



The Role of Micro-Influencer as Key Opinion Leader in Increasing Brand Awareness of Jiniso

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Abstract

The advancement of digital technology has transformed marketing communication patterns, particularly in the local fashion industry. This study aims to analyze the role of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders (KOL) in increasing Jiniso's brand awareness, using the Two Step Flow Theory as its theoretical foundation. This theory posits that brand information is more effectively conveyed to the public through trusted KOLs. The research hypothesizes that collaboration with micro-influencers can foster stronger audience engagement and trust compared to conventional advertising. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation of Jiniso's micro-influencer content on TikTok. Informants were selected by purposive sampling, involving micro-influencers, Jiniso's marketing team, and digital marketing experts. The results show that micro-influencers build audience trust and emotional closeness through authentic, responsive, and consistent content. Soft-selling strategies, personal storytelling, hashtags, and community challenges were proven to increase brand exposure, audience engagement, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). These findings align with the Two Step Flow Theory and reinforce previous research on the effectiveness of KOLs in digital communication. In conclusion, the collaboration between Jiniso and micro-influencers successfully creates strong social and emotional bonds, significantly enhancing brand awareness among Generation Z. This study highlights the importance of collaborative communication strategies and adaptive influencer selection in digital marketing communication practices.

Introduction

The development of digital technology has driven significant changes in the advertising landscape in Indonesia (Agus et al., 2019; Sukmayadi, 2024). This digital transformation not only affects the public's media consumption patterns but also disrupts marketing communication strategies that were long dominated by conventional media such as television, radio, and print (Alzub, 2023; Khan et al., 2024). In the digital era, the public especially younger generations spend an increasing amount of time on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

As a result, digital platforms have become the primary spaces for social interaction, information exchange, and effective channels for promotional and marketing activities (Key, 2017). According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association, the number of internet users in Indonesia has surpassed 210 million, with social media penetration exceptionally high among Gen Z and millennials (Nurbaiti, 2023). This shift brings strategic

consequences for industry players, especially local fashion sectors, to continuously adapt and innovate to maintain relevance and win market competition.

Hardabkhadze et al. (2023) said that, the fashion industry itself is one of the sectors most impacted by digitalization. Competition among local brands is becoming increasingly fierce, driven by dynamic trends, rapidly changing consumer tastes, and easy access to a variety of products through digital platforms. This situation requires local brands such as Jiniso to develop marketing strategies that are not only creative but also adaptive to the characteristics of today's digital consumers. Jiniso, which focuses on jeans and casual wear, is a local brand that has successfully utilized digitalization by switching to social media as its main communication channel and actively collaborating with micro-influencers (Escourido-Calvo et al., 2025).

According to Truman (2022). Micro-influencers individuals with 1,000 to 100,000 followers have now become the spearhead of digital communication strategies for many brands. They are considered to possess a high level of trust, emotional closeness with the audience, and the ability to build organic engagement through relevant and relatable content (Atiq et al., 2022; Putra et al., 2025). This is consistent with research that emphasizes the content produced by micro-influencers is perceived as more natural, so that brand messages are viewed as personal recommendations rather than mere advertisements (Carolina & Sari, 2024). The transformation of the role of micro-influencers in digital marketing communication is also closely related to classic communication theory, namely the Two Step Flow Theory proposed by Türkmen (2022) and Mutia (2025).

According to the Two Step Flow Theory, the flow of mass communication does not occur directly from the media to the audience, but rather through the role of opinion leaders (key opinion leaders/KOLs) who filter, interpret, and distribute information to the wider public. In today's digital ecosystem, micro-influencers act as key opinion leaders capable of shaping perceptions, preferences, and even audience purchase decisions through more personal and convincing communication (Harrison, 2024).

Jiniso leverages the strategic role of micro-influencers to build brand awareness and brand loyalty among young Indonesian consumers. Brand awareness itself is the consumer's ability to recognize, recall, and distinguish a brand among many choices (Khurram et al., 2018; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). In the highly competitive fashion industry, brand awareness becomes an important asset that determines the success of marketing and the sustainability of the brand. Previous studies confirm that collaboration strategies with micro-influencers are effective in increasing brand awareness and encouraging audience interaction (Carolina & Sari, 2024).

However, research that specifically discusses the characteristics of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders in building brand awareness, especially for Indonesian local fashion brands, is still relatively limited (Silalahi, 2021). This research gap is important to address, given the dynamic changes in communication patterns, trust, and digital consumer behavior. Most previous studies have focused on the general effectiveness of influencer marketing, such as its impact on purchase intention or engagement rate, without thoroughly discussing the communication process and the personal attributes of micro-influencers that make them effective as key opinion leaders (Silalahi, 2021: 92; Conde & Casais, 2023).

Earlier studies also tended to see influencers as a homogeneous group, whereas there are significant differences between macro-influencers and micro-influencers in building trust and emotional closeness with audiences. In the context of modern digital communication,

authenticity, consistency, and the active participation of micro-influencers become the main determinants of successful collaborations in building brand awareness.

As its theoretical foundation, this study refers to the integration of the Two Step Flow Theory and the concept of brand awareness in digital marketing communication. The Two Step Flow Theory is relevant as it highlights the process of information mediation through key opinion leaders, who in today's digital ecosystem are represented by micro-influencers (Taher et al., 2025; Oguntoye, 2025). On the other hand, the brand awareness theory is used to evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration strategies between brands and micro-influencers in strengthening brand positioning in the minds of consumers, increasing recall, and influencing purchase preferences (Wang et al., 2021).

Moreover, digital communication phenomena in Indonesia have become increasingly complex with the emergence of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and co-creation content, where audiences are not merely passive recipients of information but also actively involved in the creation and dissemination of messages. Micro-influencers are the main drivers of e-WOM because their content is often adopted and redistributed by their followers, thereby strengthening viral effects and increasing brand recall organically (Gruodytė, 2022).

The significance of this research is further reinforced by the characteristics of Gen Z consumers, who prioritize authenticity, two-way interaction, as well as inclusive values and self-expression in choosing fashion products. This generation tends to be skeptical of conventional advertising and prefers recommendations from peers or figures they regard as authentic, such as micro-influencers who are able to present personal and relatable narratives in every post. In this context, Jiniso has succeeded in building a strong brand community through ongoing collaboration with micro-influencers relevant to their market segmentation (Azzaakiyyah & Rijal, 2025).

Based on the theoretical explanation and empirical data above, the formulation of the problem in this research is grounded in real-world phenomena: the need for local brands to strengthen brand awareness amid increasingly fierce digital competition and changing consumer behavior. Thus, it is important to comprehensively analyze how the characteristics of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders can contribute to building and strengthening brand awareness through digital communication strategies. This study also attempts to fill the literature gap regarding the integration of classic communication theory and modern digital marketing practices in Indonesia, which has not been widely discussed in previous studies.

Therefore, the results of this research are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions, not only for the development of digital marketing communication studies but also for local fashion industry practitioners seeking to optimize collaboration with micro-influencers. Previous studies are explained in the research by Carolina & Sari (2024), Conde & Casais (2023), and Silalahi (2021), which highlight the effectiveness of influencer marketing but have not specifically discussed the characteristics of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders in the context of Indonesian local fashion brands. This study is limited to the analysis of collaboration between Jiniso and micro-influencers on digital platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

Therefore, this research aims to analyze in depth the role of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders in increasing Jiniso's brand awareness on social media, as well as to examine the integration of communication theory with influencer-based marketing practices in Indonesia's digital fashion ecosystem. The communication-related objective of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of effective digital communication strategies in building brand awareness through collaboration with micro-influencers, and to offer strategic

recommendations for local brands facing communication challenges in the increasingly competitive digital era.

Methods

Methodology refers to the systematic steps taken by researchers to address the research problems previously formulated (Snyder, 2019). The selection of an appropriate method is crucial to ensure the research proceeds in a structured and focused manner and generates relevant and valid data. This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach within an interpretive paradigm. This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon concerning the role of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders in enhancing Jiniso's brand awareness (Mudjia, 2018). The interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to understand the experiences and meanings given by the informants, providing a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the social behavior and interactions being studied (Darby, 2019). The research was conducted online using digital platforms for data collection. The primary methods of data collection were Zoom-based interviews and social media content observation. The study was carried out over a four-month period from January to April 2025. Throughout this period, the researcher observed the digital content produced by micro-influencers collaborating with Jiniso and conducted in-depth interviews with informants who were either directly or indirectly involved in the brand's marketing strategy.

The population in this study consists of micro-influencers with follower counts between 1,000 and 100,000 who have previously collaborated or are currently working with Jiniso as key opinion leaders. It also includes individuals involved in Jiniso's campaign planning and execution. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, in which informants were deliberately chosen based on criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The selected participants included eight micro-influencers serving as key informants, three supporting informants with experience in Jiniso's marketing campaigns, and one expert informant with theoretical expertise in digital marketing. The sample was intended to generate rich and diverse data as well as varying perspectives. The main variable of this research is the characteristics of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders and their influence on Jiniso's brand awareness. The study analyzes elements such as the influencers' social status and credibility, the level of their accessibility and external communication, the compatibility of their content with the brand's target audience, the degree of engagement and interaction they generate, and the impact of their communication on brand loyalty and recognition in the market. These variables are explored to provide a clear picture of how micro-influencers influence consumer perception and behavior in real terms.

The data collected in this research are qualitative and descriptive, comprising narrative information and visual documentation obtained from in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. The interviews aim to explore in detail the perceptions, experiences, and viewpoints of the informants, while the observations focus on analyzing social media content posted by micro-influencers during the study period. Data sources include transcripts from key, supporting, and expert informants, as well as social media materials such as videos, photos, captions, and interaction data including likes, comments, and shares. Data analysis was carried out using the Copeland & Agosto (2012) model, which involves four main processes: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data were first collected in a systematic manner, then reduced by selecting and simplifying the most relevant information. The refined data were presented descriptively and categorized thematically. Finally, conclusions were drawn critically and logically based on the available findings. To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, source triangulation was applied by comparing information gathered from different informants and observational sources to verify consistency

and accuracy. This methodological explanation is presented in detail to ensure that the research process is clearly understood, transparent, and replicable by other researchers who may wish to conduct similar studies within the same or a comparable context.

Results and Discussion

Explain the results of the research in the form of problem-solving analyzed using relevant theories. The results of the study also revealed the findings of the research. Discussion is accompanied by logical arguments by linking the results of research with theory, the results of other studies. This study reveals the strategic role of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders (KOLs) in building and strengthening Jiniso's brand awareness on digital platforms, particularly TikTok. The role of micro-influencers is crucial in bridging brand communication with the audience in a personal and authentic manner. The main findings of this research can be categorized into six aspects of micro-influencer characteristics: social status, accessibility, external communication, suitability, credibility and influence, and their contribution to brand exposure, customer engagement, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). The social status of micro-influencers is built through the authenticity and consistency of lifestyles that closely relate to the everyday realities of their audiences. Influencers such as Ardani and Ade emphasize that honesty in product reviews and relatable styles are key factors in building trust.

This social position is not merely seen from follower count but is a symbolic position formed through active involvement in digital communities. This reinforces the view that micro-influencers function as mediators of public opinion who are trusted because they are perceived as 'peers' by the audience (Mudjia, 2018). Statements from expert informants clarify that this social status grants micro-influencers legitimacy as opinion leaders capable of shaping perceptions and opinions within their communities. Accessibility of micro-influencers is also an important factor that strengthens emotional closeness with the audience. Responsive practices such as replying to direct messages (DMs), comments, and creating content based on audience requests, like Q&A videos and story highlights, indicate an effective two-way communication. This communication approach increases audience trust because micro-influencers not only deliver one-way messages but also actively engage in interactions that build personal relationships. This participatory communication model emphasizes interactivity that is highly relevant to current consumer needs.

In terms of external communication, micro-influencers prefer a natural and narrative style, avoiding hard-selling techniques. They weave product messages into everyday stories that are easy to accept and feel authentic. This approach is also supported by the use of educational content such as infographics that facilitate audience understanding of product features. Creative freedom in presenting content is key to success, while maintaining branding elements such as official hashtags to ensure brand identity remains consistent (Sitinjak, 2021). The alignment of micro-influencers' values and lifestyles with the brand is also a major factor in collaborator selection. This alignment includes values promoted by the brand, such as sustainability and product comfort, which reinforce the authenticity of promotional messages. Influencers who maintain narrative consistency and understand their audience are able to create more effective content in attracting attention and building follower loyalty (Silalahi, 2021). Micro-influencer credibility is built through transparency and selective endorsement. Influencers who only promote products they genuinely use and trust succeed in building higher levels of trust. Authentic language and personal narratives help reduce audience resistance to promotion, thereby increasing the micro-influencers' impact on purchase intention.

The contribution of micro-influencers in expanding brand exposure is seen in the application of a soft exposure strategy before official campaigns are launched. Creative visual exploration

and community programs like the “Jiniso Community,” which gathers content from influencers and other users, maximize the repetition of visual messages. The use of distinctive hashtags such as #JinisoEmangKeren also plays a role in broadening reach and strengthening brand identity organically (Carolina & Sari, 2024). This approach results in brand exposure that feels natural and does not pressure the audience. Customer engagement is built through live sessions, dance challenges, and user-generated content, which are effective tools to increase active audience involvement. This interactive and participatory approach fosters a more intimate and human relationship between the brand and consumers, further strengthening loyalty and audience ownership of the brand. Micro-influencers act as facilitators of two-way communication, enabling the creation of a vibrant and active digital community. Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) further strengthens horizontal brand message dissemination. With calls to tag friends, repost content, and testimonials by the audience, the spread of information about Jiniso occurs widely without additional advertising costs. This social network dynamic forms collective opinions and naturally increases brand recall. Therefore, micro-influencers are not merely intermediaries but also catalysts accelerating message diffusion within their digital communities.

The integration of Jiniso’s strategy with micro-influencers showcases an adaptive and dynamic collaborative pattern, where the brand provides creative freedom and trust to influencers to convey messages authentically. Meanwhile, brand consistency is maintained through visual elements and signature hashtags uniting the entire campaign. This approach aligns with the principles of the Two Step Flow Theory, which positions influencers as message mediators capable of building meaning and credibility within a social context closer to the audience. This communication model enables brand messages to be widely disseminated while being personally interpreted, effectively addressing current digital communication needs.

Overall, Jiniso’s collaboration with micro-influencers not only successfully increases brand visibility but also builds emotional bonds and sustainable audience loyalty. This success is based on value alignment between influencers and the brand, transparent communication, high interactivity, and flexibility in delivering messages that suit the digital characteristics of Generation Z. This adaptive communication strategy strengthens Jiniso’s position as a relevant and authentic local fashion brand in a highly competitive social media landscape. The results of our study on the adaptive communication strategy that strengthens Jiniso’s position as a relevant and authentic local fashion brand in a highly competitive social media landscape are presented in Table 1 below. The table summarizes the main findings and discussion based on micro-influencer characteristics and their contributions to building Jiniso’s brand awareness.

Tabel 1. Summary of Main Findings and Discussion

Aspect	Main Findings and Discussion
Social Status	Authenticity and consistency build trust; symbolic position as opinion leader within digital communities (Mudjia, 2018).
Accessibility	Quick responses and two-way communication increase emotional closeness and audience trust (Putri & Riswandi, 2025).
External Communication	Natural and educational narratives with creative freedom facilitate message acceptance (Sitinjak, 2021).
Suitability	Influencers’ values and lifestyles align with the brand, supporting authenticity and loyalty (Silalahi, 2021).
Credibility & Influence	Transparency, selective endorsements, and personal narratives strengthen influence on purchase intention (Weismueller et al., 2020).

Brand Exposure	Soft exposure strategy, digital community, and hashtags expand organic reach (Carolina & Sari, 2024).
Customer Engagement	Real-time interaction, co-creation, and user-generated content build intimate and participatory relationships (Simon, 2016).
Electronic Word of Mouth	Horizontal spread through hashtags, reposts, and testimonials strengthens collective opinion and brand recall (Addis, 2025).
Strategy Integration	Two Step Flow approach with flexible collaboration and authentic narratives enhance brand message resonance within digital communities (Kozinets et al., 2010).

The results and discussion of this study demonstrate that micro-influencers play a crucial role in building and strengthening Jiniso's brand awareness through authentic, personal, and interactive communication approaches. Characteristics such as genuine social status, responsive accessibility, natural communication style, alignment of values and lifestyle, and maintained credibility enable micro-influencers to establish strong emotional connections between the brand and its audience. Their contributions in expanding brand exposure, enhancing consumer engagement, and driving message dissemination through organic electronic word of mouth prove that collaboration with micro-influencers is an effective digital marketing strategy aligned with current consumer behavior. Through an adaptive and collaborative strategic integration, Jiniso has successfully solidified its market position while building sustainable audience loyalty within a highly competitive digital environment. These findings provide valuable insights for developing influencer-based marketing communications that are relevant and adaptive in the ever-evolving digital era.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study highlights the novelty in understanding the role of micro-influencers as key opinion leaders (KOLs) who effectively build and strengthen brand awareness for the local brand Jiniso within the digital landscape. The research reveals that authentic, personal, and interactive communication strategies including the authenticity of social status, responsive accessibility, natural communication narratives, alignment of values and lifestyle, and maintained credibility significantly contribute to creating strong emotional connections between the brand and its audience. These findings enrich the field of digital communication by emphasizing the importance of adaptive and flexible collaboration between brands and micro-influencers in addressing the dynamic behavior of Generation Z consumers, who demand honesty, closeness, and active participation. From a practical perspective, this study offers strategic guidance for digital marketing practitioners, particularly local brands aiming to strengthen their market position in a highly competitive and rapidly changing environment. By affirming the effectiveness of the Two Step Flow communication model adapted to the digital ecosystem, this research also contributes theoretically to the development of influencer marketing and community-based communication studies. Overall, the study demonstrates that successful digital marketing depends not only on broad reach but also on the quality of relationships and meaning constructed through authentic interactions between micro-influencers and their audiences.

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