The Effectiveness of Mega Influencers, Macro Influencers, and Micro Influencers in Forming Brand Evangelists

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Abstract:

Purpose – The aim of this research is to determine the order of effectiveness of each type of influencer, namely mega, macro and micro influencers, in the formation of people who will become brand evangelists for culinary MSMEs in the city of Batam.

Design/methodology/approach – The research method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative research method, using interview techniques and literature study.

Findings – The number of followers affects the level of trust and the content influences the level of interaction.

Research limitations/implications – This research did not take interview data from informants who are influencers, but only interview data from social media users and culinary MSMEs.

Practical implications – Content becomes the 'bridge' between influencers and their followers. Collaboration and promotion of a brand is displayed through content and researchers found that each type of influencer has different levels of effectiveness, but not only based on the number of followers.

Originality/value – Researchers found 1 unique finding, namely the behavior of followers who recommend products promoted by an influencer without ever buying, trying or experiencing the product first. This behavior is included in the brand evangelism section.

Keywords: Mega Influencer; Macro Influencer; Micro Influencer; Brand Evangelist; Pinball Marketing.

Introduction

Online marketing is certainly inseparable from the role of humans as subjects who introduce, use, evaluate and recommend goods or services. Influencer (or also called social media influencer) is one of the names that is often heard in online marketing terms. Social media influencers are online personalities with a large number of followers on one or more social media (such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, personal blogs) who have influence on their followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019a). In contrast to celebrities or public figures who become famous through traditional media, social media influencers are 'ordinary people' who become 'online celebrities' by creating and uploading content on social media. They generally have some expertise in specific areas such as healthy lifestyles, food, lifestyle, travel, or fashion.

The growth rate of influencers continues to grow rapidly, especially in Indonesia because of increasingly easy access to creating content on social media, especially Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. Based on data compiled from Influencer Marketing Hub, the influencer industry is estimated to be worth 13.8 billion dollars in 2021, an increase of 4.1 billion dollars from the previous year.
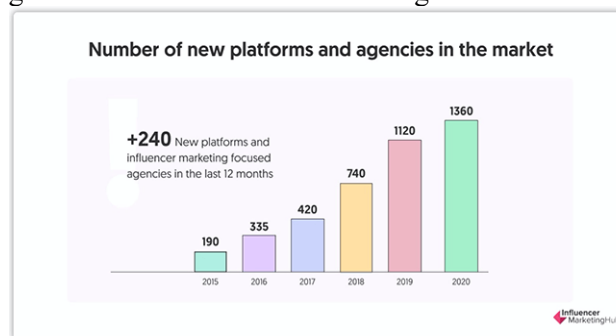
Figure. Influencer Growth Rate in the World
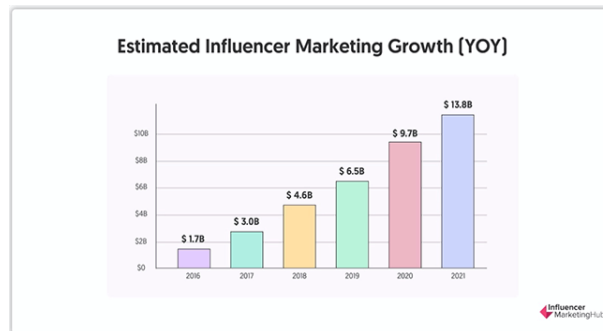
Source: (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021)

Influencers can also be in the form of agencies. Also reported by the Influencer Marketing Hub (The State of Influencer Marketing, 2021), in 2020 there were 1,360 influencer marketing agencies.

Figure. Growth Rate of Influencer Agencies in the World

Source: (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021)

Based on the number of followers, influencers are divided into 4 types, namely mega, macro, micro and nano influencers. Mega influencers are people with more than 1 million followers on social media, macro influencers with 100 thousand to under 1 million followers, micro influencers with a thousand to under 100 thousand followers, and nano influencers with under a thousand followers (Isyanto et al.., 2020).

A business is also inseparable from its name, consumers who have bought and tried its products. Consumers who have experienced the product will have a personal assessment of the product they use. Consumers who like the products they have tried have a high probability of using them again. At that time, these consumers can be called customers and can build brand evangelism. Brand evangelism is a development of 'word of mouth' marketing and contains a habitual pattern of 'lobbying' as well as having a spirit of enthusiasm to promote a brand and convince other people to buy (Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021). People who are part of brand evangelism are called brand evangelists.

Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are one of the parties that often use the services of influencers to promote their goods or services. Based on data reported by Databoks, the majority of MSMEs in Indonesia operate in the culinary sector with 1.51 million business units in 2020. So it can be seen that content from influencers is dominated by food and beverage brands. Reporting from the Online Data System (ODS) at the Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises, the city of Batam had 81,486 MSMEs in 2019 which were also dominated by the culinary sector.

Figure. Number of MSMEs in Various Sectors in Indonesia
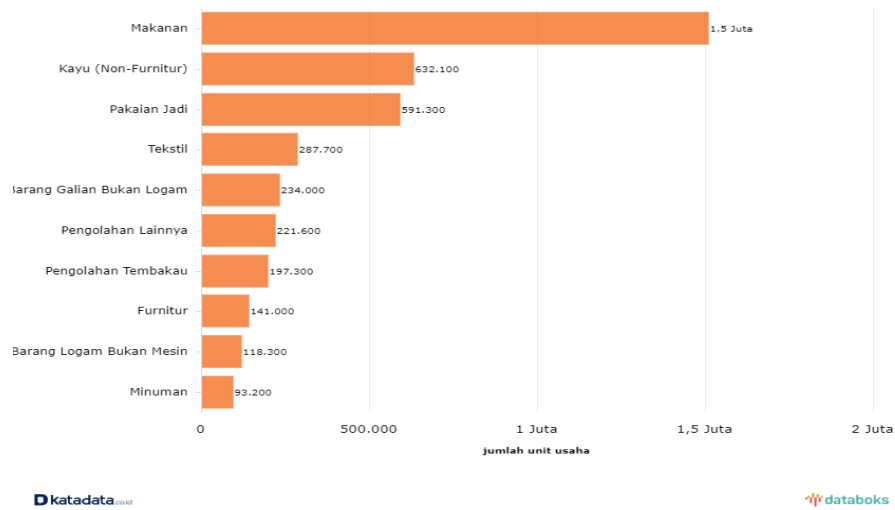
Source: (Databoks, 2020)

In previous research (Pornsrimate & Khamwon, 2021), researchers only developed how to convert consumers (especially millennials) into brand evangelists through micro influencers. Previous researchers did not focus on discussing the level of effectiveness of influencers on brand evangelism, especially the differences between each influencer, namely mega influencers, macro influencers and micro influencers. There has been a lot of research on the influence of influencers on brand awareness, such as research conducted by (Maria et al., 2019); Ferina et al. (2021) ; Tjandrawibawa (2020), but not towards brand evangelism so researchers are interested in conducting this research. Brand evangelism in the current era plays a very important role in the existence of a brand, where brand evangelism is not just advocacy (brand advocacy) but also protects (brand defense) and even denigrates other brands (Marticotte et al., 2016).

Literature Review
Influencer

Literally, influencer means a person or party who has influence. Currently, influencers are more associated with people who have a mass following on social media and promote products (social media influencers). Influencers are online personalities who have a large number of followers and have influence over their followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019b). Mentions of influencers are currently increasingly diverse and specific based on their social media, such as Instagram celebs, TikTokers for TikTok, YouTubers for YouTube, and so on. Influencers are also known as content creators. These influencers specifically have areas they focus on, such as fashion, food and drink, travel, comedy, and so on. The following is a division of influencer categories based on the number of followers and their characteristics, advantages and disadvantages:

Table. Influencer Category Distribution

	Micro Influencer	*Macro Influencer*	*Mega Influencer*
Number of Followers	1.000 - 100.000	100.001 - 1.000.000	>1.000.000
Characteristics	Having a strong 'voice' in a community, niche market or local area.	Has a substantial number of loyal followers	More famous on the internet.
	Uniform audience with close relationships.	Audience diversification is higher than micro influencers.	Their status is similar to that of traditional celebrities.
	High credibility is felt by the audience.		
Excess	An audience that is loyal and has a high level of trust.	Higher specific market reach.	Able to reach a wide and massive audience.

	Good engagement rates.	*Return on investment is higher than micro influencers.*	High visibility and recognition.
	Authentic; their recommendations are similar to word of mouth.	Accessibility; easier to contact than micro or mega influencers.	They create trends.
	Low rates.		Professional.
			Easy to measure return on investment.
Lackness	Low visibility and audience reach.	*Engagement rates are around 5 to 25% smaller than micro influencers.*	Premium rates.
	Difficult to activate large-scale content.	Rates are more expensive than micro influencers.	Audiences will get tired of frequent ads.
	Have less control over outcomes, volatility, and more difficulty measuring return on investment		*Low engagement rates.*

Source: (Conde & Casais, 2023)

Endorsment

In Indonesian, the word endorsement means support or backing. Endorsements are usually a cooperative relationship between a company (brand owner) and an influencer as a promotional event (Hani et al., 2018). Endorsements are now a means for companies to promote their products more massively without needing a brand ambassador.

Brand Evangelist

People who carry out brand evangelism are called brand evangelists. The concept of brand evangelism is communicating positive information, ideas and feelings focused on a brand freely and sincerely to other people in a desire to influence the consumption habits of a brand (Mamesah, 2020). Brand evangelism is a further development of 'word of mouth' marketing where consumers who really believe in a brand will freely convince others to buy and use it or become 'volunteer advocates' who actively speak out for it. company interests.

Culinary MSMEs

MSME is an abbreviation for micro, small and medium enterprises. In Indonesia, MSMEs are the spearhead of the economy. According to the Ministry of Cooperatives and UMKM, in 2020 the number of MSMEs reached 64.19 million with a contribution to GDP of 61.97% or 8,573.89 trillion rupiah. The contribution of MSMEs to the economy in Indonesia includes the ability to absorb 97% of the total existing workforce and can collect 60.4% of total investment. MSMEs are classified based on the number of assets and turnover they have according to Law No. 20 of 2008 as follows:

Table. MSME Groups

No.	Business	Criteria	
		Asset	Turnover
1	Micro	Max. 50 million	Max. 300 million
2	Small	>50 million - 500 million	>300 million -2,5 billion
3	Intermediate	>500 million -10 billion	>10 billion - 50 billion

(Source: Kementrian Koperasi dan UMKM, 2022)

Review, Rating, and Recommendation

Influencers and brand evangelism cannot be separated from reviews, ratings, and recommendations. These three things are interconnected and sequential. A review is a review process to determine the quality, advantages and disadvantages of a product with the aim of providing an initial overview to listeners (Putra, 2020). Rating is the process of assessing products that have been experienced based on the reviewer's objective and subjective views. Recommendation is the stage of providing information to other people about whether to use or not use a product that has been rated.

Pinball Marketing

Currently, the marketing era has changed based on the latest research. Traditional marketing resembles bowling, a practice of using traditional marketing techniques (bowling balls) to reach and influence target markets (bowling pins). Mass media (bowling arena) functions as a marketing content mediator. Marketers throw the ball as hard and as straight as they can in the hope that the ball will hit the target (pin). But the marketing journey is no longer a straight line, where marketing is now more like a pinball game (Opresnik, 2017).

Social media is changing the current marketing landscape. Pinball Marketing is an environment where marketing instruments (balls) are used to reach target markets (bumpers, kickers, and slingshots). In the pinball marketing era, the target market has more control compared to the bowling marketing era where the target market (pin) is passive. For further illustration, all parts in the pinball game play a role in throwing or bouncing the ball so that the ball does not fall into the hole which is the end of the game. In marketing activities, this happens on social media where every target market or consumer has the right to give their views on a product (review, rating, recommendation). So in the era of pinball marketing, the brand or company owner is no longer the party in control of the perception of their product but the public is in control.

Research Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is to look at the level of effectiveness of mega influencers, macro influencers and micro influencers on brand evangelism in the culinary sector on an MSME scale. In this research, previous sources have shown that influencers have quite an influence on brand relationships with consumers. The following is the conceptual framework of this research:

Figure. Research Conceptual Framework
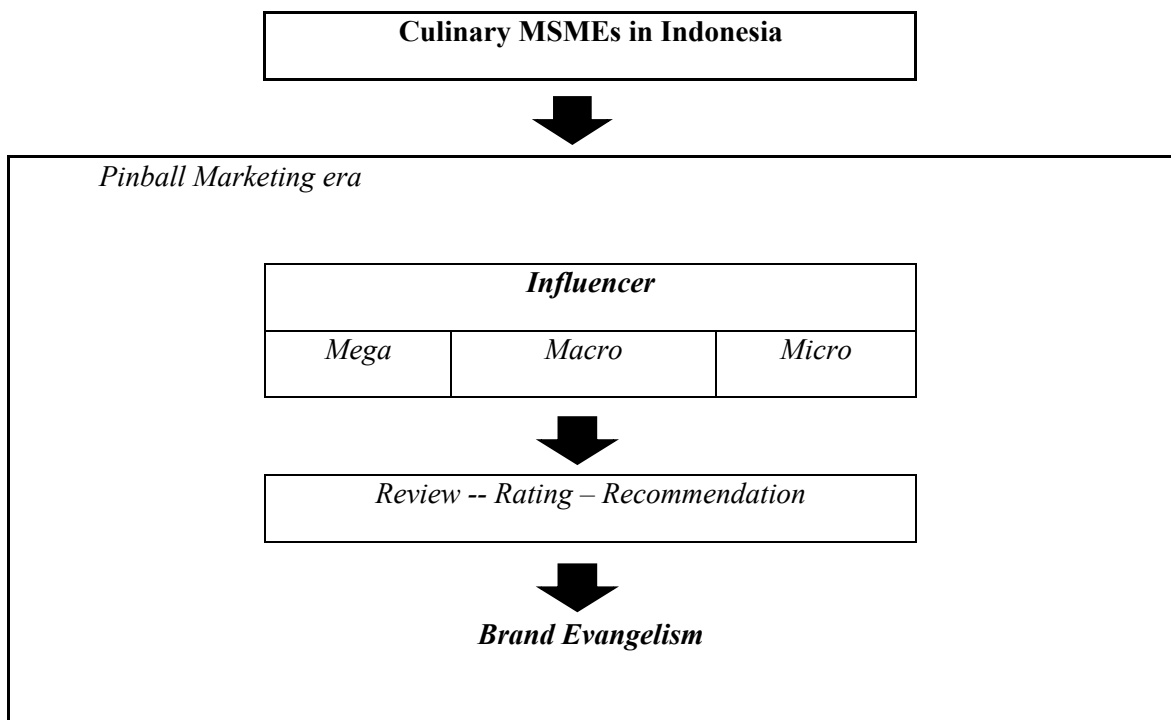
Research Proposition

P₁: *Mega influencers are effective in shaping consumers into brand evangelists for culinary MSMEs in the city of Batam.*

P₂: *Macro influencers are effective in shaping consumers into brand evangelists for culinary MSMEs in the city of Batam.*

P₃: *Micro influencers are effective in forming consumers into brand evangelists for culinary MSMEs in the city of Batam.*

Method

Based on the type of data that will be used, this research uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an attempt to understand in depth by entering into a particular setting that is being researched in a problem using descriptive research or exposure. A qualitative approach is research aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, thoughts of people individually and in groups (Bachri, 2010). The data will be combined including descriptions in detailed context accompanied by in-depth questionnaire results, as well as the results of document analysis. The research data that has been collected is in the form of words or images, so it does not focus on numbers.

Researchers use the content analysis method for their data analysis techniques. The content analysis method is a method that includes all analyzes regarding the content of the text. The stages carried out in this research in analyzing the data are as follows:

1. Information gathering stage
   Collecting related information through interviews with culinary MSMEs who have used influencer services, culinary MSME consumers who are active social media users, and through literature studies.
2. Reduction stage
   Select and sort appropriate or inappropriate information from the results of interviews and literature studies.
3. Presentation stage
   Select appropriate information so that it can be presented in the explanatory description.
4. Conclusion stage
   The stage of drawing conclusions from the results of existing data analysis.

An important concept in research is validity in research. Validity means the extent to which the measurer is accurate and accurate in carrying out its measuring function. A test is said to have high validity if the tool can carry out the correct measuring function or provide measuring results that are in accordance with the objectives (Bachri, 2010).

Triangulation is a multi-method approach used by researchers when collecting and analyzing data (Alfansyur, 2020). The phenomenon under study can be understood well so that a high level of truth can be obtained if approached from various points of view. A single phenomenon from different points of view will allow a reliable level of truth to be obtained. Therefore, triangulation is an effort to check the correctness of data or information obtained by researchers from various different points of view by reducing as much doubt as possible during data collection and analysis.

Results and Discussion

This research has presented data regarding the effectiveness of micro, macro and mega influencers in forming brand evangelists, especially for culinary MSME products in the city of Batam. Researchers obtained data in 2 ways, namely in-depth interviews and literature study. Researchers found 4 important things that have an impact on the effectiveness of influencers in forming brand evangelists, namely the number of followers, content content, congruence and interpersonal skills. Researchers also found other findings in the form of recommendations without buying.

The first finding is that the number of followers influences the level of trust. Manipulation of the number of followers is widespread through buying and selling followers, but the number of followers is still important today. However, potential buyers who see an influencer's recommendation content for a product (brand) are not only based on one single factor or the number of followers. Another factor to pay attention to is the number of views and comments. Because views and comments (interactions) are considered more 'real' relationships between people than just the number of followers displayed. From the interview results, 3 out of 7 informants said they trusted mega influencers more, which are the type of influencer with the most followers

because they were considered more credible, had more experience and had a wider audience. This is in line with research by Conde & Casais (2023), Giuffredi-Kähr et al. (2022) and Pittman & Abell (2021) who say that the more followers you have, the more persuasive you are and increase your intention to adopt. However, this is not in line with research revealed by Kay et al. (2020) and Teresa Borges-Tiago et al. (2023) who say that 'less is more'. The 'less is more' concept says that the fewer the number of followers, the higher the level of intimacy and honesty of the influencer in creating content so that the resulting content is more authentic and original. In these findings, influencers who have more followers (in this case mega influencers) are more trusted for their share of the Indonesian MSME culinary market, especially the city of Batam at this time.

The second finding is that the content influences the level of interaction. Content becomes the 'bridge' between influencers and their followers. Collaboration and promotion of a brand is displayed through content. According to research by Rungruangjit et al. (2023) content is divided into 7 things, namely information, entertainment, social interaction value, identification, confidence benefits, social benefits, and special treatment benefits, where a piece of content can have more than 1 of these things. This research suggests that entertainment is the most effective in building active follower participation. This is in line with Lou et al. (2019) in their research entitled "Does Non-Hard-Sell Content Really Work? Leveraging The Value of Branded Content Marketing in Brand Building", that currently non-hard-sell (soft selling) with information and entertainment value in marketing content is more effective than hard selling. Research (Giuffredi-Kähr et al., 2022) also points out the importance of content, especially content in collaboration with brands. Disclosure that the content published is a collaboration with a brand to promote that brand is important. This will determine how the followers respond. The earlier you are informed that the content is a collaboration with a brand, the less negative impact it will have on followers' responses, especially when collaborating with culinary MSME products because the 'impression of being paid for' by the brand creates 'the impression of being said to be delicious'.

The third finding is that congruence influences loyalty or allegiance. Congruence is the suitability of the influencer's field with the consistency of the content produced, so that congruence is more than just the content or type of content. Congruence also concerns the suitability of the influencer's field and the product (brand) being promoted. An influencer can create entertaining or informative content (which triggers interaction) in various collaborations offered by brands, but it is not necessarily congruent with the field that is the main point of the influencer's personal brand. Feng et al. (2023) in their research said that content can make potential consumers buy but congruence can make consumers become loyal customers. The research also states that congruence can reduce perception errors in consumers' minds. The more famous and more followers an influencer has, the more offers of collaboration there will be from brands with different product categories. This causes the congruence of macro and mega influencers to decrease compared to micro influencers who focus more on the suitability of the product to be promoted.

The fourth finding is the importance of an influencer's interpersonal skills in building parasocial relationships. Interpersonal skills are the ability to communicate, interact, build and maintain relationships with other people in various circumstances or situations. Becoming an influencer certainly requires adequate interpersonal skills, but the relationship between influencers and followers will be much stronger if a parasocial relationship is built. Parasocial relationships are imaginative relationships formed between fans and their idols. The parasocial relationships that are built make followers become consumers and even brand evangelists for the product (brand) promoted by an influencer. This is in line with research by Conde & Casais (2023) which suggests that parasocial relationships are fostered from posts that form perceptions of intimacy, access to see the influencer's personal life and dialogue, thus validating the idea that parasocial relationships can be seen as a vehicle for advertising. There are 3 things that are the main points in the view of parasocial relationships, namely practices of self-disclosure which contribute to forming a greater perception of authenticity, feelings of social presence, and social identification. These three things have an impact on the intention to buy recommended products. In this case, influencers who have a smaller audience will find it easier to build parasocial relationships because the larger the audience, the longer it takes to form dialogue and intimacy. In Lou's (2022) research entitled "Social Media Influencers and Followers: Theorization of a Trans-Parasocial Relationship and Explication of Its Implications for Influencer Advertising", the final findings state that followers also often consider influencer collaboration (sponsorship) with brands as inspiration. and give 'congratulations' to the influencer's success. From the research statement, the researchers concluded that this could happen to micro influencers. Generally, offers of collaboration for micro influencers to promote products come from culinary MSMEs.

Apart from the 4 findings previously stated, researchers found 1 other finding, namely the behavior of followers who recommended products promoted by an influencer without ever buying, trying or experiencing the product first. This behavior is included in the brand evangelism section. This finding was found especially in culinary products which was supported by the results of interviews with several previous informants. Chen & Yuan (2020) in their research entitled "Psychology of Word-of-Mouth Marketing" said that senders (message senders or people who recommend) will recommend a product or brand after feeling a positive emotional impact. In contrast to this research, the behavior in these findings is influenced by trust in what the influencer says and previous experience that what the influencer says matches the reality of the product's taste. This behavior is centered on the influencer's persona, not just what product is being promoted. In everyday social contexts, recommendations used include "said product A is delicious", "influencer B said product C tastes unique", "let's try it, yesterday I saw product D being promoted by influencer E" and other similar statements. . From these findings, the researchers concluded that this behavior can occur in influencer promotions with a larger number of followers because the recommended party needs to know the influencer who is promoting. In other words, the recommending follower and the recommended party both know the influencer so that trust is created to buy or try from the recommended party. So, mega influencers (especially those on a national scale) will find it easier and more effective to create this behavior. This finding is in line with research by Zarei et al. (2020) with the title "Characterising and Detecting Sponsored Influencer Posts on Instagram" which states that the most significant mega influencers get attention from the public compared to other types of influencers.

Conclusion

The results of this research can contribute to scientific development in the field of economics, especially in the marketing aspect. Of the many theories regarding marketing currently developing, the use of influencer services is still effective, especially in the pinball marketing era. This research supports that each type of influencer, namely micro, macro and mega, has its own level of effectiveness, but effectiveness does not only depend on the number of followers. Other factors such as interpersonal skills, interaction in comments and content content.

The results of this research can help culinary MSMEs, especially those located in the city of Batam (Riau Islands Province) because the use of influencer services is currently widely used to promote products (brands). Culinary MSMEs can be more careful in determining the most effective type of influencer to use for their services. Choosing the right influencer can give culinary MSMEs a greater chance of getting a brand evangelist whose role is important in the current era of pinball marketing. The brand evangelist that is formed can maintain the existence of a brand and even develop it, where the existence of a brand evangelist will increase brand awareness, sales and company profits.

This research has explained the effectiveness of mega, macro and micro influencers in forming brand evangelists, especially for culinary MSME products in the city of Batam. From several findings that have been presented, researchers concluded that the order of types of influencers from the most effective is mega influencers (>1,000,000 followers), then micro influencers (1,000-100,000 followers) and finally macro influencers (100,001 – 1,000,000 followers) .

Researchers found that each type of influencer has different levels of effectiveness, but not only based on the number of followers. Other factors that influence the level of effectiveness include content, congruence and interpersonal skills in parasocial relationships. The number of followers is currently still very important even though there is a lot of practice of buying followers, but the content has more influence on the level of interaction because it becomes a 'bridge' for influencers to start interacting with their followers. Good content is content that has consistent congruence (suitability) with the influencer's expertise or field, so that it can form consumer loyalty. Apart from congruence, influencers' interpersonal skills can build parasocial relationships with their followers. This research also found another finding, namely the behavior of followers who recommend products promoted by an influencer without ever buying, trying or experiencing the product first.

Acknowledgement

Conflict of Interest

Most likely there is a question, why research on influencers but this research does not take interview data from informants who are influencers, but only interview data from social media users and culinary MSMEs. This could be a suggestion for further research. Currently we have not been able to find influencers who fit the research criteria in Batam City.

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