

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world and is known for its cultural diversity, rich natural resources, and vast geographical area stretching from Sabang to Merauke. Kurniawan et al. (2025) stated that with such a large population and wide territorial coverage, it is unsurprising that social media has become a vital tool for people to stay connected whether with family, friends, colleagues, or loved ones. In Indonesia, social media has emerged as one of the most influential platforms for communication, information sharing, and marketing. Supported by billions of users worldwide, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X have revolutionized the way people connect and interact (Han & Balabanis, 2024). Lim & Zhang (2022) argue that these platforms are no longer limited to entertainment purposes; they have evolved into powerful tools for shaping opinions, setting trends, and influencing consumer behavior. In the Indonesian context, this transformation shows how social media has become an inseparable part of everyday life, reflecting broader changes in how people communicate, access information, and form perceptions.

Over the past few years, the number of internet users in Indonesia has shown a consistent upward trend, reflecting the country's rapid digital adoption in line with broader global patterns. According to the *Digital 2025 Report* by We Are Social and Meltwater records that, as of February 2025, Indonesia's total population reached 285 million, with 212 million internet users equivalent to 74.6% of the

population. The number of social media user identities stood at 143 million (50.2% of the population), marking a year-on-year increase of 2.9% or approximately 4 million new users.

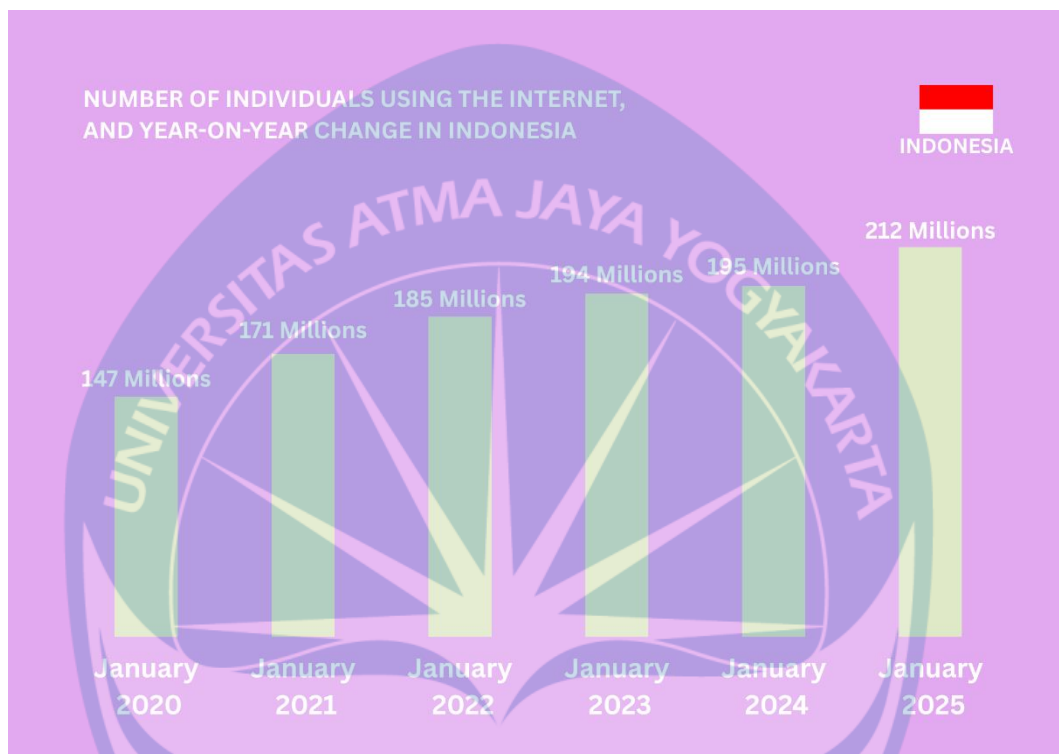


Figure 1. 1. Digital Population of Indonesia from 2020-2025

Source: Adapted from We Are Social & Meltwater (2025)

As illustrated in Picture 1.1, the population of internet users in Indonesia has increased significantly from 147 million in January 2020 to 212 million in January 2025. Breaking down the data year by year, the number of internet users rose to 171 million in January 2021, followed by 185 million in January 2022. The upward trajectory continued in January 2023 with 194 million users, and slightly increased to 195 million in January 2024. The most notable jump occurred between January 2024 and January 2025, reaching 212 million users. Ilieva et al. (2024) argue that this increase is driven largely by lifestyle shifts that have led people to

rely more heavily on digital platforms for communication, work, and shopping. Consequently, social media has evolved into a dominant space not only for entertainment but also for marketing, influencing consumer perceptions and decision-making more than ever before.

This steady growth in internet and social media adoption underscores the potential of digital platforms particularly social media as influential channels for communication, information exchange, and marketing. Such a large and continuously expanding online population provides fertile ground for the emergence and growth of social media influencers, who play a key role in shaping public opinion, consumer preferences, and purchasing behavior. As digital media becomes increasingly integrated into everyday life, consumers are shifting away from traditional advertising toward voices perceived as authentic and trustworthy known as Social Media Influencers (SMIs). Pramono (2023) stated that recent findings show that social media engagement and brand experience strongly shape consumer preferences among Generation Z in Indonesia's food and beverage sector.

Influencers, often ordinary individuals who build a large following through consistent content creation, are now regarded as digital opinion leaders (Su et al., 2021). Unlike traditional celebrities, who often appear distant and overly commercialized, influencers are seen as more approachable and authentic. This makes them role models for many, especially younger generations, when it comes to product recommendations, lifestyle inspiration, and purchasing decisions. Consequently, influencer marketing has become a dominant strategy in the digital marketing landscape, offering brands a way to connect with consumers through

trusted voices. Handranata & Kalila (2025) argued that influencer credibility, expertise, and perceived behavioral control significantly affect consumer attitudes toward influencers, which in turn shape brand attitudes and purchase intention.

To further understand how influencers shape consumer decisions, it is important to examine the Source Credibility Theory, originally introduced by Hovland et al. (1953) and later refined by Ohanian (1990). This theory highlights that an influencer's effectiveness is largely determined by how audiences perceive their trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Galandar (2021) emphasized that these three dimensions continue to form the foundation of credibility and significantly influence the persuasiveness of a message. When an influencer is regarded as reliable, knowledgeable, and relatable in a way that feels authentic, followers are more inclined to trust their recommendations. In line with this, Fatik et al. (2024) demonstrated that emotional attachment developed through interactivity and authenticity not only enhances brand credibility but also plays a critical role in driving purchase intention.

The trust built between an influencer and their audience can indirectly affect the brand or product being promoted (Fadelia & Astuti, 2024). This is because influencers can shape consumer beliefs about the reliability, integrity, and competence of a brand. When consumers consistently see an influencer using or recommending a particular product, they tend to associate the influencer's positive attributes with the brand. If the endorsement feels genuine and aligns with the influencer's overall content, it can foster strong brand trust. Once this trust is established, it can significantly influence purchase intention the likelihood that a

consumer will buy the product or service in the future. Sesar et al. (2022) stated that transparent advertising disclosures also enhance influencer credibility, which through brand awareness positively influences consumer purchase intention.

In essence, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between influencers, brands, and purchasing behavior. An influencer's ability to persuade their followers can enhance public perception and trust in a product, which in turn encourages potential buyers to make a purchase. However, while influencers play a significant role in promotion, brands cannot remain passive; they must also deliver on product quality. If the product fails to meet expectations, the influencer's endorsement will have little long-term effect. Han et al. (2025) demonstrated that influencer credibility has greater positive impact on purchase intention when product-influencer congruence and perceived product attributes (like quality) are strong. On the other hand, if the product is genuinely good, influencer promotion can attract and retain potential customers.

In the Indonesian context, there is an interesting case involving an influencer who serves as both the brand ambassador and CEO of a brand, playing a crucial role in its sales. The research focuses on the collaboration between Cellosxz, a well-known influencer in Indonesia, and Hotto, a multigrain beverage brand. This case study is relevant as it reflects the real-world application of influencer marketing strategies to meet the evolving needs of consumers, particularly in the areas of health and convenience in a fast-paced lifestyle.



Figure 1. 2. Indonesian Influencer Cellosxz (center) at The BYON Combat Showbiz 4 Press Conference, Sponsored by Hotto

Source: Bola.com (2024)

Cellosxz, whose real name is Yoshua Marcellos Muliardo, is an Indonesian content creator known for his comedy sketches, relatable lifestyle content, and entertaining stories. Starting his journey on TikTok and Instagram, Cellosxz quickly gained popularity thanks to his humorous take on everyday life in Indonesia. His down-to-earth personality and authentic engagement with his followers have helped him build a strong personal brand. He often shares personal experiences, product reviews, and brand collaborations.

Due to his fun and interactive style, Cellosxz eventually decided to create a YouTube channel, and in less than a year, he surpassed one million subscribers. From there, he became more active in uploading engaging and entertaining videos.

which expanded his audience base significantly. Beyond content creation, he also established BYON Combat, a boxing entertainment event that received wide public attention and further elevated his reputation as a digital entrepreneur.



Figure 1. 3. YouTube Profile Celloszxz

Source: Celloszxz's YouTube Official Account (2025)

In BYON Combat vol. 2, Celloszxz himself participated as a fighter. During this period, he was seeking sponsorship opportunities and eventually met Guntur, the CEO of Hotto. Their shared vision and mission led to a sponsorship agreement, marking the beginning of his collaboration with Hotto. According to Audrezet et al. (2020), collaborations are more effective when influencers integrate the brand into their lifestyle narrative, thereby reinforcing trust and relatability among audiences. Since then, Celloszxz has actively promoted Hotto's multigrain drink, often positioning it as a practical meal replacement that fits his busy lifestyle as both a content creator and event organizer.

What sets him apart is his ability to maintain transparency and honesty when reviewing a brand, while also personally trying the product, which strengthens

audience perception, trust, and relatability. Wahyudi et al. (2025) showed that relatability and authentic trust signals from influencers strongly shape purchase intention among Gen Z. With millions of followers across various platforms, Cellosxz has become one of the most recognized digital figures among young people in Indonesia, making his collaboration with Hotto highly strategic and impactful.



Figure 1. 4. Hotto Multigrain Drink – Product Presentation with Natural Ingredients

Source: Hotto Official Website (2025)

Hotto, on the other hand, is a health beverage brand that offers a variety of multigrain drinks to support a balanced lifestyle (Lim & Zhang, 2022). Founded with the mission of promoting healthy eating habits and overall well-being, Hotto emphasizes the importance of breakfast and proper nutrition. In Indonesia, there is a growing lifestyle trend in which many people skip breakfast, delay meals, or opt

for unhealthy fast food due to busy work schedules similar to the case of Celloszxz, who often postpones meals because of his hectic working hours. In the long run, such habits, if continued, can lead to health problems such as gastritis, fatigue, and reduced concentration. Therefore, Hotto seeks to address this issue by offering ready-to-drink multigrain beverages that are filling and beneficial for digestive health.

The collaboration between Celloszxz and Hotto is both highly compatible and strategically relevant. Celloszxz's audience largely consists of university students and young people who can relate to his daily struggles and busy lifestyle, which closely aligns with Hotto's target market: young, busy individuals who tend to neglect their health yet are open to practical and effective solutions. Through storytelling and sketches, Celloszxz promotes Hotto not merely as a commercial product but as a lifestyle necessity. Djafarova & Bowes (2021) showed that influencer-brand congruence significantly increases consumer trust and positively impacts purchase intention, especially among younger demographics. His ability to integrate the product naturally into his content helps maintain credibility and avoid the impression of excessive advertising. This approach strengthens trust in both the influencer and the product, thereby potentially increasing purchase intention among Celloszxz's viewers and followers.

The author chose to conduct this study because although numerous studies have explored influencer marketing, there remains limited research that specifically investigates how influencers build trust in a brand and ultimately drive consumer purchase intention within the context of Indonesia's health beverage industry

(Ilieva et al., 2024). Previous studies have generally focused on fashion, beauty, or lifestyle sectors, while health-related consumer goods particularly beverages have received far less scholarly attention. Moreover, existing literature has not sufficiently examined the unique case where an influencer simultaneously acts as both a brand ambassador and the CEO of a brand, a role that may shape consumer trust and purchase decisions in distinctive ways. By analyzing the dynamics between Cellosxz's credibility as an influencer and Hotto's brand positioning as a health-oriented product, this study seeks to address this gap and provide fresh insights into how digital endorsement strategies can foster brand trust and influence purchasing behavior.

Furthermore, this research identifies several distinctions from previous studies. First, earlier investigations have predominantly concentrated on industries such as fashion, cosmetics, and technology (Garg & Bakshi, 2024), leaving the Indonesian health beverage sector relatively underexplored. Second, while past research often portrayed influencers merely as endorsers (AlFraihat et al., 2025), this study examines a more complex role in which the influencer functions simultaneously as a content creator, event organizer, and brand collaborator, offering a more comprehensive view of credibility transfer. Third, unlike many prior works that focused on existing consumers, this study specifically investigates potential consumers who recognize the influencer but have not yet purchased the product. This focus provides deeper insight into how influencer credibility shapes brand trust and purchase intention among previously untapped audience segments.

Accordingly, this study contributes by extending the discussion of influencer credibility to the health beverage industry in Indonesia while also exploring the multidimensional role of influencers as digital entrepreneurs. Through this approach, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of influence and trust transfer mechanisms, which are increasingly crucial for brands seeking to remain relevant and competitive in today's digital landscape.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on this background, the problems that will be raised in this research are:

1. Does influencer credibility have a significant effect on brand trust?
2. Does influencer credibility have a significant effect on purchase intention?
3. Does brand trust have a significant effect on purchase intention?
4. Does brand trust mediate the relationship between influencer credibility and purchase intention?

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the effect of influencer credibility on brand trust in the context of Celloszxz and Hotto.
2. To analyze the effect of Influencer Credibility on purchase intention in the context of Celloszxz and Hotto.
3. To analyze the effect of brand trust on purchase intention in the context of Celloszxz and Hotto.

4. To analyze the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between Influencer Credibility and purchase intention in the context of Celloszxz and Hotto.

1.4. Research Benefits

This research is expected to provide several benefits, both theoretically and practically:

1. Theoretical Benefit

This research is expected to contribute to the development of marketing science, especially in the field of digital marketing and consumer behavior, by providing empirical evidence on the role of influencer credibility and brand trust in influencing consumers' purchase intention. The results may also serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in similar topics.

2. Practical Benefits

- a) **For Businesses and Brands:** This research can help companies, especially Hotto and other similar brands, to better understand how influencer credibility and brand trust can be strategically used to increase consumer purchase intention. The findings may assist in selecting the right influencer and building effective marketing campaigns.
- b) **For Influencers:** The research provides insights into the key attributes that make an influencer credible and how those attributes can influence

followers' trust and purchase decisions, thus enhancing their professional image and impact.

- c) **For Future Researchers:** The research can serve as a foundation or comparison for further studies related to influencer marketing, trust building, and consumer purchase behavior, especially in the context of food and beverage products.

1.5. Research Systematics

This research is structured into five chapters, each designed to examine the influence of influencer credibility on brand trust and purchase intention toward Hotto, as promoted by Celloszxz. The structure is as follows:

1. Chapter I: Introduction

The first chapter explains the background of the study, problem formulation, research objectives, research significance, scope and limitations, and the systematic structure of the thesis. The focus of this chapter is to introduce the research context regarding influencer credibility, brand trust, and purchase intention in the case of Hotto promoted by Celloszxz.

2. Chapter II: Literature Review

The second chapter presents the theoretical foundations including Source Credibility Theory, influencer marketing, brand trust, and purchase intention. It also discusses prior relevant studies, highlights research gaps, and develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses.

3. Chapter III: Research Methodology

The third chapter outlines the research design using a quantitative approach, sampling criteria, data collection techniques through online questionnaires, variable operationalization, measurement indicators, and data analysis procedures using SPSS and SmartPLS.

4. Chapter IV: Data Analysis & Discussion

The fourth chapter delivers the results of statistical analysis including reliability and validity testing, descriptive statistics, and hypothesis testing. This chapter also interprets and discusses the findings in connection with existing theories and previous studies.

5. Chapter V: Conclusion

The fifth chapter provides the conclusions derived from the research results regarding the influence of influencer credibility on brand trust and purchase intention. It also offers practical implications for brands and influencers, as well as recommendations for future research.