

THE ROLE OF INDONESIAN DIGITAL INFLUENCERS IN POPULARIZING CHINESE BEAUTY PRODUCTS THROUGH THE TIKTOK PLATFORM

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ABSTRACT

Chinese beauty products represent a category of foreign cosmetics that have entered the Indonesian market and have been associated with audience skepticism, particularly in relation to conventional celebrity endorsement practices. Digital influencers are observed to produce content emphasizing honest narratives and everyday practices to strengthen audience trust. This study aims to describe the role of digital influencers in popularizing Chinese beauty products in Indonesia by applying the theory of commodity fetishism and the concept of digital influencers through a descriptive qualitative, literature-based approach. Data were collected from academic journals, scholarly publications, product reviews, and content analyses, and were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, with attention to transparency, content authenticity, and cultural alignment. The research results show that the process of digital influencers builds trust with the audience by providing examples of product use in the form of videos through daily activities and the suitability of products with the needs of the audience in Indonesia. The approach taken by digital influencers still gives an authentic impression even with the offer of paid company advertising collaborations.

Keywords: Digital Influencer, Chinese Beauty Products (C-Beauty), TikTok, Celebrity Endorsement

INTRODUCTION

Global digitalization has opened new spaces for the negotiation of cultural identity. Cultural practices are no longer limited to specific geographic regions but can be adapted and transformed through various digital platforms such as social media (Appadurai, 2006). Digital influencers act as cross-cultural intermediaries or non-state actors who facilitate cultural exchange between countries by adapting foreign cultural elements so they are more easily accepted by Indonesian society. This cultural adaptation is not merely a matter of language translation but also involves shifts in meaning related to values, aesthetic norms, lifestyles, and local consumption habits in everyday life (Bhabha, 1994).

Modern marketing strategies are now largely conducted online by involving individuals who possess significant influence in the digital sphere (digital influencers) to encourage audiences' purchasing decisions. This approach reflects a shift from earlier promotional methods that relied heavily on television advertising and celebrity figures as the main attraction (Lengkawati & Saputra, 2021). Beauty trends have become increasingly diverse due to the emergence of universal social media platforms that facilitate the spread of beauty innovations from various countries, including China, which has introduced its distinctive beauty standards to different regions (Riyantie, 2019).

The emotional closeness between digital influencers and their audiences often attracts audiences to try Chinese beauty products promoted by these influencers. Such relationships encourage audiences to imitate the habits or styles of the digital influencers they admire (Salsabila & Fitria, 2023). The lifestyles and consumption patterns displayed by digital influencers can influence audiences' decisions to recognize and even try recommended products (Marandika, 2018).

In marketing practice, Chinese beauty companies utilize social media as a bridge connecting Indonesian digital influencers and audiences online. Businesses in China's beauty industry compete to collaborate with digital influencers to promote their products across various popular platforms, one of which is TikTok. TikTok has become one of the most popular platforms globally. In Indonesia alone, it recorded around 30.7 million active users, making the country one of TikTok's largest markets worldwide. TikTok in Indonesia ranked as the country with the largest number of users globally in 2024, with 157.6 million active users, surpassing the United States, which had a total of 120.5 million active users.

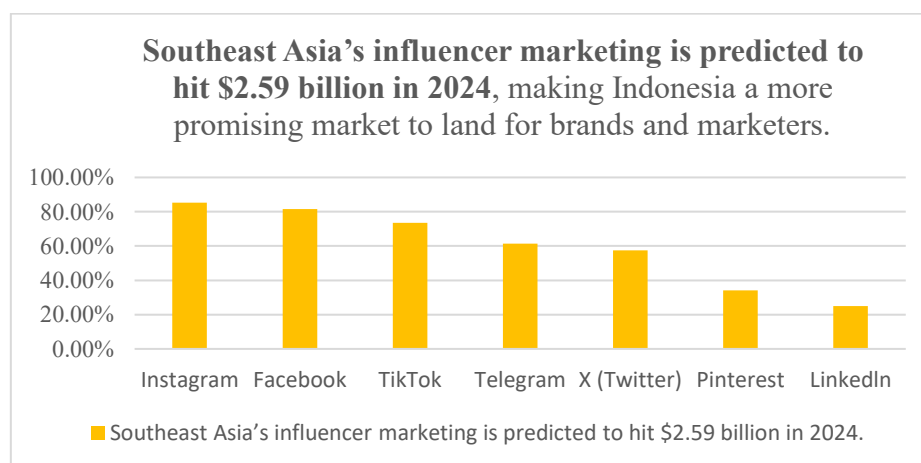


Figure 1. Southeast Asia's Influencer Marketing Predicted In 2024.
(Source: Processed by the researcher using data from Influencer Market Insights, INSG.CO)

The digital marketing strategies implemented by Chinese companies through the TikTok platform have become increasingly stronger with the presence of a paid advertising feature called TikTok Ads. Its working system is similar to digital advertising in general, namely based on the number of targeted views or likes. In-Feed Ads are the most popular because they frequently appear on users' main pages or For You Page (FYP). The combination of digital influencers and the creative features offered by TikTok has further accelerated the promotion of Chinese beauty products. Short-duration video formats that are engaging and easy to understand make this platform an effective medium for increasing audience awareness and interest in marketed products (Media et al., 2024).

TikTok provides opportunities for its users to create short videos lasting 15 to 60 seconds, a format that strongly aligns with the interests of today's younger generation. Short-form video content has proven to be more engaging and easier to consume compared to long-duration videos on other platforms. Most TikTok users come from younger demographics aged between 18 and 34 years, with 86% belonging to Generation Z and 73% classified as millennials (Social, 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, quarantine policies that restricted social activities outside the home led many teenagers to turn to TikTok as a means of self-expression. The platform became a space for them to channel creativity and showcase their artistic side through short videos that are easily accessible and widely shareable (Raza, 2023).

TikTok has a relatively higher engagement rate with brand content compared to other social media platforms. According to the Social Media Content Strategy Report (2024), 54% of TikTok users interact with brand content at least once every day, while 30% actively seek information and updates related to new products on the platform (Social, 2024). This high engagement rate indicates that TikTok functions not only as an entertainment platform but has also evolved into an effective marketing medium for various products and brands.

Marketing strategies that utilize social media such as TikTok, along with the role of digital influencers, are used as promotional tools to help beauty products gain recognition more quickly and reach wider audiences. Audiences tend to feel more trust and comfort toward products promoted by digital influencers they look up to. In the beauty industry, beauty digital influencers display diverse makeup styles according to their individual characteristics. However, most of them still collaborate with various cosmetic companies through celebrity endorsement programs to enhance brand image while introducing new products to audiences (Mubarok, 2016).

The Chinese market is now expanding further into Indonesia due to the role of Indonesian digital influencers who actively promote products through the TikTok platform. The presence of digital influencers plays an important role in popularizing emerging trends in society and influencing product purchase interest on a global scale. Compared to television advertising, promotions through TikTok are considered more efficient because they offer wider reach, lower costs, and more measurable results. Even micro and nano digital influencers on TikTok are capable of generating high engagement rates at relatively low promotional costs. The increasing popularity and sales of beauty products in Indonesia today cannot be separated from the significant influence of digital influencers and social media algorithms that drive massive content exposure (Nanevi et al., 2022). Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the role of Indonesian digital influencers in popularizing Chinese beauty products through the TikTok platform.

THEORY AND CONCEPTS

Digital Influencer Concepts

Digital influencers act as intermediaries connecting companies, consumers, and various industry groups through the communication networks they possess (Wirapraja et al., 2023). The potential of digital influencers to reach audiences on a large scale

encourages companies to collaborate with them as a relatively new marketing communication tool known as influencer marketing or celebrity endorsement (Deiss et al., 2019). Digital influencers perform their roles by utilizing various social media platforms. They tailor the content they create based on the platforms they focus on, such as YouTubers, TikTokers, and Instagram celebrities (selebgrams) (Wirapraja et al., 2023). The concept of digital influencers, based on the number of followers and their level of influence, is divided into five types, namely:

1. Celebrity Influencer

According to Jayasinghe (2021), a celebrity influencer is any individual who enjoys public recognition outside social media and is utilized by a brand due to their large follower base. These influencers are celebrities who collaborate with certain brands, allowing them to command much higher fees than non-celebrity digital influencers.

2. Mega Influencer

According to Jayasinghe (2021), mega influencers are individuals who have experienced significant follower growth on social media platforms and have built celebrity status from established expertise, typically after reaching 1,000,000 (one million) followers or more.

3. Macro Influencer

According to Jayasinghe (2021), macro influencers are influencers who have not attained celebrity status but are highly successful, with follower counts ranging from 100,000 to 1,000,000. Macro influencers achieve strong engagement levels and can leverage their large audiences to promote brand products at costs lower than those of mega and celebrity influencers.

4. Micro Influencer

According to Jayasinghe (2021), micro influencers are fairly successful influencers with follower counts between 10,000 and 100,000. They rely on the creative aspects of the content they produce to connect with their followers and to generate high engagement rates.

5. Nano Influencer

According to Jayasinghe (2021), nano influencers represent the earliest stage of influencers, whose followers are mostly friends, acquaintances, and people living nearby. Nano influencers offer the advantages of personal accessibility and high perceived authenticity to their followers and often generate the highest engagement rates among all influencer categories.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study begins by identifying the gap within the phenomenon of the rising popularity of Chinese beauty products driven by digital influencers. Furthermore, this research analyzes the entry of Chinese beauty products and the role of local digital influencers in popularizing these products through the TikTok platform in Indonesia. First, the digital influencer concept is used to explain how Indonesian digital influencers contribute to the promotion of beauty products on TikTok social media in order to stimulate consumers' purchase intentions. Second, the role of digital influencers concept is used to examine how digital influencers function as bridges in building parasocial relationships between foreign beauty products and audiences in Indonesia.

The analysis is conducted by integrating the two main concepts, namely the Digital Influencer Concept and the Role of Digital Influencers Concept. This study aims to identify and analyze the opportunities and challenges related to the role of local digital influencers in promoting Chinese beauty products in Indonesia. Based on the description outlined above, the following is the conceptual framework that will be explained in this research:

The Role and Impact of Local Digital Influencers in Promoting Chinese Beauty Products

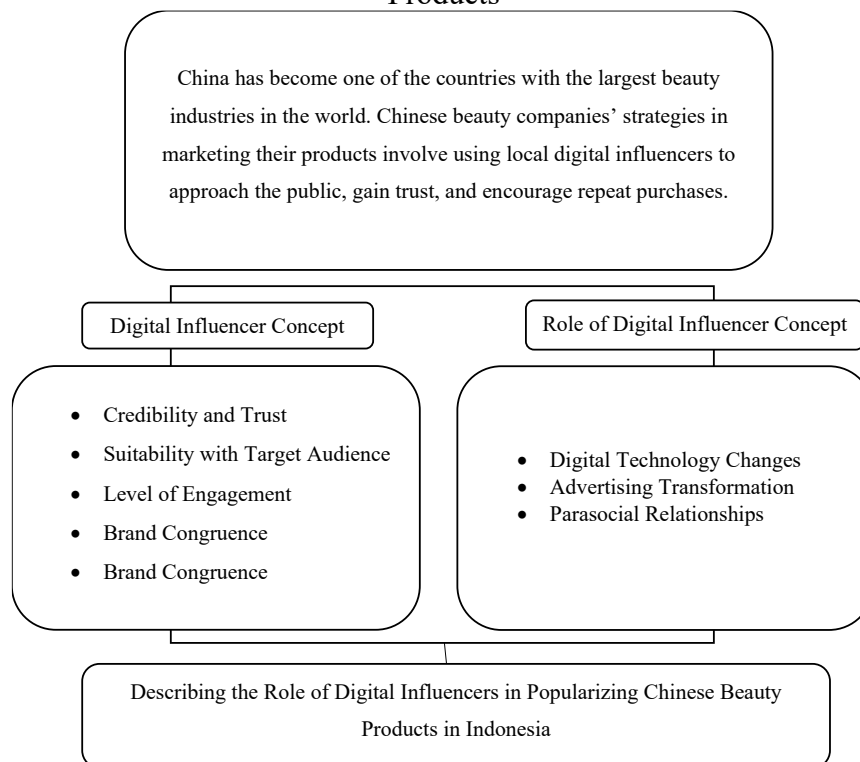


Figure 2. Research Conceptual Framework
Source: Compiled by the Author (2026)

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this study is content-based, aimed at examining information presented on TikTok social media (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher employs a descriptive qualitative research method, which seeks to understand and explore meanings related to social phenomena, whether involving individuals, groups, or broader social issues. This study uses primary data sourced from the official TikTok accounts of digital beauty influencers and several Chinese beauty product brands related to their collaborative activities. The researcher also utilizes data derived from literature studies, encompassing various written sources relevant to the research subject, such as books, articles, scientific journals, and official websites of Chinese beauty brands referenced from previously collected and processed sources. The research applies qualitative data analysis techniques proposed by Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 2014), namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

DISCUSSION

A. The Development of Chinese Beauty Products in the Indonesian Market

Chinese beauty products, better known as C-Beauty, have shown rapid growth in the Indonesian market over the past five years. Data from Future Market Insights (2025) states that Chinese brands have successfully captured more than 15% of Indonesia's cosmetics market between late 2024 and early 2025, representing a 2% increase compared to 2019. The characteristics of Chinese beauty products have become popular in the Indonesian market because they combine ingredients derived from Traditional Chinese

Medicine (TCM) (Mintel Trends, 2019). These products have also managed to compete with Western beauty products that were previously more familiar and popular in Indonesia. The composition of ingredients used in Chinese beauty products offers unique selling values that differentiate them from Western products, which has contributed to their growing dominance in the Indonesian market.

Chinese beauty products entering the Indonesian market fall into two categories: cosmetics and skincare. In the color cosmetics category, brands such as O.TWO.O, Focallure, Skintific, and Pinkflash boldly market best-selling products favored by Indonesian audiences, particularly eye and lip makeup. Meanwhile, skincare brands such as The Originote, Glad2Glow, and Bioaqua offer a wide range of skincare products at prices lower than the general market average. Through strategic promotion, digital influencers have been able to boost sales in the cosmetics category by up to 16% of total sales in 2024.

Promotion of Chinese beauty products in the era of technology and globalization—especially within the realm of social media—lies in the ability to adapt. Whereas beauty product promotion and advertising were once dominated by television and famous celebrities, companies have now shifted their focus to social media platforms dominated by digital influencers (Sambyal et al., 2025).

Table 1. Comparison of Past and Present Promotional Models

Aspect	Then (Traditional)	Now (Social Media)
Promotional Media	Dominated by TV and print media	Dominated by social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram
Promotional Actors	Famous celebrities and TV commercials	Digital influencers with active and loyal followers
Delivery Method	Formal advertisements with fixed TV durations	Creative content such as short videos (15–60 seconds), product reviews, live streaming
Target Audience	General audiences determined by TV ratings	More targeted audiences, as social media is regulated by AI algorithms
Audience Interaction	Minimal due to one-way communication	High and interactive, enabling two-way interaction via comments, messages, and collaborations
Cost	Generally more expensive, depending on the celebrity used and their rate card	More affordable for emerging influencers, but can be expensive for top influencers with large followings
Promotional Outcomes	Dependent on celebrity popularity and TV reach	Dependent on influencer quality and audience engagement

Source: Processed by the researcher using data from slice.id

Through content interaction and lifestyle resonance built by digital influencers, Chinese beauty products are perceived as part of everyday beauty trends and standards among Indonesian audiences. The selection of video settings, background scenes, and even the types of music used are adjusted to trends currently popular in Indonesia, aligning with local tastes and social norms. This content-driven approach indirectly builds an emotional connection with consumers (Wirapraja et al., 2023).

Table 2. Digital Influencer Content Adaptation to Indonesian Audience Preferences and Norms

Content Aspect	Form of Adaptation by Digital Influencers	Purpose for Indonesian Audiences
Video Setting/Background	Using personal makeup spaces, natural sunlight lighting or artificial lighting, and backgrounds adjusted to the product or brand being promoted	Creating an authentic impression aligned with daily beauty routines
Type of Music	Using trending TikTok music or songs currently popular in Indonesia	Increasing reach and opportunities to appear on the FYP through cultural/taste similarity and supporting TikTok's AI algorithm performance
Visual Style	Makeup looks aligned with the brand while highlighting the natural beauty of tropical-skinned women	Adjusting product aesthetics to Indonesian audience beauty preferences
Language and Narration	Casual (non-formal) Indonesian language, conversational tone, sharing personal experiences related to the product	Reducing cultural distance and increasing trust in foreign products
Alignment with Social Norms	Maintaining visual politeness, gestures, and word choice	Adjusting content to Indonesian social norms and values / avoiding SARA (Ethnicity, Religion, Race, Intergroup issues)

(Source: Processed by the researcher using data from DataReportal)

Digital influencers act as intermediaries who disseminate meanings, lifestyles, and cultural tastes across national borders. They play a significant role by spreading cultural content beyond geographical boundaries. By leveraging social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, they introduce various cultural aspects to global audiences. The content created by digital influencers is packaged through honest reviews and daily makeup content, making it more engaging and easier for audiences to understand (Wibowo et al., 2023).

The credibility and personal appeal of digital influencers are key factors in the successful dissemination of cultural content. Audiences tend to trust recommendations or information delivered by influencers they follow consistently. Authentic and relatable delivery styles make cultural content feel less didactic or overly formal. Digital influencers also frequently collaborate with influencers from other countries to create richer cross-cultural content. Honest review strategies combined with storytelling approaches are able to reshape audience perceptions of a culture and even encourage deeper interest in learning about it (Rizal et al., 2025).

The influence of brand image, brand awareness, and price perception has enabled Chinese beauty products to compete with local and Western beauty products (Aifa Fahira et al., 2020). One of the most favored and sought-after product categories among

audiences today is moisturizer. The following are the best-selling moisturizer products from Chinese brands and their competitors, namely local and Western brands:

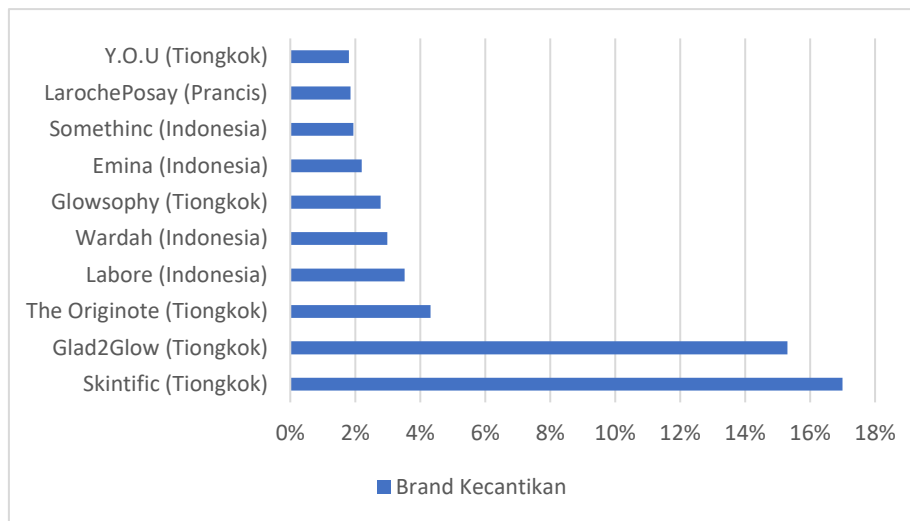


Figure 3. Leading Moisturizer Brands in the Indonesian Market
(Source: Processed by the researcher using data from Markethac.id)

Through consistent use, digital influencers create positive brand associations for Chinese brands that go beyond perceptions of individual products and extend to broader views of innovation and quality in Chinese beauty products. As digital influencers consistently feature Chinese beauty brands and demonstrate their roles and benefits, they generate a “halo effect,” in which audiences begin to associate Chinese beauty products in general with positive attributes such as technological innovation and advancement, premium quality at affordable prices, proven effectiveness, as well as accessibility and availability (Kurniawan et al., 2023).

B. The Role of Digital Influencers Through the TikTok Platform

Products introduced through videos created by digital influencers hold value for audiences, encouraging them to imitate and develop curiosity toward Chinese beauty products (Sambyal et al., 2025).

Table 3. Credibility and Trust Mechanisms Toward Digital Influencers

Digital Influencer Credibility Factors	Identity/Aspiration Formation Mechanisms
Authenticity	Audiences prefer content that feels authentic and aligned with the real experiences of digital influencers, rather than mere promotion or celebrity endorsement.
Closeness	Direct and personal interaction on TikTok creates higher engagement and makes audiences feel emotionally connected. This closeness builds loyalty and increases audience trust in digital influencers.
Expertise	Beauty digital influencers with high credibility are recognized as having expertise that fosters audience trust in foreign products introduced through the TikTok platform.

(Source: Processed by the researcher using data from the Social Identity Perspective)

The presence of digital influencers who introduce and popularize Chinese beauty products—considered foreign products—has increased audience trust, as their quality is perceived to be validated through trusted influencers' honest reviews. Digital influencers not only boost sales of Chinese beauty products but also build dynamic emotional relationships with audiences and facilitate the acceptance of foreign products among Indonesian consumers. The role of social media in promoting products through the use of digital influencers plays an important part in shaping the perceptions and behaviors of Generation Z in Indonesia. Digital influencers demonstrate in-depth knowledge about the products they promote, which convinces audiences to make purchases or at least search for more information about those products.

Through their reviews of Chinese beauty products, digital influencers explain product usage by integrating it into their daily activities, such as makeup routines. Most influencers tend to use everyday makeup strategies and provide detailed explanations of products according to their facial conditions. They also show the results of the Chinese beauty products they use—for example, documenting their makeup from the events they attend to the final look when they return home. In addition, digital influencers often insert personal life stories. For instance, Nadia Tilem shared her experience of undergoing plastic surgery, recovering for several weeks, and eventually deciding to wear cosmetics again.

Clinic (2023), in its survey research, found that 78% of Indonesian women trust local digital influencers more than international celebrities when choosing beauty products. This finding emphasizes the importance of cultural attachment and emotional proximity in shaping local audience preferences. Audience responses also help form new consumptive cultures, where audiences feel encouraged to follow beauty trends popularized by digital influencers as symbols of status and lifestyle (Alya Zahra, 2023).

These digital influencers focus heavily on their audiences, especially Generation Z, who tend to implement social identities represented by admired beauty digital influencers (Glucksman, 2017). This also proves that their influence on Chinese beauty products is not limited to product introduction or sales but also serves as a benchmark for achieving desired beauty identities, culturally aligned with the ideal beauty standards of Indonesian women. Indonesian audiences' acceptance of Chinese beauty products varies depending on who introduces the products. Data shows that macro influencers have engagement rates reaching 7–11%, demonstrating that the quality of relationships with audiences is as important as follower counts. This trust encourages audiences to explore products further and even repurchase them (Muhammad et al., 2025).

Table 4. The Influence of Macro Influencers and Micro Influencers

Feature	Macro Influencers	Micro Influencers
Audience Reach	100,000 – 10,000,000+ followers	1,000 – 10,000 followers
Engagement Rate	Lower, but focused on brand awareness	Higher due to more loyal and engaged audiences
Sales Strategy	Effective for hard selling to boost instant sales and brand awareness	Effective for soft selling, building trust, and influencing purchase decisions through personal relationships
Cost	More expensive due to popularity and wide reach	More affordable
Credibility	Sometimes perceived as less trustworthy due to commercial nature	More trusted due to closer and more authentic relationships

Campaign Goals	Brand awareness, visibility, broad exposure	High engagement, conversion, and building brand loyalty in specific markets
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(Source: Processed by the researcher using data from The Social Cat)

The role of digital influencers in marketing Chinese beauty products is strongly influenced by audience trust in driving purchase interest. Digital influencers become trusted figures because they review products by integrating them into daily activities with clear evidence. The resulting impact is that, prior to influencers sharing product content through everyday contexts, audiences were hesitant to purchase lesser-known products. Several aspects are impacted by the presence of digital influencers promoting Chinese beauty products through the TikTok platform, including:

Table 5. The Role of Digital Influencers Before and After Their Emergence

Aspect	Before Digital Influencers	After Digital Influencers	Description / Detailed Explanation
Audience Trust Level	Relatively Low	Increased Significantly	Digital influencers build trust in foreign products through credibility and authenticity
Purchase Interest	Lower	Increased (significant positive influence)	Trust gained from honest influencer reviews increases interest in buying foreign products
Product Sales	Lower	Increased significantly (>30–50%)	Trust built by influencers creates perceptions of promoted product authenticity
Brand Awareness	Low	Increased significantly	Influencers effectively expand the reach of foreign brands entering the Indonesian market
Greatest Influencing Factor	—	Credibility and Audience Similarity	The strongest influence lies in trust built through honest, relevant content reviews for audiences (fans and general viewers)

(Source: Processed by the researcher using data from Journal of Social Science Research, 2024)

Digital influencers also demonstrate a deep understanding of product consistency, skin conditions, and various facial concerns that are specific to tropical climates and Southeast Asian skin characteristics. This expertise is not only built through formal experience such as beauty education, but is also gained through experiences they share directly with their audiences. In the context of Chinese beauty products, digital influencers act as intermediaries of a foreign lifestyle, explaining product benefits in a language that is familiar to Indonesian audiences. This process increases interest in Chinese beauty products or brands because it conveys the conceptual understanding that the brand aims to communicate (Wirapraja et al., 2023).

Digital influencers who successfully introduce Chinese beauty products implement strategies by maintaining product authenticity and their personal characteristics (Fadli et al., 2025), by:

1. Disclosing or providing clear transparency regarding “paid partnerships.”

2. Conducting honest reviews that include both the advantages and disadvantages of products involved in “paid endorsements.”
3. Only introducing or promoting products that they genuinely use and trust in their daily lives (real life).
4. Responding transparently to negative reviews or audience concerns.

Data shows that 91% of Indonesian women compare products to find the best offers, while 83% frequently purchase beauty products that provide discounts. This proves that Indonesian audiences are information-seeking buyers who conduct product comparisons. Therefore, digital influencers build trust through honest reviews delivered via video review content. Recommendations based on honest reviews create a more sustainable long-term trust in a digital influencer, compared to influencers who focus solely on paid promotions (Mintel Trends, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study addresses the role of digital influencers in introducing Chinese beauty products to Indonesia. The results of the analysis show that digital influencers play an important role in promoting Chinese beauty products through the TikTok platform in Indonesia. Digital influencers function not only as actors who introduce foreign culture but also as bridges that reconcile lifestyle differences through content adapted to the preferences of Indonesian audiences. Through authentic, personal, and interactive content, digital influencers successfully build trust, create aspirations, and shape a strong identity among Indonesian audiences toward foreign Chinese beauty products by using TikTok as a promotional bridge. Through gradual promotional and introduction processes, Chinese beauty products enter as foreign products promoted by digital influencers through the creation of creative videos that combine everyday activities with explanations of product compositions and active ingredients according to their respective functions. This approach helps align product benefits with the skincare needs of Indonesian audiences.

The Digital Influencer Concept in this context operates by positioning influencers as beauty experts as well as marketing agents for Chinese beauty brands, packaging these products with aesthetic and social values that are appealing and localized for Indonesian audiences. Meanwhile, the Role of Digital Influencer Concept is reflected in how influencers manage viewers' emotions by creating a sense of closeness, as if they were online friends. The TikTok platform, by leveraging its content personalization algorithm and interactive features, facilitates cross-border product dissemination and the acceptance process of foreign products within the Indonesian market. TikTok also functions as a digital space that strengthens relationships and cultural exchange or lifestyle/trend flows between Indonesia and China. Moreover, as an AI-based platform, TikTok can easily reach viewers across all audience segments.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the balance, consistency, and credibility demonstrated by digital influencers in introducing Chinese beauty products—while adapting to Indonesian audiences' lifestyles—combined with the accessibility and trustworthiness of the TikTok social media platform, help introduce and build audience trust in cross-cultural or foreign products, particularly within the dynamic and competitive beauty industry.

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