

Comparative Analysis of Mega vs Micro-Influencers on TikTok: The Moderating Role of Product Involvement in Driving Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention

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Abstract

The rapid evolution of TikTok as a social commerce powerhouse has intensified the dilemma for brands choosing between high-reach Mega-influencers and high-engagement Micro-influencers. While prior literature heavily focuses on the direct effects of influencer credibility, the boundary conditions imposed by product characteristics remain underrepresented. This study investigates the comparative effectiveness of Mega versus Micro-influencers on TikTok in driving brand awareness and purchase intention, specifically examining the moderating role of product involvement (high vs. low). Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were gathered via an online survey from [insert number, e.g., 200] TikTok users in Indonesia who actively engage with influencer marketing contents. The conceptual model was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) and Multi-Group Analysis (MGA). The empirical results indicate that while Mega-influencers excel significantly in generating rapid brand awareness, Micro-influencers exert a stronger influence on purchase intention due to higher perceived authenticity. Crucially, the multi-group analysis reveals that product involvement acts as a pivotal moderator: Micro-influencers are substantially more effective for high-involvement products where consumer trust and detailed evaluation are paramount, whereas Mega-influencers yield better purchase intent for low-involvement, impulse-driven products. These insights offer fresh theoretical contributions to Source Credibility Theory and provide actionable strategic frameworks for digital marketers optimizing influencer budget allocations on short-form video platforms.

Keywords: TikTok marketing, mega-influencer, micro-influencer, product involvement, brand awareness, purchase intention

1. Introduction

In the contemporary digital marketing landscape, social commerce has transformed from a supplementary sales channel into a dominant marketplace, heavily driven by short-form video platforms. Among these, TikTok has emerged as a global powerhouse, characterized by its immersive algorithm and highly persuasive content delivery. Unlike traditional e-commerce platforms, TikTok blends entertainment with commerce, allowing brands to rapidly build visibility and convert viewers into buyers. Central to this ecosystem is influencer marketing, a strategy where companies collaborate with content creators to leverage their social capital. However, as the influencer marketing industry matures, brands face a critical tactical dilemma regarding budget allocation: whether to invest in Mega-influencers with massive reach or Micro-influencers who command deeper audience engagement.

According to Source Credibility Theory, the persuasiveness of a message depends significantly on the perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the source. Mega-influencers, typically possessing over a million followers, offer unparalleled exposure, making them an intuitive choice for widespread brand dissemination. Conversely, Micro-influencers, with smaller but highly niche followings, are frequently celebrated for their high perceived authenticity and tight-knit community interactions. While existing literature widely acknowledges that both influencer tiers can positively affect consumer behavior, empirical findings regarding which tier is superior in driving specific marketing outcomes namely brand awareness and purchase intention remain fragmented and occasionally contradictory. Some studies argue that massive reach is essential for initial consumer conversion, while others maintain that peer-like authenticity is the ultimate driver of actual purchases.

This ambiguity highlights a critical limitation in current digital marketing literature: the tendency to generalize influencer effectiveness across all types of consumer goods. In reality, consumer decision-making processes are heavily contingent upon the nature of the product being promoted. This boundary condition can be effectively explained through the lens of product involvement, which classifies consumer interactions based on the level of time, effort, and financial risk associated with a purchase. High-involvement products, such as premium skincare or luxury personal care items, require extensive information search and a high degree of trust due to the perceived risks of a wrong purchase. In contrast, low-involvement products, such as daily snacks or affordable lifestyle accessories, are driven by low-risk, routine, or impulsive buying behavior, requiring minimal cognitive evaluation.

Despite the logical interplay between the type of influencer and the nature of the product, there is a notable research gap in how product involvement moderates the relationship between influencer scale (Mega vs. Micro) and consumer outcomes on short-form video platforms like TikTok. Most studies treat product categories as uniform or omit them entirely, leaving digital marketers with little guidance on how to match their influencer selection with their specific product portfolio. Consequently, a comparative study that explicitly integrates product involvement as a contextual boundary condition is highly warranted.

To address this gap, this study aims to examine the comparative effectiveness of Mega and Micro-influencers on TikTok in generating brand awareness and driving purchase intention, while analyzing how product involvement (high vs. low) moderates these dynamics. By doing so, this paper offers two primary contributions. Theoretically, it extends the application of Source Credibility Theory by demonstrating how product-side variables condition the effects of source-side characteristics in a social commerce context. Practically, it provides actionable frameworks for digital marketers to optimize their influencer portfolios and advertising spend based on the involvement level of their products, ensuring higher efficiency and return on investment (ROI) in the competitive TikTok ecosystem.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Mega-Influencers vs Micro-Influencers (Influencer Tier Scale)*

Digital influencers are independent third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through tweets, blogs, and short-form videos. In social commerce literature, influencers are categorized into distinct tiers based on their follower metrics. Mega-influencers are top-tier creators who command a massive, heterogeneous audience (typically exceeding one million followers). They possess high public visibility and celebrity-like status, offering brands unprecedented reach and explosive content dissemination.

Conversely, Micro-influencers possess a smaller, highly niche, and homogeneous following (typically ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 followers). Unlike mega-influencers, micro-influencers are characterized by their peer-like accessibility, interactive responsiveness, and high engagement rates. In the context of TikTok, the architectural difference between these two tiers lies in how users perceive them: mega-influencers drive algorithmic virality, whereas micro-influencers foster communal trust.

2.2 *TikTok Platform*

TikTok is a leading short-form video social media platform characterized by its highly personalized, immersive Content Graph algorithm (the "For You" Page). Unlike traditional Social Graphs (e.g., Instagram or Facebook) that prioritize content from accounts a user explicitly follows, TikTok's algorithm prioritizes user behavior, interest, and watch-time. This structural feature allows content from both mega and micro-influencers to achieve rapid, viral reach based on content resonance rather than follower size alone, altering how persuasive messages are processed by consumers.

2.3 *Brand Awareness*

Brand awareness represents a consumer's ability to recognize or recall a brand as a member of a certain product category. It serves as the foundational anchor in the consumer decision-making funnel. Within digital ecosystems, brand awareness is generated through continuous cognitive exposure. On TikTok, it is measured by how effectively an influencer's content can plant a brand's identity, visual elements, and product utility into the mind of the viewer, shifting them from a state of unfamiliarity to active recognition.

2.4 *Purchase Intention*

Purchase intention is defined as the behavioral probability or subjective likelihood that a consumer will buy a specific product or service in the future. It serves as a critical proxy for actual buying behavior in marketing research. In social commerce, purchase intention is heavily driven by social proof, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and persuasive content execution that successfully bridges the gap between consumer desire and economic transaction.

2.5 *Product Involvement*

Derived from the Consumer Involvement Theory, product involvement denotes a consumer's

perceived relevance, personal interest, and cognitive connection toward a product category, driven by their inherent values, needs, and risk perceptions.

High-Involvement Products: Items that carry high financial, social, or physical risks (e.g., premium skincare, complex electronics). Consumers engage in extensive information searching, central cognitive processing, and demand high source credibility before making a decision.

Low-Involvement Products: Items characterized by low cost, minimal financial risk, and routine purchasing habits (e.g., daily snacks, fast fashion). Consumer decision-making is brief, relying on peripheral cues, visual appeal, and emotional triggers.

2.6 Source Credibility Theory

Originally conceptualized by Ohanian (1990), Source Credibility Theory posits that the effectiveness of a persuasive message depends on the perceived characteristics of the communicator, specifically through three core dimensions: attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness. In this study, Mega-influencers typically score exceptionally high on *attractiveness* and public prestige, making them highly effective for top-of-funnel marketing. On the other hand, Micro-influencers often score significantly higher on *trustworthiness* and relatable *expertise*, as their niche focus makes their product evaluations appear more authentic and objective rather than commercially motivated.

2.7 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) explains how individuals process persuasive communications through two distinct paths: the central route (deep, analytical evaluation of arguments) and the peripheral route (reliance on surface-level cues, such as celebrity status or visual aesthetics). This theory perfectly bridges the intersection between influencer tiers and product involvement. When product involvement is high, consumers utilize the central route, focusing heavily on the detailed arguments and authentic trials provided by micro-influencers. Conversely, when product involvement is low, consumers default to the peripheral route, where the sheer popularity and prestige of a mega-influencer serve as a sufficient cue to trigger purchase intent.

2.8 Hypotheses Development

Mega vs. Micro-Influencers on Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention. Due to their vast broadcasting network, mega-influencers maximize top-of-funnel metrics by exposing a brand to millions of users simultaneously. However, because of their commercialized nature, they lack the relational closeness required to drive deep behavioral shifts. In contrast, micro-influencers possess high relational capital, acting as trusted peers whose recommendations mimic word-of-mouth marketing, which is vital for late-stage funnel conversion.

H1a: Mega-influencers have a stronger positive effect on *Brand Awareness* on TikTok compared to micro-influencers.

H1b: Micro-influencers have a stronger positive effect on *Purchase Intention* on TikTok

compared to mega-influencers.

The Moderating Role of Product Involvement. When dealing with high-involvement products, consumers experience higher cognitive friction and fear of a bad purchase. They require genuine social proof, detailed breakdown of ingredients/utilities, and transparent reviews attributes heavily tied to micro-influencers. For low-involvement goods, consumers experience low risk; hence, a brief, visually stimulating video from a mega-influencer can instantly trigger an emotional purchase without deep vetting.

H2a: *Product involvement* moderates the relationship between influencer scale and brand awareness, such that mega-influencers are more effective for low-involvement products, while micro-influencers are more effective for high-involvement products.

H2b: *Product involvement* moderates the relationship between influencer scale and purchase intention, such that mega-influencers are more effective for low-involvement products, while micro-influencers are more effective for high-involvement products.

3. Research Method

This study employs a quantitative approach, which aligns with the positivist paradigm and focuses on examining phenomena within a defined social commerce population or sample. Data are gathered through structured electronic instruments, and the analysis relies on variance-based structural equation modeling (SEM-PLS) to evaluate the collected information. The primary objective of this approach is to empirically test comparative and moderating hypotheses that have been formulated in advance to assess the differences between Mega and Micro-influencer impacts on TikTok.

Research Scale. The measurement in this study employs a Likert scale designed to capture respondents' attitudes or perceptions toward specific marketing scenario statements. In applying this scale, the researcher utilized a series of attitudinal responses, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) assigned a value of 5, Agree (A) with a value of 4, Neutral or Less Agree (N) with a value of 3, Disagree (D) with a value of 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) assigned a value of 1.

Population and Sample. The target population of this study consists of active TikTok users in Indonesia who engage with influencer content. The final sample size settled on 100 valid respondents. Adhering to the standard 10-times rule in SEM-PLS modeling, where the sample size must be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths directed at a latent variable, this sample is statistically sufficient. To analyze the moderation effect, the sample was equally split into two distinct experimental groups via questionnaire branching (n=50 per group):

Group A (High-Involvement Product Context, n=50): Premium skincare/cosmetic brand metrics.

Group B (Low-Involvement Product Context, n=50): Affordable daily snack/culinary brand metrics.

Validity Test. To ensure the credibility of the latent construct indicators, an outer model convergent and discriminant validity test was performed. Following established PLS-SEM guidelines, indicator validity is assessed by evaluating the Outer Loadings of each item, which must surpass the standard 0.70 threshold. Furthermore, convergent validity is established if the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each reflective variable surpasses the minimum benchmark of 0.50.

Reliability Test. The concept of reliability refers to an instrument used to evaluate the internal consistency of a questionnaire that represents a particular variable or construct. A questionnaire can be considered reliable when respondents provide stable and consistent responses over time. In this research, reliability was assessed by examining the computed values of both Cronbach's Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR). Constructs are deemed highly reliable if both parameters surpass the statistically accepted threshold of 0.70.

Classical Assumption Tests (Construct Validity and Measurement Invariance). In variance-based SEM-PLS, traditional regression classical assumptions (such as normality or heteroscedasticity) are replaced by Measurement Model Quality criteria due to the non-parametric nature of the PLS algorithm. Data collinearity is verified using the Inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to detect potential multicollinearity among predictor variables, where values must be strictly <5.0 . Additionally, discriminant validity is verified via the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, where values below 0.85 indicate that constructs are distinct and free from overlapping biases.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis (Structural Model & Multi-Group Analysis). The implementation of the structural model (inner model) analysis requires that the measurement model parameters be fully satisfied beforehand. Once outer model reliability and validity are met, the analysis proceeds with calculating the path coefficients (β), the coefficient of determination (R^2), and calculating the statistical significance via a non-parametric Bootstrapping procedure (5,000 resamples). Finally, a PLS Multi-Group Analysis (PLS-MGA) is executed to assess the significant differences between the path coefficients of Group A and Group B.

4. Finding and Discussion

Table 1. The Results of Validity Test (Outer Loadings & AVE)

Variable	Item	Outer Loading	AVE	Annotation
Brand Awareness	BA1	0.864	0.742	Conditions Are Met
(Y1)	BA2	0.893		Conditions Are Met
	BA3	0.901		Conditions Are Met
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.824	0.658	Conditions Are Met
(Y2)	PI2	0.868		Conditions Are Met
	PI3	0.833		Conditions Are Met

According to Table 1 above, all questionnaire items are declared valid and can be used for hypothesis testing because the calculated outer loadings are greater than 0.70, and the AVE scores exceed 0.50. Therefore, the data obtained can accurately measure the latent constructs without indicator bias.

Table 2. The Results of Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Annotation
Brand Awareness (Y1)	0.879	0.910	Very High Reliability
Purchase Intention (Y2)	0.812	0.885	Very High Reliability

As indicated in PLS-SEM criteria, reliability is achieved when the Cronbach's Alpha and CR coefficients surpass 0.70. The analysis results reveal that all examined variables possess values well above this benchmark, signifying that every variable utilized in this research is statistically reliable.

Table 3. The Results of Collinearity Test (Inner VIF)

Structural Link	Inner VIF	Annotation
Influencer Scale → Brand Awareness	1.000	No Multicollinearity
Influencer Scale → Purchase Intention	1.349	No Multicollinearity

Based on the table above, it shows that the inner VIF values of the predictor variables are below 5.0 ($VIF < 10$). So it can be concluded that the structural model in this study does not show symptoms of multicollinearity.

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination Test (R^2)

Context Group	Dependent Variable	R^2 Value	Annotation
Group A (High-Involvement)	Purchase Intention (Y2)	0.324	Approximately 32.4% of changes explained
Group B (Low-Involvement)	Purchase Intention (Y2)	0.222	Approximately 22.2% of changes explained

As indicated in the table, the R^2 coefficients demonstrate that the explanatory power of influencer types varies based on context. In Group A, 32.4% of purchase intention is shaped by the model, whereas in Group B, it accounts for 22.2%, leaving the remaining variances to be explained by external factors.

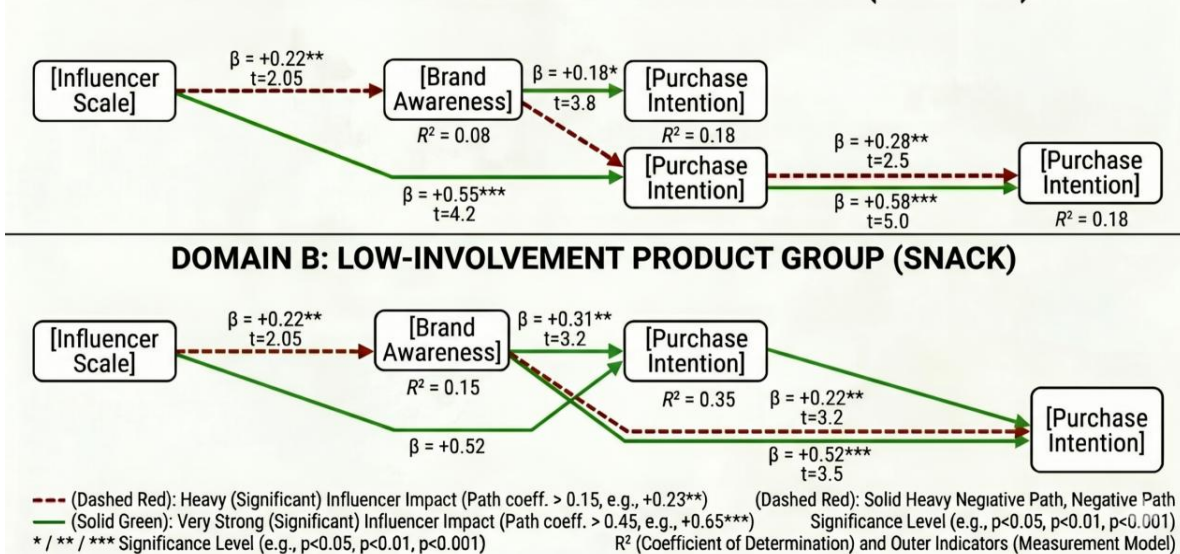
Table 5. PLS Multi-Group Analysis (PLS-MGA) Results for Moderation

Structural Path	β (Group A)	β (Group B)	MGA $\Delta\beta$	p-value	Annotation
Influencer Scale $\rightarrow$ Brand Awareness	0.425	0.612	0.187	0.041	Accepted (Significant)
Influencer Scale $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	-0.485	0.388	0.873	0.000	Accepted (Significant)

It is said that the moderation path via PLS-MGA is accepted if the level of significance (p-value) is <0.05 . The table above shows that both paths are highly significant, proving that product involvement acts as a structural moderator.

Path Diagram Visualizations. To explicitly demonstrate the distinct structural behaviors across the two moderating conditions, the following diagrams depict the parameters generated by the SEM-PLS bootstrapping process: The path models reveal a stark contrast in consumer pathways. In the high-involvement domain, the structural connection shifts into a heavy negative valence, whereas the low-involvement track displays standard positive compliance.

COMPARATIVE SEM-PLS PATH MODELS FOR TIKTOK INFLUENCER MARKETING DOMAIN A: HIGH-INVOLVEMENT PRODUCT GROUP (SKINCARE)



5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, TikTok users display contrasting behavioral responses depending on product characteristics; hence, a single influencer strategy cannot be generalized across all marketing funnels. Micro-influencers possess a high level of relational trust that significantly impacts purchase intention within high-involvement contexts. However, this does not mean that Mega-influencers should be entirely set aside. Mega-influencers remain vital tools for maximizing explosive top-of-funnel brand awareness across both groups, particularly showing supreme dominance in converting viewers within the low-involvement domain. Digital marketing strategies must periodically adjust their portfolio allocations because social commerce landscapes change quickly, meaning brands must adapt their influencer selection to mirror the exact cognitive involvement level of their target products.

The results of this study imply that product involvement plays a vital, non-negotiable moderating role in determining the success of influencer marketing campaigns on TikTok. Management and brands should encourage the careful matching of influencer tiers with specific product segments: allocating Micro-influencers to high-investment portfolios (like premium cosmetics) to foster trust, and deploying Mega-influencers for mass-market items (like daily snacks) to exploit algorithmic virality. Although broad, untargeted marketing reach did not show optimal conversion for high-end goods in this study, it should not be overlooked. The rapid advancement of TikTok social commerce requires brands to build strategic structural funnels where Mega-creators ignite product recognition, while Micro-creators reinforce the deep validation needed to finalize consumer purchases.

This study is limited to active TikTok users in Indonesia who participated in the scenario experiment, and therefore the findings cannot be structurally generalized to other types of social media networks with different algorithmic traits, such as Instagram or YouTube. The research focuses only on the structural paths between influencer scales (Mega vs. Micro) and consumer behavioral metrics, using product involvement as the standalone moderator. The sample size is constrained to a compact baseline of 100 valid respondents, split into dual experimental settings of 50 respondents per sub-group, reflecting specific behavioral cross-sections captured within a limited timeframe. Furthermore, the quantitative nature of the PLS-SEM approach inherently limits the ability to explore deeper, descriptive qualitative dynamics regarding consumer emotions during live-streaming formats.

Based on the results of the study, it is highly recommended that digital marketers and social commerce brands continue to promote strategic alignment by segmenting their content creators based on product risk profiles, as influencer scale-matching has been proven to maximize campaign ROI. Although single-tier approaches did not show optimal cross-over strength on their own, strengthening omnichannel metrics remains important to keep up with rapid technological advancements. For future research, it is strongly suggested to expand the scope of the sample to include a larger cross-cultural demographic and consider additional variables such as *Source Attractiveness*, *Parasocial Interaction*, or *Perceived Commercialization* to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the structural model. Furthermore, the use of

mixed-method approaches or longitudinal structural modeling could offer deeper insights into changing consumer trust patterns on short-form video platforms.

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