, more recent studies caution that scarcity effects are contingent upon perceived sincerity and authenticity. When consumers interpret scarcity as artificial or manipulative, it can undermine trust and reduce purchase intentions (Jin et al., 2025). This tension underscores the importance of understanding how scarcity is symbolically constructed and communicated.

A compelling illustration of these dynamics can be observed in the Indonesian creator-led premium food phenomenon, particularly the case of Amazing's Valrhona brownies. Despite being priced at approximately Rp1.2 million per tray, the product consistently generates waiting lists and strong consumer demand (Khaqqo, 2025; Rana, 2025; Pertiwi, 2025). Media coverage emphasises that the product's appeal lies not only in its high-quality ingredients, but also in its limited production, personal involvement of the creator, and transparent documentation of the baking process. Consequently, the brownies are perceived as symbolic artefacts that represent exclusivity, access, and emotional proximity to the creator.

From a theoretical perspective, this phenomenon aligns with research on luxury consumption and symbolic value creation. Studies show that purchase intentions for premium and luxury products are strongly influenced by attitudes, perceived value, and emotional experience rather than functional attributes alone (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Bilal et al., 2023). Moreover, perceived brand authenticity has been identified as a key driver of willingness to pay more and psychological ownership, particularly in contexts where consumers seek meaning and self congruence through consumption (Das et al., 2022; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022). These insights suggest that premium value can be socially constructed through narratives and relational cues.

Central to this construction is the role of parasocial relationships between influencers and their audiences. Extensive research demonstrates that parasocial intimacy enhances trust, emotional attachment, and purchase intention across various digital contexts (Kim et al., 2015; Conde & Casais, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). In creator led

commerce, this relationship is intensified by behind the scenes content, perceived vulnerability, and direct communication, which collectively foster an illusion of interpersonal closeness. Despite the growing relevance of this phenomenon, empirical studies that integrate parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and scarcity prestige within the context of premium food consumption remain limited. This gap highlights the need for systematic investigation into how these factors jointly shape purchase decisions in Indonesia's evolving creator driven marketplace.

## Literature Review

### Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism is a foundational sociological theory that explains social reality as a continuous process of meaning construction through interaction. Originating from the work of George Herbert Mead, the theory argues that individuals do not respond directly to objective stimuli, but to the meanings those stimuli hold for them, meanings that emerge from social interaction and are interpreted through shared symbols such as language, gestures, and narratives (Mead, 1934). Reality, from this perspective, is not fixed or given, but socially produced and constantly renegotiated through everyday encounters.

Herbert Blumer later formalised Symbolic Interactionism into three core premises. First, individuals act toward objects, events, and people based on the meanings those things have for them. Second, these meanings arise out of social interaction with others. Third, meanings are modified through an interpretive process as individuals deal with the things they encounter in their social world (Blumer, 1969). This interpretive emphasis makes Symbolic Interactionism particularly relevant for analysing consumption behaviour that cannot be explained solely by functional utility or economic rationality.

Within consumer research, Symbolic Interactionism has been widely used to explain how products function as symbolic resources for identity construction. Belk (1988) argues that possessions become extensions of the self, allowing individuals to communicate who they are, who they aspire to be, and how they wish to be perceived by others. Consumption thus becomes a form of symbolic action, where products carry social meanings that transcend their material attributes. From this view, purchasing decisions are embedded in identity projects rather than isolated transactional choices.

Symbolic Interactionism also provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding authenticity and meaning making in markets. Grayson and Martinec (2004) show that authenticity is not an inherent property of an object, but a socially constructed perception derived from cues such as origin stories, production processes, and personal narratives. Consumers interpret these cues symbolically, attaching value to products that are perceived as sincere, personal, or connected to real human effort. This interpretive process helps explain why handcrafted or creator associated products can command premium prices despite functional substitutes being widely available.

The theory is equally powerful in explaining social relationships mediated by symbols, including parasocial relationships in digital environments. Horton and Wohl (1956) describe parasocial interaction as an illusion of face-to-face relationship formed through repeated symbolic exposure. In social media contexts, creators communicate intimacy, vulnerability, and consistency through symbolic performances such as storytelling, behind the scenes content, and direct address. Audiences interpret these symbols as indicators of relational closeness, which then shape trust, emotional attachment, and behavioural responses, including purchasing decisions.

Finally, Symbolic Interactionism offers a compelling lens to understand scarcity and prestige as symbolic constructs rather

than purely economic conditions. Scarcity gains meaning through collective interpretation, where limited availability is read as a signal of exclusivity, status, and access to a privileged social circle (Goffman, 1959; Belk et al., 2009). When scarcity is communicated through authentic social interaction rather than impersonal marketing tactics, it becomes a powerful symbol that enhances perceived value. In this sense, Symbolic Interactionism functions effectively as a grand theory for analysing creator led commerce, where meaning, identity, and social interaction jointly shape premium consumption behaviour.

#### Drivers of Premium Food Purchase Decisions

In creator led premium food markets, purchase decisions are increasingly driven by symbolic, relational, and contextual factors rather than solely by functional product attributes. Prior studies on luxury and premium consumption consistently demonstrate that consumers' purchase decisions are shaped by emotional attachment, perceived value, and the social meanings attached to consumption rather than by utilitarian considerations alone (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Bilal et al., 2023). In social commerce environments, these drivers are amplified by influencer mediated interactions, where creators act as both opinion leaders and relational anchors who reduce uncertainty and enhance perceived value through personal narratives and social engagement (Masuda et al., 2022; Djafarova & Davies, 2025). Parasocial intimacy, in particular, has been shown to foster trust, emotional closeness, and perceived relational bonds between consumers and creators, which significantly influence behavioural outcomes, including purchase decisions, across various digital contexts (Kim et al., 2015; Hanief et al., 2019; Conde & Casais, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024).

When consumers feel emotionally connected to a creator, purchasing premium products becomes a symbolic act of affiliation and support rather than a purely transactional decision. In parallel, product scarcity operates as a powerful situational cue that enhances perceived exclusivity and urgency, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchase decisions for premium offerings (Barton et al., 2022; Ladeira et al., 2023; Dahan & Sayag, 2024). Scarcity signals are particularly effective in premium contexts when they are aligned with credible narratives and authentic production constraints, as they reinforce prestige rather than suspicion (Jin et al., 2025; Rosendo Rios & Shukla, 2023). However, empirical evidence also suggests that the influence of parasocial intimacy and product scarcity on actual purchase decisions often unfolds through a cognitive evaluative stage, namely intention to purchase, which captures consumers' readiness and commitment to act (Azad Moghddam et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024). This indicates that while parasocial intimacy and scarcity may directly influence purchase decisions, their effects are also partially channelled through consumers' intention to purchase premium products. Accordingly, parasocial intimacy and product scarcity are conceptualised as key drivers of premium food purchase decisions, both directly and indirectly via purchase intention. Based on this theoretical reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Parasocial intimacy has a positive effect on consumers' purchase decision of premium products.
- H2: Product scarcity has a positive effect on consumers' purchase decision of premium products.
- H3: Parasocial intimacy has a positive effect on consumers' purchase decision of premium products through intention to purchase premium products.

#### The Mediation Role of Intention to Purchase Premium Food

In premium food consumption contexts, intention to purchase functions as a central psychological mechanism

that translates symbolic and relational stimuli into actual purchasing behaviour. Prior research consistently positions purchase intention as the most proximal antecedent of purchase decisions, particularly in premium and luxury consumption where higher perceived risk and price sensitivity require stronger motivational commitment (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Sharma et al., 2024). Within social commerce environments, impulsive and affect driven decision making is intensified by continuous exposure to persuasive content, where emotional cues and social validation reduce cognitive resistance and accelerate purchase readiness (Azad Moghddam et al., 2024). Parasocial intimacy plays a critical role in this process by fostering emotional closeness, trust, and perceived relational bonds between consumers and creators, which have been shown to significantly increase purchase intention across influencer driven contexts (Kim et al., 2015; Conde & Casais, 2023; Rungruangjit, 2022; Zhou et al., 2024).

At the same time, perceived authenticity strengthens consumers' confidence in both the creator and the product, reinforcing perceived sincerity, value congruence, and psychological ownership, all of which contribute to stronger purchase intention for premium offerings (Das et al., 2022; Kumar & Kaushal, 2021; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Sun et al., 2024). Product scarcity further amplifies purchase intention by signalling exclusivity, limited access, and elevated symbolic value, increasing urgency and desirability when scarcity cues are perceived as credible and sincere (Barton et al., 2022; Ladeira et al., 2023; Dahan & Sayag, 2024). However, prior studies also caution that scarcity effects are contingent on perceived retailer or creator sincerity, as artificial scarcity may undermine trust and weaken behavioural outcomes (Jin et al., 2025). Collectively, these findings suggest that parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and product scarcity primarily influence consumers' purchase decisions indirectly by shaping their intention to purchase premium products. Intention thus operates as a mediating mechanism that converts emotional attachment, authenticity perceptions, and scarcity signals into actual purchase decisions, consistent with empirical evidence across luxury, influencer marketing, and social commerce research (Masuda et al., 2022; Rosendo Rios & Shukla, 2023; Xu et al., 2024). Therefore, intention to purchase premium products is expected to mediate the relationships between parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, product scarcity, and purchase decision of premium products. Based on this theoretical reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H4: Parasocial intimacy has a positive effect on consumers' intention to purchase premium products.
- H5: Perceived authenticity has a positive effect on consumers' intention to purchase premium products.
- H6: Product scarcity has a positive effect on consumers' intention to purchase premium products.
- H7: Consumers' intention to purchase premium products has a positive effect on their purchase decision of premium products.
- H8: Consumers' intention to purchase premium products mediates the relationship between parasocial intimacy and purchase decision of premium products.
- H9: Consumers' intention to purchase premium products mediates the relationship between perceived authenticity and purchase decision of premium products.
- H10: Consumers' intention to purchase premium products mediates the relationship between product scarcity and purchase decision of premium products.

## Methods

#### Research Type

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between parasocial intimacy,

perceived authenticity, product scarcity, intention to purchase, and purchase decision in the context of influencer led premium food consumption. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the objective of the study is to test theory driven hypotheses and to assess causal relationships among latent variables using statistical modelling techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative methods are widely adopted in consumer behaviour and social commerce research to ensure objectivity, replicability, and generalisability of findings (Hair et al., 2019). Accordingly, data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analysed using structural equation modelling, which enables simultaneous testing of direct and mediating effects within a comprehensive theoretical framework.

Framework

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of adult consumers who actively use social media and have been exposed to influencer promoted premium food products in Jakarta, Indonesia. The target respondents were individuals aged 20 to 45 years, representing a demographic group that is highly engaged in digital consumption and influencer driven purchasing behaviour. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation across gender and age categories, thereby enhancing the external validity of the results (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A total of 420 respondents participated in the survey, which meets the recommended sample size requirements for partial least squares structural equation modelling, particularly for models involving mediation analysis and multiple constructs (Hair et al., 2021). This sample size also exceeds the minimum threshold suggested by the ten times rule and supports sufficient statistical power for hypothesis testing.

Research Location

The study was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia’s capital city and primary economic centre, which represents one of the most digitally advanced and consumption intensive urban environments in the country. Jakarta was selected as the research location due to its high concentration of social media users, extensive exposure to influencer marketing activities, and strong adoption of digital commerce platforms. As the core hub of Indonesia’s creative economy and premium consumption trends, Jakarta provides a relevant context for examining consumer behaviour in influencer led markets.

Prior research suggests that metropolitan consumers are more responsive to symbolic consumption cues, social influence, and digital mediated interactions, making Jakarta an appropriate setting for investigating parasocial intimacy and premium purchase decisions (Kotler et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, Jakarta’s diverse population in terms of income levels, education, and occupational backgrounds enhances the generalisability of the study’s findings to other urban contexts in Indonesia (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Measurement Item(s)

Parasocial intimacy in this study is operationalised as the perceived emotional and psychological closeness experienced by consumers toward a content creator, despite the one-sided nature of the relationship. This construct reflects the extent to which consumers feel emotionally connected, personally engaged, and psychologically familiar with the creator, which in turn shapes their consumption behaviour. Parasocial intimacy is measured using six indicators: feeling emotionally close to the creator (PI1), feeling personally connected to the creator (PI2), perceiving that the creator understands the consumer (PI3), perceiving that the creator communicates directly with the consumer (PI4), trusting the creator’s opinions and recommendations (PI5), and feeling familiar with the creator’s personality (PI6). This operationalisation is grounded in the foundational concept of parasocial relationships proposed by Horton and Wohl and supported by subsequent empirical research in social media and influencer marketing contexts (Kim et al., 2015; Lou & Kim, 2019; Hanief et al., 2019; Masuda et al., 2022; Conde & Casais, 2023).

Product scarcity is defined as consumers’ perceptions of limited product availability, either in terms of quantity or purchasing time, which creates a sense of urgency and exclusivity. In this study, product scarcity is measured through six indicators: perception that the product is available in limited quantities (PS1), perception that the product is not always available for purchase (PS2), perception that the product can only be purchased at specific times (PS3), concern about missing the opportunity to purchase if action is delayed (PS4), perception of exclusivity associated with owning the product (PS5), and perception that only a small number of consumers can obtain the product (PS6). These indicators are derived from extensive empirical and meta-analytical studies on scarcity effects in marketing and consumer decision making (Barton et al., 2022; Ladeira et al., 2023; Dahan & Sayag, 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

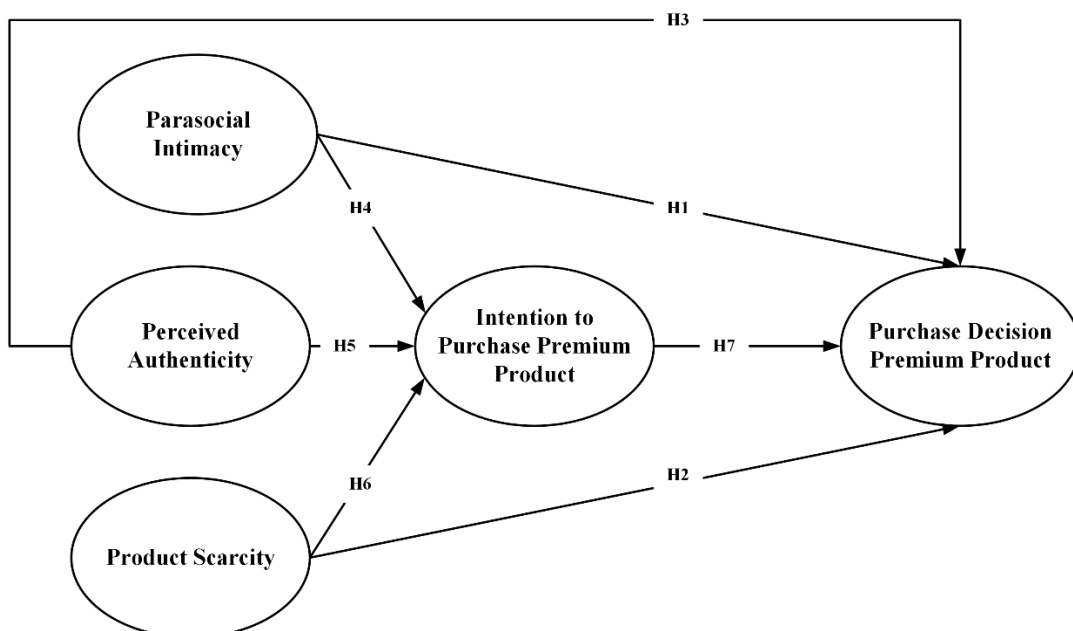


Figure 1. Research

Perceived authenticity refers to the degree to which consumers view both the creator and the premium food product as genuine, sincere, and consistent with the values presented. This construct encompasses creator authenticity, product authenticity, and value congruence between the creator and the product. Perceived authenticity is measured using five indicators: perception that the creator appears genuine and sincere (PA1), perception that the creator presents the product honestly (PA2), perception that the product feels handmade or personally crafted (PA3), perception that the product reflects real effort and originality (PA4), and perception that the product aligns with the creator's values and identity (PA5). This operationalisation is consistent with prior research on brand authenticity, psychological brand ownership, and authenticity driven consumption (Kumar & Kaushal, 2021; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Das et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2024).

Intention to purchase premium products is defined as consumers' psychological readiness and motivational state preceding an actual purchase decision. These variable captures consumer's cognitive evaluation and affective desire to acquire premium food products offered in social commerce settings. Intention to purchase is measured through four indicators: strong desire to purchase the premium product (IP1), willingness to pay a higher price for the product (IP2), intention to purchase the product when it becomes available (IP3), and active consideration of purchasing the premium product (IP4). The measurement of this construct is informed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour and supported by empirical studies on purchase intention in premium and luxury consumption contexts (Ajzen, 1991; Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Sharma et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Purchase decision of premium products is defined as the actual behavioural outcome in which consumers commit to purchasing premium food products, including the choice to prioritise these products over available alternatives. This construct reflects realised consumer behaviour rather than evaluative intention. Purchase decision is measured using three indicators: decision to purchase the premium product (PD1), actual purchase despite the high price of the product (PD2), and preference for the product over competing alternatives (PD3). This operationalisation follows empirical research on purchase behaviour in social commerce and premium consumption settings (Azad Moghddam et al., 2024; Bilal et al., 2023; Ting et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2024).

## Result and Discussion

The data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS SEM), which is appropriate for predictive research models involving mediation effects and complex relationships among latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019; Putra, 2022). The evaluation followed the two-stage approach recommended in PLS SEM literature, consisting of measurement model assessment and structural model assessment (Hair et al., 2021).

### Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was first evaluated to assess indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator loadings for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Specifically, intention to purchase premium products showed strong loadings ranging from 0.843 to 0.920, parasocial intimacy ranged from 0.800 to 0.855, perceived authenticity ranged from 0.850 to 0.922, product scarcity ranged from

0.775 to 0.837, and purchase decision premium product ranged from 0.824 to 0.914. These results confirm that all indicators adequately represent their respective latent constructs (Perkasa & Putra, 2020; Putra, 2018, 2022, 2024a, 2024b).

Internal consistency reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability rho\_a, and composite reliability rho\_c. All constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating high reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.839 to 0.926, while composite reliability rho\_c values ranged from 0.903 to 0.945. Convergent validity was established as all average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded the recommended cut off of 0.50 (Putra et al., 2020; Putra, Harista, et al., 2024; Putra, Prasetya, et al., 2024; Putra & Ardianto, 2022; Rinaldi & Sunaryo Putra, 2022), with AVE values ranging from 0.656 to 0.803, demonstrating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators (Hair et al., 2021; Putra, 2022).

### Structural Model Assessment

The structural model was evaluated by examining collinearity, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), effect significance, and model fit indices. The coefficient of determination indicates substantial explanatory power, with intention to purchase premium products achieving an  $R^2$  value of 0.724 and purchase decision premium product achieving an  $R^2$  value of 0.706. These values suggest that the model explains a large proportion of variance in both endogenous constructs, exceeding the threshold for substantial explanatory power in behavioural research (Andriani & Putra, 2019; El Sa'ud et al., 2019; Fahmi, Kostini, et al., 2022; Fahmi, Mukti, et al., 2024; Fahmi, Novel, et al., 2022; Fahmi, Putra, et al., 2024; Kasmoo et al., 2018; Kunaifi et al., 2022).

Predictive relevance was assessed using the Stone Geisser  $Q^2$  value obtained through blindfolding procedures. The  $Q^2$  values for intention to purchase premium products (0.572) and purchase decision premium product (0.526) were well above zero, indicating strong predictive relevance of the model (Hair et al., 2019; Putra, 2022). As expected, exogenous constructs showed  $Q^2$  values of zero, confirming their role as predictors rather than outcomes.

Model fit was further evaluated using the Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The SRMR value of 0.063 for both saturated and estimated models fall below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating an acceptable model fit (Hair et al., 2021). Additional fit indices, including  $d_{ULS}$  and  $d_G$ , were consistent across both models, while the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.798 reflects an acceptable comparative fit given the complexity of the model and the predictive orientation of PLS SEM (Putra, 2022).

### Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing results reveal that intention to purchase premium products has a strong and significant effect on purchase decision premium product ( $\beta = 0.597$ ,  $t = 8.893$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H7. Parasocial intimacy and product scarcity did not have significant direct effects on purchase decision premium product, resulting in the rejection of H1 and H2. However, parasocial intimacy ( $\beta = 0.277$ ,  $t = 5.439$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), perceived authenticity ( $\beta = 0.168$ ,  $t = 2.087$ ,  $p = 0.037$ ), and product scarcity ( $\beta = 0.465$ ,  $t = 5.955$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) all showed significant positive effects on intention to purchase premium products, supporting H4, H5, and H6.

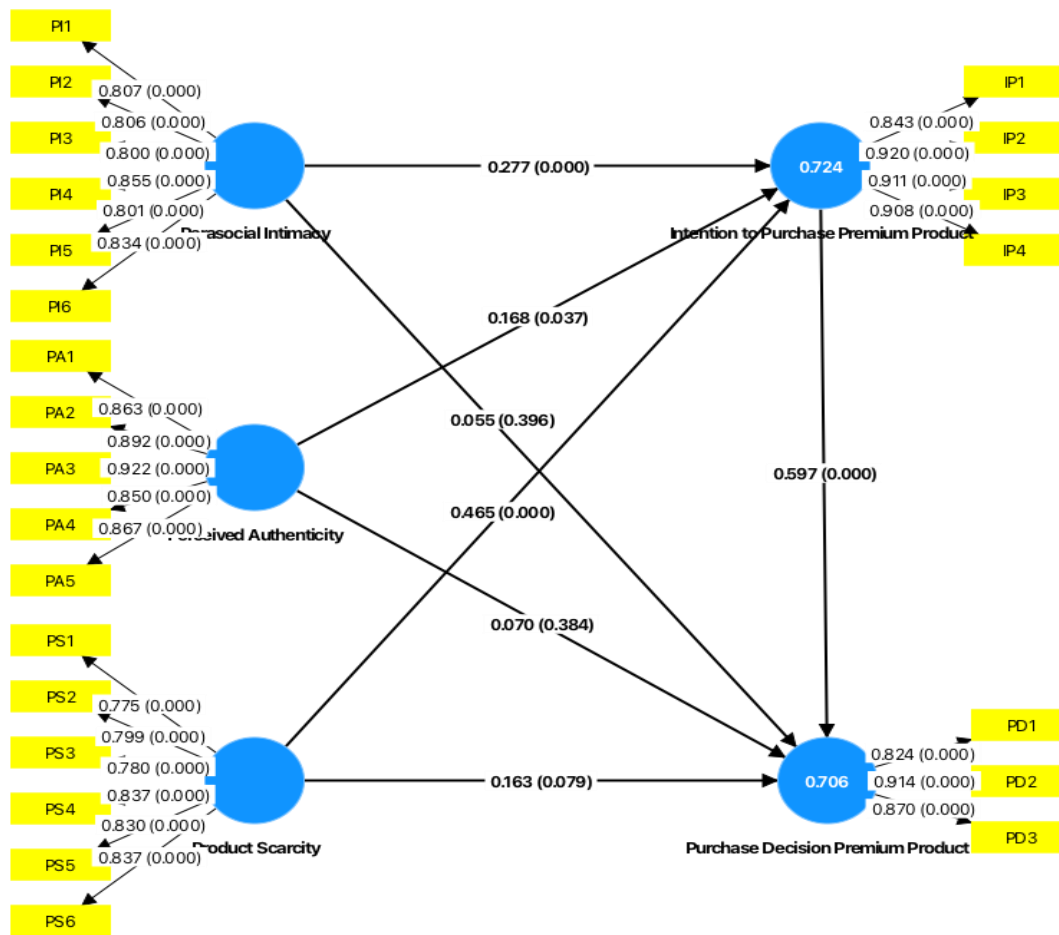


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Results

Importantly, all indirect effects through intention to purchase premium products were significant. Parasocial intimacy ( $\beta = 0.165$ ,  $t = 4.443$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), perceived authenticity ( $\beta = 0.100$ ,  $t = 2.017$ ,  $p = 0.044$ ), and product scarcity ( $\beta = 0.278$ ,  $t = 5.031$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) significantly influenced purchase decision premium product via intention to purchase, supporting H3, H8, H9, and H10. These findings indicate that intention to purchase premium products fully mediates the effects of parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and product scarcity on purchase decision.

This study aims to explain how parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and product scarcity jointly influence consumers' purchase decisions of premium food products, with intention to purchase serving as a mediating mechanism. Distinct from previous research that typically examines these constructs in isolation or as direct predictors, this study integrates them within a unified explanatory model to capture the complex decision-making process in creator-led digital commerce. By demonstrating that the effects of parasocial intimacy, authenticity, and scarcity are fully channelled through purchase intention, the findings reveal a new explanatory mechanism—highlighting that symbolic and psychological drivers must first shape consumers' cognitive and motivational readiness before translating into actual behaviour.

This integrative approach not only advances the theoretical lens beyond utility-based or attitudinal models traditionally employed in influencer marketing, but also addresses inconsistencies in the literature regarding direct versus indirect effects of these factors. By drawing from social commerce, luxury consumption, influencer marketing, and scarcity literature, the study provides a comprehensive and cohesive explanation of premium food purchasing behaviour, clarifying how symbolic meaning, relational closeness, and

perceived exclusivity coalesce to shape consumer action in creator-led environments.

Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings reveal that intention to purchase premium products is the most proximal and influential predictor of purchase decision, demonstrating a strong and significant effect. This result is consistent with prior luxury and premium consumption studies, which emphasise intention as the immediate antecedent of behaviour, particularly when products involve high prices, symbolic value, and deliberative decision-making processes (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Bilal et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2024). In line with social commerce research, intention functions as a psychological commitment that transforms affective and symbolic stimuli into actual behaviour (Azad Moghddam et al., 2024).

However, this intention-driven pathway may be especially salient in high-involvement and premium consumption contexts, where perceived risk, price sensitivity, and symbolic value require greater cognitive and motivational consolidation prior to action. Unlike impulse-oriented or low-involvement product categories, premium food consumption appears to follow a more deliberative decision structure in which behavioural commitment must be firmly established before purchase execution. Accordingly, the generalisability of this mechanism may be contingent upon product involvement, price level, and symbolic intensity. This suggests that intention-based mediation models are most applicable to consumption domains characterised by high perceived value and psychological investment, thereby delineating an important scope condition for future influencer marketing and social commerce research.

Parasocial intimacy significantly influences intention to purchase premium products, but not purchase decision

directly. This supports the notion that parasocial relationships primarily shape consumers' motivational readiness rather than triggering immediate transactions. Prior studies have

consistently shown that parasocial intimacy enhances emotional attachment, trust, and favourable attitudes toward influencers and endorsed products.

**Table 1. Hypothesis Testing**

	Hypothesis	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Result
H1	Parasocial Intimacy → Purchase Decision Premium Product	0.055	0.848	0.396	Not Supported
H2	Product Scarcity → Purchase Decision Premium Product	0.163	1.757	0.079	Not Supported
H3	Parasocial Intimacy → Intention to Purchase Premium Product → Purchase Decision Premium Product	0.165	4.443	0.000	Supported
H4	Parasocial Intimacy → Intention to Purchase Premium Product	0.277	5.439	0.000	Supported
H5	Perceived Authenticity → Intention to Purchase Premium Product	0.168	2.087	0.037	Supported
H6	Product Scarcity → Intention to Purchase Premium Product	0.465	5.955	0.000	Supported
H7	Intention to Purchase Premium Product → Purchase Decision Premium Product	0.597	8.893	0.000	Supported
H8	Parasocial Intimacy → Purchase Decision Premium Product (via Intention to Purchase)	0.165	4.443	0.000	Supported
H9	Perceived Authenticity → Purchase Decision Premium Product (via Intention to Purchase)	0.100	2.017	0.044	Supported
H10	Product Scarcity → Purchase Decision Premium Product (via Intention to Purchase)	0.278	5.031	0.000	Supported

Source: Primary Data

(Kim et al., 2015; Lou & Kim, 2019; Conde & Casais, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). In premium food contexts, this emotional closeness appears to foster desire and aspiration, which then crystallise into behaviour only through intention formation, echoing findings in fashion, beauty, and digital consumption settings (Yuan et al., 2016; Yuan et al., 2021; Masuda et al., 2022). Product scarcity emerges as the strongest predictor of intention to purchase premium products, aligning with extensive evidence that scarcity cues heighten perceived value, urgency, and exclusivity (Barton et al., 2022; Ladeira et al., 2023; Tang & Zhang, 2026). Beyond its statistical strength, this finding acquires additional interpretive significance when considered within the broader debates on artificial scarcity and consumer scepticism in digital commerce. In environments saturated with algorithmically engineered scarcity and promotional gimmicks, consumers may become increasingly critical or resistant to scarcity appeals they perceive as inauthentic or manipulative. By situating scarcity within a symbolic interactionist framework, the present study underscores that the persuasive impact of scarcity cues depends not merely on their presence, but on their perceived sincerity and symbolic resonance. The results suggest that, in creator-led premium food commerce, scarcity is most effective when constructed as a credible and relational narrative—distinct from artificial scarcity tactics that may erode trust. This highlights the need for brands and influencers to cultivate authenticity in scarcity signalling, as the interpretive context determines whether scarcity acts as a motivator or a deterrent to purchase intention. Scarcity signals encourage consumers to prioritise consumption under perceived limitation, consistent with behavioural economics perspectives on consumption priorities (Dahan & Sayag, 2024). However, the absence of a significant direct effect on purchase decision suggests that scarcity alone does not compel action in premium food markets. Instead, scarcity operates as a cognitive and

emotional trigger that strengthens intention, supporting recent findings that scarcity may backfire or lose effectiveness if perceived as manipulative or insincere (Jin et al., 2025; Rosendo Rios & Shukla, 2023).

Perceived authenticity also significantly enhances intention to purchase premium products, reinforcing its central role in premium and luxury consumption. Authenticity perceptions foster psychological ownership, emotional attachment, and willingness to pay more, especially when products are associated with genuine narratives and credible creators (Das et al., 2022; Kumar & Kaushal, 2021; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Sun et al., 2024). In creator led premium food contexts, authenticity differentiates symbolic craftsmanship from mass production, resonating with consumers' desire for meaning, sincerity, and experiential value.

#### Comparison with Previous Studies

The full mediation effects identified in this study extend existing influencer marketing and social commerce literature. While some studies report direct effects of parasocial relationships or influencer attributes on purchase behaviour, particularly in impulse-driven or low-involvement categories (Hanief et al., 2019; Rungtuanjit, 2022; Azad Moghddam et al., 2024), this study demonstrates that premium food consumption follows a more structured and evaluative decision pathway. This distinction aligns with research on luxury and masstige consumption, where intention and perceived value mediate emotional and symbolic drivers (Bilal et al., 2023; Rosendo Rios & Shukla, 2023; Xu et al., 2024).

It is important, however, to interpret these mediation findings within the methodological constraints of the study. The use of a cross-sectional design limits causal inference, making it challenging to confirm the temporal sequence implied by the mediation model. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for common method bias, which could inflate relationships between variables or obscure subtler

effects. These weaknesses suggest that, while the mediation pathway is statistically supported, its interpretive strength would be enhanced by longitudinal or experimental studies that more robustly establish causality and reduce measurement bias. Recognising these limitations not only demonstrates methodological reflexivity but also highlights critical directions for future research aiming to validate or refine the mediation model proposed here.

The findings also align with influencer typology research, which suggests that both human and virtual influencers influence emotional attachment and purchase intention, but their effects depend on perceived authenticity and relational depth (Djafarova & Davies, 2025; Yan et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025; Xie Carson et al., 2023). Unlike counterfeit or mass luxury contexts, where price sensitivity and functional value dominate (Ting et al., 2016), premium food consumption appears to rely more heavily on symbolic meaning, creator credibility, and experiential scarcity.

#### Limitations and Cautions

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, as behavioural dynamics and psychological processes may evolve over time. This limitation is especially pertinent in the context of parasocial intimacy and authenticity perceptions, which are likely to develop, deepen, or fluctuate as consumers' exposure to creator's changes and as social media interactions accumulate. Temporality may play a critical role in how symbolic relationships and authenticity cues are established, maintained, or even eroded, suggesting that cross-sectional snapshots may underestimate or misrepresent the true dynamics of relationship-building in creator-led commerce.

Second, reliance on self-reported measures may introduce common method bias, particularly for emotionally charged constructs, potentially inflating observed associations. Third, the focus on urban consumers limits generalisability to rural or less digitally engaged populations, and premium food products represent a unique category that may differ from other sectors in consumption motives and risk perceptions.

Given these considerations, future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to capture the evolving nature of symbolic interaction, the temporal formation of parasocial bonds, and the trajectory of authenticity perceptions. Such approaches would enable scholars to map how consumers' symbolic relationships with creators—and their purchase intentions—unfold and change over time, thereby offering a more dynamic and robust understanding of influencer-driven consumption.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to capture the temporal evolution of parasocial intimacy, authenticity perceptions, scarcity cues, and purchasing behaviour. Incorporating behavioural data from digital platforms could enhance validity. Scholars are also encouraged to examine moderating factors such as income, cultural orientation, and creator type. Expanding research across premium categories and cultural contexts would further enrich theoretical understanding. Qualitative approaches, such as digital ethnography or in-depth interviews, could provide deeper insight into how consumers interpret authenticity and scarcity narratives in creator-led markets.

## Conclusion

This study examined the drivers of consumers' purchase

decisions of premium food products in creator-led digital environments by focusing on the roles of parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and product scarcity, with intention to purchase serving as a mediating mechanism. The primary objective was to explain how symbolic and psychological factors derived from influencer interactions translate into actual purchasing behaviour in premium consumption contexts. The findings demonstrate that intention to purchase premium products is the most influential determinant of purchase decision, while parasocial intimacy, perceived authenticity, and product scarcity exert their effects indirectly through intention formation. This indicates that premium food consumption is not merely impulsive but follows a deliberative process in which emotional closeness, authenticity perceptions, and scarcity cues must first be cognitively and affectively internalised before behavioural commitment occurs.

By integrating these constructs within a single explanatory model, this study decisively advances understanding of symbolic consumption in social commerce. It establishes that symbolic drivers—such as parasocial intimacy and authenticity—do not simply trigger impulsive action, but operate through intention as a necessary gateway to behavioural change. This redefines how value, trust, and exclusivity are constructed and acted upon in influencer-driven markets, challenging existing assumptions and offering a more nuanced framework for both scholars and practitioners. The model provides clear guidance for brands and creators, emphasising the strategic importance of fostering authentic symbolic relationships and credible scarcity over direct sales appeals in building sustainable market influence.

Notably, the study reveals a pattern of full mediation, highlighting intention to purchase as a critical behavioural gateway that converts symbolic interaction and scarcity narratives into actual purchase decisions. This provides a novel contribution by extending influencer marketing and social commerce literature into the premium food domain, demonstrating that high price, limited availability, and symbolic value alter the decision-making pathway compared to mass or impulse driven products. The results underscore important theoretical implications by reinforcing intention-based behavioural models in premium consumption settings, and assert practical implications that fundamentally challenge conventional marketing tactics. This study proposes that, in competitive digital markets, creators and brands should move beyond transactional approaches and direct sales pressure. Instead, they must adopt relationship-driven, value-based strategies—prioritising the cultivation of authentic symbolic relationships with consumers and developing credible scarcity cues that foster trust and long-term engagement. By doing so, brands and creators can achieve sustainable influence and differentiation in saturated social commerce environments, setting a new standard for effective marketing practice.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The cross-sectional research design limits causal inference, and the use of self-reported data may introduce common method bias. In addition, the focus on urban consumers in Jakarta restricts generalisability to other demographic or geographic contexts. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs, integrate behavioural transaction data, and explore moderating variables such as income, cultural orientation, and creator type. Such extensions would deepen understanding of premium consumption dynamics and further refine theoretical and managerial frameworks within influencer led markets.

## Author contributions

All authors contributed substantially to the conception and design of the study. The first author was responsible for

developing the research framework, conducting data analysis, and drafting the manuscript. The second author contributed to the literature review, questionnaire development, and data collection process. All authors participated in the interpretation of results, critical revision of the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication.

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