

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AGE CUE ON CHARITABLE INTENTIONS FOR DISASTER RELIEF IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's high disaster vulnerability has elevated the role of social media influencers in mobilizing charitable support, yet the influence of specific cues such as age particularly among older audiences remains underexplored. This study investigates the impact of social media influencers' age cues on charitable intentions for disaster relief in Indonesia, drawing on social comparison theory. Through three sequential experiments involving Indonesian participants aged 55 and older (N = 120, 140, and 160 respectively), the research examines how influencer age cues affect charitable intentions both directly (assimilation) and indirectly through age identity as a mediator. Additionally, the study explores the moderating roles of disaster severity and community involvement, as well as the boundary conditions of intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints. Study 1, a one-factor between-subjects experiment on Instagram, found that older influencers significantly increase charitable intentions among older audiences. Study 2, a 2×2 factorial design on Facebook, demonstrated that this effect is amplified in severe disaster scenarios. Study 3, a 2×2 factorial design on YouTube, revealed that solo relief efforts strengthen the influence of older influencers compared to collective efforts. Across all studies, age identity mediated the relationship between influencer age cues and charitable intentions. These findings provide theoretical contributions to social comparison theory in influencer marketing and practical implications for disaster management organizations seeking to design effective charitable campaigns targeting older demographics.

Keywords: *age cue; charitable intentions; disaster relief; social comparison theory; social media influencers*

INTRODUCTION

The escalating frequency of natural disasters in Indonesia has underscored the critical need for robust disaster relief

mechanisms. Situated on the Pacific Ring of Fire, Indonesia is particularly vulnerable to a variety of natural



calamities, including earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions. Data from the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) revealed a 15% increase in disaster occurrences in 2023 compared to the previous year, highlighting a marked rise in disaster-related risks nationwide (BNPB, 2023). The consequences of these disasters are far-reaching, affecting physical infrastructure, economic stability, and necessitating urgent humanitarian intervention.

Within this framework, social media has proven to be an indispensable tool for rallying resources and public support. As of 2023, approximately 77% of Indonesians were active on social media platforms, with significant growth observed among younger demographics and the increasingly tech-savvy middle class (APJII, 2023). Social media influencers, characterized by their large followings and substantial influence, play a crucial role in shaping public behaviour and driving support for disaster relief efforts (Iqbal et al., 2023). The characteristics of both content and its creators have been shown to significantly influence the sharing of disaster-related information on social media (Li et al., 2021). Compared to

traditional celebrities, social media influencers often exert a stronger impact on shaping attitudes and behaviors due to their perceived trustworthiness, relatability, and similarity to their audience (Gökerik, 2024). Prior research further emphasizes that congruence between influencers and their audiences is a critical determinant of message effectiveness (Von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021). As a result, influencers can generate positive outcomes, including favourable attitudes toward charitable causes, enhanced trust, increased online engagement, and elevated donation intentions (Ahsan & Rais, 2023). In cause-related marketing contexts, both donation magnitude and source characteristics jointly shape consumers' willingness to give (Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012).

Despite the progress in understanding social media influencer marketing, existing research predominantly focuses on broad characteristics of influencers, such as trustworthiness, credibility, and attractiveness (Iqbal et al., 2023; Schouten et al., 2020), without examining how specific social cues like age affect charitable intentions. Most research focuses on younger demographics, typically under 40 years



old (Belanche et al., 2021; Liu, 2022), often overlooking age cues as a factor influencing charitable behavior. However, age cues are quick identifiers that can significantly influence charitable behavior, especially in societies with prevalent age-related stereotypes (Donizzetti, 2019). Older individuals may respond differently to influencers based on age cues, shaped by experiences and stereotypes such as those suggesting that older people are less competent or more socially isolated (Thakor et al., 2008). At the same time, older adults have been found to derive greater emotional reward from charitable giving than younger adults, reflecting an age-related positivity bias (Bjälkebring et al., 2016). This gap is particularly notable in disaster relief contexts, where influencer characteristics and disaster-related factors may interact in complex ways.

This study draws upon social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), which suggests that individuals evaluate their abilities and opinions by comparing themselves to others. The theory's foundational similarity hypothesis posits that people prefer comparing themselves to similar others. Later research has shown that individuals also compare

with dissimilar others, leading to both assimilation and contrast outcomes (Wheeler & Suls, 2007; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Age identity and age-related attitudes vary substantially across the life span, with older adults generally exhibiting more positive self-directed age attitudes than stereotypes would predict (Chopik & Giasson, 2017). In charitable marketing, age congruence between influencers and audiences may trigger assimilation effects, while age discrepancy may result in contrast effects reducing charitable engagement (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Additionally, the study incorporates the hierarchical leisure constraints model (Hinch et al., 2005) to explain how intrapersonal and interpersonal charitable constraints moderate the relationship between age identity and charitable intentions.

This study aims to investigate how the age cues of social media influencers affect charitable intentions among older Indonesians during real disaster events. Specifically, the research examines: (1) the direct effects of influencer age cues on charitable intentions, (2) the mediating role of age identity, (3) the moderating effects of disaster severity and community involvement, and (4) the



boundary conditions of intrapersonal and interpersonal charitable constraints. Through three sequential experiments across different social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) and disaster types (flood, earthquake, volcanic eruption), this study contributes significant theoretical insights into the role of social cues in influencer marketing and offers practical implications for disaster management organizations in Indonesia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative experimental approach using between-subjects factorial designs across three sequential studies. Study 1 used a one-factor design (influencer age cue: old vs. young) to examine the main effects and mediation of age identity. Study 2 used a 2 (influencer age cue: old vs. young) $\times$ 2 (disaster severity: severe vs. mild) factorial design to investigate moderation by disaster severity. Study 3 used a 2 (influencer age cue: old vs. young) $\times$ 2 (community involvement: solo vs. collective effort) factorial design to examine moderation by community involvement cues. Each study varied the influencer's gender, social media

platform (Instagram in Study 1, Facebook in Study 2, YouTube in Study 3), and disaster type (flood, earthquake, and volcanic eruption, respectively) to enhance external validity. All study designs received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

2. Hypotheses

Based on social comparison theory and the hierarchical leisure constraints model, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Older individuals are more likely to donate to disaster relief efforts promoted by older social media influencers than by younger influencers.
- H2: Perceived age identity significantly mediates the effect of the influencer's age cue on charitable intentions.
- H3: Disaster severity significantly moderates the effect of the influencer's age cue on charitable intentions.
- H4: Disaster severity significantly moderates the mediation effect of age identity between the influencer's age cue and charitable intentions.
- H5: Community involvement cues



significantly moderate the effect of the influencer's age cue on charitable intentions.

H6: Community involvement cues significantly moderate the mediation effect of age identity between the influencer's age cue and charitable intentions.

H7: Intrapersonal constraints significantly moderate the mediating effect of perceived age identity.

H8: Interpersonal constraints significantly moderate the mediating effect of perceived age identity.

3. Participants and Sampling

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, targeting Indonesian individuals aged 55 and older who had internet access and had donated to a charitable cause in the past year. Study 1 involved 120 participants (*Age* = 63.2, *SD* = 5.8; 49.2% female; 85.6% Javanese; 82.5% with at least high school education), conducted in May 2023. Study 2 involved 140 participants (*Age* = 64.1, *SD* = 6.3; 51.4% female; 84.2% Javanese; 79.8% with at least high school education), conducted in July 2023. Study 3 involved 160

participants (*Age* = 63.7, *SD* = 6.0; 50.3% female; 86.9% Javanese; 81.2% with at least high school education), conducted in September 2023. Sample sizes were determined based on power analysis to detect medium effect sizes ($f = 0.25$) with 80% power at $\alpha = 0.05$.

4. Experimental Procedure

All experiments were conducted online via a survey platform. Participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions. In each study, participants were instructed to imagine they encountered a social media influencer's post advocating for disaster relief in Indonesia. The stimuli consisted of simulated social media posts featuring either an older or younger influencer. In Study 1 (Instagram), the disaster scenario involved a flood. In Study 2 (Facebook), the scenario involved an earthquake described as either severe (major earthquake causing widespread devastation, numerous casualties, and extensive infrastructure damage) or mild (minor earthquake with limited impact). In Study 3 (YouTube), the scenario involved a volcanic eruption, with the relief effort described as either a solo endeavor by the influencer or a collective community effort. After



viewing their assigned scenario, participants completed a questionnaire assessing manipulation checks, age identity, charitable intentions, and (in Studies 2 and 3) charitable constraints.

5. Variables and Instruments

All constructs were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The independent variable was the influencer's age cue (old vs young), manipulated through visual and textual cues in the simulated social media posts. Age identity (mediator) was measured using a scale adapted from George et al. (1980), consisting of four items assessing how old participants felt, looked, acted, and their age-related interests, with options ranging from "much younger" to "much older." Cronbach's α exceeded 0.70 across all studies.

Charitable intentions (dependent variable) were measured using three items adapted from previous studies on donation behaviour (e.g., "I would be willing to donate to this disaster relief campaign"). Cronbach's α exceeded 0.70 across all studies.

Disaster severity (moderator in Study 2) was manipulated as severe versus mild

disaster conditions. Community involvement (moderator in Study 3) was manipulated as a solo versus collective effort.

Intrapersonal constraints (Study 2) and interpersonal constraints (Study 3) were measured using scales adapted from Cong et al. (2021), assessing internal barriers (personal interest, perceived relevance, emotional states) and social barriers (lack of peer encouragement, social support).

Manipulation checks asked participants to rate the influencer's perceived age (1 = young, 7 = old), the perceived severity of the disaster (1 = not severe, 7 = very severe), and the perceived community involvement (1 = solo, 7 = collective).

6. Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. For Study 1, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine the main effect of influencer age cue on charitable intentions, and PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) was used to test the mediating effect of age identity. For Studies 2 and 3, two-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine main effects and interaction effects. PROCESS Macro Model 7 was employed to test the moderated mediation effects of disaster severity



(Study 2) and community involvement (Study 3). PROCESS Macro Model 14 was used to examine the boundary conditions of intrapersonal constraints (Study 2) and interpersonal constraints (Study 3) on the mediation effect of age identity. All mediation and moderation

analyses used bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. An overview of the experimental design across the three studies is presented in **Figure 1**.

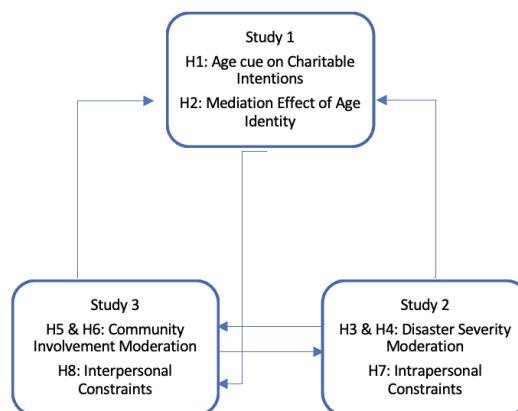


Figure 1. Flowchart of Experimental Design Across Three Studies

Source: Authors' own elaboration

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Study 1: Main and Mediating Effects of Influencer Age Cue

The manipulation check confirmed that participants perceived the influencer's age as intended ($M_{old} = 6.18$, $M_{young} = 1.39$, $t = 40.12$, $p < 0.001$). An independent-samples t-test revealed significant main effects of the influencer's age cue on charitable intentions ($M_{old} = 4.73$, $M_{young} = 3.98$, $t = 2.62$, $p = 0.010$), supporting H1. To test the mediating effect of age identity,

PROCESS Macro Model 4 was employed. Age identity significantly mediated the relationship between the influencer's age cue and charitable intentions (Effect = 0.19, SE = 0.09, 95% CI [0.02, 0.38]), supporting H2. Specifically, exposure to older influencers led older participants to perceive themselves as younger ($\beta = 0.45$, $t = 2.71$, $p = 0.008$), which in turn heightened their charitable intentions ($\beta = 0.34$, $t = 2.32$, $p = 0.021$). These findings support the notion that age

congruence between influencers and their audience enhances charitable intentions in disaster relief contexts, consistent with the assimilation effect predicted by social comparison theory (Wheeler & Suls, 2007).

2. Study 2: Moderating Effect of Disaster Severity

Manipulation checks confirmed that participants perceived both the influencer's age ($M_{old} = 6.22$, $M_{young} = 1.46$, $t = 39.17$, $p < 0.001$) and disaster severity ($M_{severe} = 5.98$, $M_{mild} = 3.14$, $t = 21.63$, $p < 0.001$) as intended. A two-way ANOVA revealed significant main effects for both influencer age cue ($F(1, 136) = 7.12$, $p = 0.009$) and disaster severity ($F(1, 136) = 12.45$, $p < 0.001$), as well as a significant interaction ($F(1, 136) = 4.87$, $p = 0.029$). Older influencers led to higher charitable intentions particularly in the severe disaster condition ($M_{old-severe} = 5.12$, $M_{young-severe} = 4.02$, $t = 2.92$, $p = 0.004$), supporting H3. In the mild condition, this effect was not significant ($M_{old-mild} = 4.55$, $M_{young-mild} = 4.21$, $t = 1.12$, $p = 0.264$). PROCESS Macro Model 7 confirmed that age identity significantly mediated the relationship with disaster severity moderating this

mediation (Effect = 0.21, SE = 0.11, 95% CI [0.03, 0.45]), supporting H4. The intrapersonal constraints analysis using PROCESS Macro Model 14 confirmed H7, showing that low intrapersonal constraints magnify the mediation effect of age identity. These results align with social comparison theory, suggesting that high-stakes disaster situations amplify age-based social comparison processes and their downstream effects on charitable behavior (Zagefka & James, 2015).

3. Study 3: Moderating Effect of Community Involvement

Manipulation checks confirmed the intended perceptions for influencer age ($M_{old} = 6.19$, $M_{young} = 1.45$, $t = 39.45$, $p < 0.001$) and community involvement ($M_{solo} = 5.85$, $M_{collective} = 3.22$, $t = 18.76$, $p < 0.001$). A two-way ANOVA showed significant main effects for influencer age cue ($F(1, 156) = 6.84$, $p = 0.010$) and community involvement ($F(1, 156) = 9.58$, $p = 0.002$), with a significant interaction ($F(1, 156) = 5.32$, $p = 0.022$). Older influencers led to higher charitable intentions in the solo effort condition ($M_{old-solo} = 5.18$, $M_{young-solo} = 4.12$, $t = 2.89$, $p = 0.005$), supporting H5. In the collective



effort condition, the effect was not significant (*Mold-collective* = 4.67, *Myoung-collective* = 4.38, $t = 1.29$, $p = 0.200$). PROCESS Macro Model 7 confirmed that community involvement moderated the mediation of age identity (Effect = 0.23, SE = 0.12, 95% CI [0.04, 0.49]), supporting H6. The interpersonal constraints analysis using PROCESS Macro Model 14 confirmed H8, showing that high interpersonal constraints amplify the mediation effect of age identity. This finding extends social comparison theory by demonstrating that solo charitable endeavors, perceived as more challenging, heighten the relevance of age-based identity processes in driving charitable behavior (McLennan et al., 2016).

4. General Discussion

Across all three studies, the findings consistently demonstrate that older individuals are more likely to engage in charitable giving when influenced by older social media influencers. This effect operates through two distinct pathways: a direct influence, where older audiences identify more with older influencers due to perceived age similarity, fostering trust and relatability; and an indirect influence mediated by

age identity, where exposure to older influencers leads older audiences to perceive themselves as younger, enhancing their sense of capability and motivation to donate.

The moderating roles of disaster severity and community involvement provide important contextual nuances. Older influencers have a more pronounced impact in severe disaster scenarios and when relief efforts are framed as solo endeavors. These findings align with social comparison theory, which posits that individuals are more likely to engage in comparison with similar others when faced with high-stakes or challenging situations (Festinger, 1954; Wheeler & Suls, 2007). In such contexts, the perceived similarity between the influencer and the audience enhances the relevance of the influencer's message, thereby increasing the likelihood of charitable action. Conversely, in less severe disaster conditions or collective community efforts, the age of the influencer becomes less critical, suggesting that the shared nature of the activity or lower perceived urgency diminishes the need for age-based social comparison. As illustrated in **Figure 2**, older influencers produced significantly higher charitable intentions than younger



influencers in the solo-effort condition, whereas this effect attenuated in the collective-effort condition.

Furthermore, the findings regarding charitable constraints reveal that the mediation effect of age identity is significant only when intrapersonal constraints are low, supporting the notion that personal interest and motivation are key drivers of charitable behavior (Apinunmahakul et al., 2009). Conversely, in the presence of high interpersonal constraints, the impact of age identity on charitable intentions is amplified, suggesting that older individuals may rely more on their perceived age identity as a motivational

resource when faced with social barriers (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001). These results extend the hierarchical leisure constraints model (Hinch et al., 2005) to the domain of charitable behavior, demonstrating that different types of constraints exert distinct moderating effects on the relationship between age identity and charitable intentions. A comprehensive summary of the hypothesis-testing results across the three studies is presented in **Table 1**; all eight hypotheses (H1–H8) were supported within their respective study contexts.

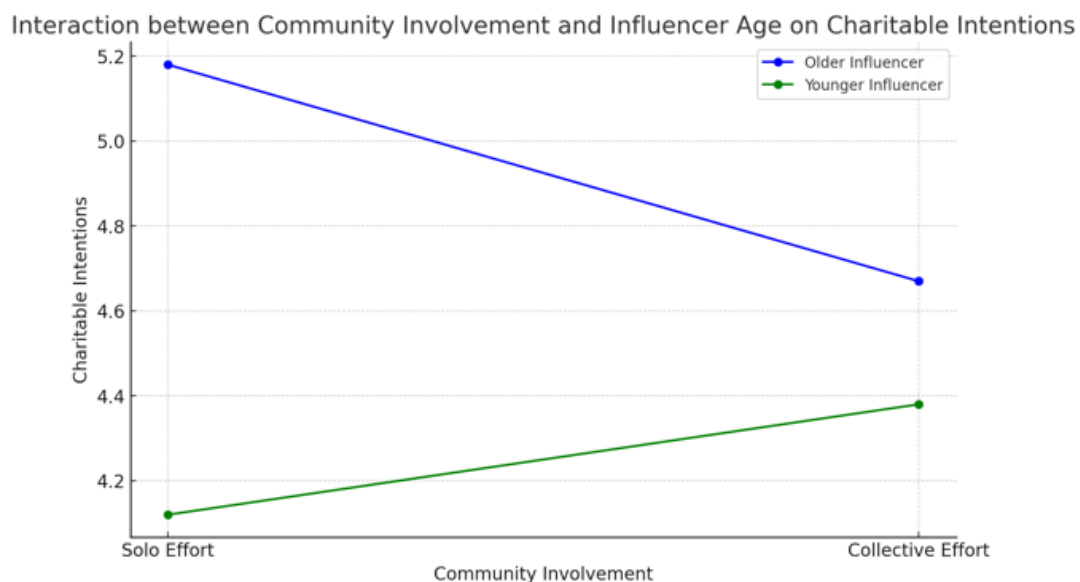


Figure 2. Interaction Between Community Involvement Cues and Influencer Age on Charitable Intentions

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Study 3 data

Table 1. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results Across Three Studies

Hypothesis	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
H1: Age cue → Charitable intention	Supported	Supported	Supported
H2: Age cue → Age identity → Charitable intention	Supported	Supported	Supported
H3: Age cue × Disaster severity → Charitable intention	—	Supported	—
H4: Age cue × Disaster severity → Age identity → Charitable intention	—	Supported	—
H5: Age cue × Community involvement → Charitable intention	—	—	Supported
H6: Age cue × Community involvement → Age identity → Charitable intention	—	—	Supported
H7: Age identity × Intrapersonal constraints → Charitable intention	—	Supported	—
H8: Age identity × Interpersonal constraints → Charitable intention	—	—	Supported

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on experimental data (2023)

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides empirical evidence that older social media influencers are more effective than younger influencers in promoting charitable intentions for disaster relief among older Indonesian audiences. The effect operates through both direct identification and indirect mediation via age identity. Contextual factors play a critical moderating role: influencer age effects are amplified in severe disaster scenarios and when relief efforts are framed as solo endeavors, while they diminish in less severe contexts and collective efforts. Furthermore, intrapersonal constraints weaken the mediation effect of age identity, whereas interpersonal constraints strengthen it, extending the

hierarchical leisure constraints model to charitable behavior. The results have important practical implications for charitable marketing strategies targeting older audiences. Disaster management organizations and humanitarian agencies should consider strategically deploying older influencers, particularly in high-stakes and individual-driven campaigns. Marketing practitioners should account for both influencer age characteristics and disaster context when designing charitable appeals, as age congruence is most critical during severe disasters and solo relief initiatives. For group-oriented or less urgent campaigns, the age of the influencer becomes less critical, allowing organizations to prioritize other influencer attributes.



Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the study focused exclusively on older Indonesian participants, and the findings may not generalize to other cultural contexts or age groups. Second, the experiments used hypothetical scenarios rather than real-time influencer campaigns, which may limit ecological validity. Third, the study only examined age as a social cue, while other influencer characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity) may also influence charitable intentions. Future research should extend these findings by exploring additional influencer characteristics, examining cross-cultural differences, and employing longitudinal designs to assess the sustainability and cumulative effects of influencer-driven charitable campaigns. Examining these effects across various charitable causes beyond disaster relief could also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to tailor marketing strategies to different contexts.

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