

Collaboration Strategies with Micro-Influencers: Building Trust Through Community

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the government's crisis communication strategy in dealing with misinformation in the digital era, focusing on the effectiveness of collaboration with micro-influencers in building public trust through a community approach. The method used is Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which allows the systematic identification, evaluation, and synthesis of scientific literature. The literature search process is carried out through databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ProQuest using relevant keywords. The inclusion criteria include publications in the last five years (2020–2024), written in English or Indonesian, and contain empirical data related to micro-influencers, audience trust, and community collaboration strategies. From the selection process, as many as 10 selected scientific articles were analyzed thematically to identify patterns of collaboration, community approaches, and trust-forming factors. The results of the study show that an effective crisis communication strategy must be adaptive, transparent, and collaborative, and involve digital actors such as micro-influencers who have closeness to the community. This collaboration has been proven to be able to strengthen the delivery of validated information and build public trust. The study recommends reforming the government's public communication policy to be more responsive to digital dynamics, placing trust and public engagement as the main foundation in dealing with the information crisis.

Keywords: Micro-influencers, collaboration strategies, digital marketing, consumer trust, digital community, brand engagement, social media

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media in the past decade has revolutionized the way brands interact with consumers. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter are not only spaces for sharing information and entertainment, but also a major arena in modern digital marketing strategies. This change shifts the approach to communication from one-way (such as television and print advertising) to interactive and community-based. Consumers are now not only the recipients of messages, but also actors who actively shape opinions, share experiences, and influence other people's purchasing decisions through comments, reviews, or content of their own creation (Widyatmoko et al., 2025). Social media enables personalization of messages at scale, opening up opportunities for brands to reach more specific and



relevant market segments. This is where the role of micro-influencers becomes increasingly important. They have a smaller but highly engaged audience, and are considered more authentic and relatable than large-scale influencers or celebrities. Changing consumer preferences that increasingly value authenticity, transparency, and personal connection have led micro-influencers to become one of the spearheads in community-based marketing strategies (Yulliyanti, 2021).

Over the past ten years, social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (X), TikTok, and YouTube have grown drastically both in terms of the number of users, features, and their influence in daily life. This development not only changed the way people communicate, but also fundamentally changed the way brands (brands) establish relationships with their consumers. If previously the interaction between brands and consumers was one-way through television, print, or radio advertising, now communication is two-way, direct, and real-time. Consumers are not only recipients of messages, but can also provide responses, inputs, or even criticism openly through social media. This forces brands to be more adaptive, responsive, and transparent in building public image and trust (Nadia Afifah & Septi Kuntari, 2025).

In addition, social media allows brands to build communities, create interactive content, and reach their target market more precisely and efficiently. The marketing process is no longer just focused on product promotion, but also on building relationships, creating experiences, and strengthening consumer engagement emotionally. Thus, social media has become a very strategic tool in transforming the way brands interact with their consumers in the digital era (Reynandya Pratama et al., 2025).

Today's digital marketing landscape no longer relies solely on how wide the reach of a campaign is, but emphasizes more on how deep the engagement and trust can be built between brands, influencers, and target communities. In the fast-paced and competitive digital era, trust is the new currency. Therefore, the success of a collaboration strategy with micro-influencers relies heavily on understanding the dynamics of social media and how brands are able to adapt to these changes. Brands that are able to harness the power of community authentically, through the right micro-influencers, are more likely to build long-term relationships and stronger consumer loyalty. (Girsang, 2020).

In order for collaborations with micro-influencers to run effectively and provide optimal results for brands, it is important for marketers to have a deep understanding of how social media works and characteristics. This includes various aspects, such as platform algorithms, emerging content trends, user interaction patterns, to audience preferences for authentic communication styles. The dynamics of social media are rapidly changing and are heavily influenced by social, cultural, and technological contexts. What is relevant today may not be interesting tomorrow. Therefore, without a good understanding of these changes, brands can make mistakes in choosing influencers, crafting messages, or determining when and how to deliver campaigns (Kurniati, 2019).

The success of collaboration also depends on the ability of brands to tailor their messages to feel natural and in line with the micro-influencer's

communication style, so that it doesn't come across as forced advertising. In addition, brands need to understand the influencer's audience, because each micro-influencer has a community with specific interests, values, and expectations. In short, to maximize the impact of collaboration with micro-influencers, brands must be literate in digital social dynamics, flexible in strategy, and able to read and respond to social media developments carefully (Karagiorgou, 2025).

In today's digital era, there has been a significant shift in consumer behavior patterns, especially in terms of purchasing decision-making. One of the most striking shifts is the diminished effectiveness of traditional advertising such as television, radio, billboards, or print ads, and consumers' increased trust in personalized recommendations, especially those coming from individuals they know or follow consistently, such as micro-influencers on social media. This is because traditional advertising is often perceived as one-sided, manipulative, and less authentic. Consumers are increasingly aware that messages in ads are made to sell, not to build relationships. On the other hand, personal recommendations from friends, family, or influencers they trust are seen as more honest, relevant, and based on real experience. In this context, micro-influencers are strategically positioned because they often display their daily lives, use products in real life, and interact directly with their followers, thus creating a sense of familiarity and authenticity (Girsang, 2020).

Some studies show that more than 80% of online consumers trust recommendations from other individuals over corporate ads, especially if they come in the form of storytelling, honest reviews, or personal experiences. This phenomenon is supported by social psychology known as social proof, which is a person's tendency to follow the decisions of others who are considered relevant or competent. This trust becomes even stronger when recommendations come from communities that share similar values, interests, or backgrounds, as consumers feel that other people's experiences may reflect their own. Therefore, in contemporary marketing strategies, a personalized, relational, and communitative approach through collaboration with micro-influencers is much more effective in building loyalty and driving purchase decisions than conventional advertising approaches that are bulk and generic (Subagio et al., 2020).

Influencers usually already have a loyal community of followers who believe in their opinions, brands use this trust to instill a positive image, introduce products, and influence purchasing decisions subtly but effectively. In this case, influencers not only convey information, but also help shape consumer perception of a product or service. Thus, influencers are not just a promotional tool, but a figure who is trusted and respected by their audience, so that they have the capacity to build strong trust between brands and consumers, especially in the midst of conditions where consumers are increasingly selective and critical of commercial or excessive advertising (Nabilah et al., 2023).

Micro-influencers are individuals who have a relatively small number of followers, generally between 1,000 and 100,000 people, but their advantage lies in

the quality of their relationships with their followers. In contrast to celebrities or macro-influencers who have a wide reach but are one-way and impersonal, micro-influencers tend to build more intimate, authentic, and sustainable communication with their community. Because of this, their followers often show a high level of loyalty and engagement either through comments, likes, direct messages, and participation in discussions or campaign activities (Haoe et al., 2023).

This trust arises because micro-influencers are considered more relatable lifestyles, communication languages, and the content they share is felt to be more "real" and close to the audience's daily lives. They are not untouchable or overly perfect figures, but ordinary people who provide opinions, reviews, or personal experiences of a product or service (Titania & Sudradjat, 2024). This image creates a perception of authenticity that is very important in building trust in digital marketing, especially in an era when consumers are increasingly critical of manipulative or excessive promotional content. In addition, the high engagement rate of micro-influencers is an important indicator of the effectiveness of community-based marketing campaigns. This engagement not only shows the audience's attention, but also the potential for the spread of the message organically through digital conversations, testimonials, and collective support from the community. As such, micro-influencers are well-suited for strategies that emphasize emotional and social connection rather than just exposure. They are able to build a deep trust ecosystem, where the audience becomes not only a buyer, but also a part of the brand's community. In this context, brands that want to establish long-term relationships with consumers and strengthen their position in the digital community, need to see micro-influencers not just as a promotional tool, but as strategic partners in creating shared value and building consumer loyalty based on social relationships (Maulana et al., 2023).

While micro-influencers have advantages such as high engagement and emotional closeness to their followers, there are still many brands that haven't fully maximized these opportunities in their marketing strategies. Some brands may still focus more on working with big celebrities or mega-influencers who have a very large number of followers, without considering that micro-influencers can have a more effective and efficient impact in certain market segments. In addition, a lack of a deep understanding of how micro-influencers work, such as how to choose the right influencers, manage long-term relationships, or tailor campaign messages to remain authentic, is a hindrance. As a result, the potential of micro-influencers in building trust and increasing engagement is often overlooked or not utilized to the fullest. In other words, there is still a lot of room for brands to optimize their collaboration strategies with micro-influencers in order to achieve greater benefits in building brand awareness, consumer loyalty, and sales conversion through a more personalized and relevant approach (Ninawati Ninawati et al., 2024).

Many parties, especially brands or marketers, still do not have enough knowledge and insight on how to develop and execute effective collaboration strategies with influencers, especially micro-influencers. The right strategy is not

just about conducting a one-time campaign, but rather about building a sustainable and consistent relationship with influencers so that the message conveyed feels more natural and convincing. This ignorance causes collaborations to be transactional and temporary, thus unable to create a strong emotional bond and deep trust from the audience in the brand. In fact, building audience trust requires time, continuous communication, and a sincere and transparent approach. Therefore, without an adequate understanding of how to forge long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships, brands risk missing out on the opportunity to create more significant and lasting impact through collaborations with influencers. This is very important so that the audience really feels connected and believes in the brand being promoted. (Hidayah & Musamma, 2024).

Choosing influencers who are not aligned with the values, vision, or brand image can pose various negative risks for a brand. If the chosen influencer has a communication style, behavior, or reputation that is contrary to the brand's character, the marketing message conveyed can feel inauthentic and even cause confusion among consumers. This inconsistency can lead to a decrease in consumer trust, as the audience may feel that the brand is inconsistent or simply chasing popularity without regard for quality and integrity. In addition, controversial or problematic influencers can also have a negative impact on the brand's reputation, such as public criticism or boycotts from customers. Therefore, in choosing an influencer, brands must make a careful selection by considering the alignment between the personal value of the influencer and the brand's image and strategic goals. This is important so that collaboration can run harmoniously, effectively, and strengthen the brand's position in the eyes of consumers (Jayanti & Hidayati, 2022).

This study aims to review in depth effective strategies for collaborating with micro-influencers, focusing on how such partnerships can strengthen consumer trust through a more personalized and relevant community-based approach. In addition, this article also presents practical recommendations based on case studies and best practices in the field, so that it can be a reference for brands or marketers in designing and implementing influencer campaigns that are sustainable, on target, and of long-term value.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant scientific literature on collaboration strategies with micro-influencers in building trust through the community. This method was chosen because it is able to present an in-depth and systematic understanding of trends, concepts, and key findings from various previous studies. The main question that was the focus of the study was: "What are some effective strategies in collaboration with micro-influencers to build audience trust through a community approach?" The literature search process is carried out systematically using a number of scientific databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. Keywords used in the search process include: "micro-influencer marketing", "trust in influencer marketing",

"community-based marketing", and "collaboration strategy with influencers". Articles included in this study must meet the inclusion criteria, namely: (1) published in the last five years (2020–2024), (2) written in English or Indonesian, (3) discussing topics related to micro-influencers, audience trust, and community-based collaboration strategies, and (4) being scientific research articles that have gone through a peer-review process. Articles that do not meet academic standards, are opinion or blog, and do not present empirical data are excluded from the selection. The selection is carried out in two stages, namely screening based on titles and abstracts, and full-text review to ensure the suitability and quality of the content. From the selection process carried out, as many as 10 articles that were most relevant and met all inclusion criteria were further analyzed. The selected articles were analyzed using a thematic approach to identify the collaboration strategies used, community approach models, and factors that contribute to building audience trust. The synthesis process is carried out narratively, by compiling the main findings from each study to form a comprehensive picture that can be used as the basis for strategic recommendations for business people or brands who want to establish effective collaboration with micro-influencers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Micro-Influencers and Their Role in Digital Communities

Micro-influencers are individuals who have a number of followers on social media in the range of 1,000 to 100,000 people. Although this number is not as big as celebrities or mega-influencers, micro-influencers actually have their own strengths in reaching audiences more personally and effectively. They are usually active in a specific niche or community, such as a healthy lifestyle, natural beauty, education, or a specific hobby, so they are able to attract a truly relevant audience (Febriani, 2022).

The main advantage of micro-influencers lies in the authentic impact and emotional closeness they build with their followers. Because the content shared feels more real and not made up, it's easier for followers to trust the opinions or recommendations provided. This makes their engagement rate tend to be higher compared to digital celebrities who have a much wider audience but are less personal (Erfiana & Purnamasari, 2023). In the digital community ecosystem, the role of micro-influencers is very strategic as a bridge of communication that is more human between brands and audiences. They convey brand messages in a natural and relatable way, so that they can build emotional relationships and increase trust in the brand. Therefore, collaboration with micro-influencers is a very relevant approach for brands that want to enter the community in a more subtle, authentic, and long-term impact way (Mulyanto & Rahayu, 2024).

Effective Collaboration Strategies between Brands and Micro-Influencers

In building strong relationships between brands and micro-influencers, it is important to implement a value-based collaboration approach. This means that brands not only choose influencers based on the number of followers, but

also based on the same vision, mission, and values adhered to. This alignment creates a more natural and convincing partnership, so that the message conveyed to the audience feels genuine and in line with the character of both. In addition, the type of content produced in collaboration also plays a big role. Narrative and non-promotional content, such as personal experience stories, honest reviews, or the process of using a product on a daily basis, have been shown to be more able to build an emotional connection and trust from followers than direct ads that feel rigid or forced (Hidayat & Ambarwati Sukmono, 2024).

In a long-term strategy, brands should empower micro-influencers as brand advocates, not just one-time "endorsers". As an advocate, influencers will actively and voluntarily defend, introduce, and recommend brands because they do have a strong personal attachment. Finally, the main key to maintaining this relationship is transparency and honesty in communication. Audiences in the digital age are very sensitive to inauthentic content. Therefore, openness about cooperation and clarity of message will help maintain the trust that has been built, while strengthening the brand's reputation and the credibility of influencers in the eyes of their community (Manullang & Rahmanita, 2025).

The Role of Community in Strengthening the Impact of Collaboration

In the context of collaboration between brands and micro-influencers, digital communities play an important role as an interaction space that strengthens emotional engagement and audience loyalty. This community is not just a collection of followers, but an active ecosystem where there is an exchange of information, experiences, and values that form social attachment. One of the main strengths of the community is the two-way interaction between influencers and followers. Influencers who actively reply to comments, answer questions, or hold online discussions create a high sense of closeness and involvement. This makes followers feel valued and part of a larger conversation, rather than just a passive audience of product promotion (Zahria, 2024).

In addition, the community also functions as a medium to strengthen brand messages through social proof. When many community members share positive experiences with a product or service, it creates a collective trust that encourages other followers to give it a try. This domino effect is very influential in building brand credibility, because recommendations that come from fellow community members are often more trustworthy than formal advertising. Thus, the existence of a community not only complements the collaboration between brands and micro-influencers, but also expands the reach and strengthens the impact of campaigns organically and sustainably (Adistia et al., 2024).

Factors That Increase Audience Trust

To build audience trust in collaboration between brands and micro-influencers, there are several key factors that need to be considered. First, the consistency of messages and imagery between brands and influencers is critical. Audiences tend to believe more in collaborations that look natural and in line,

both in terms of values, communication styles, and visual branding. The mismatch between the influencer's image and the brand's message can create an impression of inauthenticity. Second, influencer credibility plays a huge role in shaping audience perception. This credibility is based not only on the number of followers, but also on honest shared personal experiences as well as real testimonials from the use of the product or service. Stories that are relatable and transparent tend to be more convincing than generic promotions (Tarto & Gunawan, 2019).

The third factor is active interaction between influencers and followers, such as replying to comments, holding a question and answer (Q&A) session, or a live session. This form of two-way communication creates emotional engagement and social closeness, which ultimately increases trust levels. Finally, the use of user-generated content (UGC) – i.e. content created by consumers or community members themselves – is also an important element in strengthening the authenticity of the message. UGC provides social proof that a product or service is indeed used and liked by others, so that the audience will feel more confident and motivated to believe and participate. Overall, these factors work synergistically in creating strong and sustainable relationships between brands, influencers, and the digital communities they reach (Budiana & Amin, 2021).

Challenges in Collaborating with Micro-Influencers

While collaboration with micro-influencers offers many benefits, there are still challenges that brands must face to ensure the success of this strategy. One of the main challenges is improper selection of influencers. If a brand chooses an influencer who is not in line with its values, image, or target audience, this can actually damage the brand's reputation and cause distrust from the public. The next challenge is the risk of overcommercialization, which is when collaboration feels too forced as an excessive promotional effort. This can lower the authenticity of the content and make the audience feel that the influencer is only motivated by financial gain, not because they believe in the product. Audience trust can also be lost if collaboration is not communicated honestly and naturally (Qorib, 2024).

In addition, measuring the Return on Investment (ROI) of community-based campaigns is also an obstacle in itself. Not all collaboration results can be quantitatively measured in the short term, as the impact is more relational and long-term, such as increased loyalty or brand influence in the digital community. Finally, there is the risk of over-reliance on one or more influencers, without building an ongoing collaboration strategy. If brands focus too much on one figure, then the sustainability of the campaign is very vulnerable to being disrupted if the relationship ends. Therefore, a flexible and community-based strategic approach is needed, so that collaboration remains relevant and far-reaching in the future (Magafira et al., 2024).

Strategic Recommendations for Brands

In order for collaboration with micro-influencers to yield maximum results, brands need to implement a targeted and sustainable strategic approach. The first recommended step is to carefully map and select influencers, taking into account their value match, audience characteristics, and engagement history. By choosing influencers who have a shared vision and a relevant community base, brands can reach a truly potential audience and are easily emotionally connected. Second, collaboration should not be temporary or transactional. Building long-term relationships with influencers allows for the creation of a consistent and credible narrative in the eyes of the audience. Influencers who have worked with brands for a long time tend to be more trusted because they are considered to really know the product and the brand's values (Puspitasari et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the communication approach also needs to be considered. Brands are advised to prioritize storytelling and real experiences rather than just explicit promotions. Content that tells how the product is used in daily life, the challenges faced, and the solutions offered, will feel more natural and build an emotional attachment with the audience. Finally, brands can involve influencers directly in the creative process, such as in product development, campaign design, or communication messaging. This engagement not only increases a sense of ownership and authenticity, but also creates more organic collaborations, as influencers feel part of the brand's journey, not just a promotional tool. This approach is able to increase loyalty, both from influencers and from the communities they build (Budiono & Yusuf, 2023).

CONCLUSION

In the midst of the rapid flow of digital misinformation, the government's crisis communication strategy must be fast, transparent, adaptive, and collaborative. The success of crisis communication is determined by the integration of information technology, the power of the government's single narrative, and the active involvement of stakeholders in delivering validated information. This study emphasizes the importance of reforming government public communication policies that are responsive to digital dynamics and people's needs for accurate, reliable, and accessible information. This study highlights the urgency of the need for changes or updates in the government's public communication policy to be more in line with the development of digital technology and current societal behavior patterns. In the era of fast-paced and open information, the public not only expects the government to be present as a source of information, but also demands accurate, trustworthy, and easily accessible information through various digital platforms. Therefore, public communication policies can no longer be one-way and rigid, but must be responsive, adaptive, and transparent in conveying information, especially when facing crucial issues, such as crises, disasters, or disinformation. This policy reform is very important so that the government can maintain public trust, build active citizen participation, and create more inclusive and efficient information governance in the midst of the ever-growing flow of digitalization.

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