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The Power of Influence and Reviews: Trust as a Key Factor in Shopee Consumers' Purchase Intention

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of influencer marketing and online customer reviews on consumer purchase intention, while considering the role of trust as both a mediating and moderating variable. Using a quantitative approach and Partial Least Squares-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS), this research involved 410 Shopee users in Kendari City as respondents. Data were collected through a questionnaire employing a Likert scale. The results indicate that both influencer marketing and online customer reviews have a significant direct effect on consumers' purchase intention. However, online customer reviews exert a stronger influence, both in shaping purchase intention and in enhancing consumer trust in the platform. Trust is also proven to play an important role as a mediator, strengthening the relationship between marketing strategies and purchase intention. On the other hand, trust does not function as a significant moderator in the relationship between influencer marketing and purchase intention. In contrast, the interaction between online customer reviews and influencer marketing shows a significant moderating effect, indicating that the combination of these two strategies can mutually reinforce their impact on consumers' purchase decisions. This study emphasizes the importance of building trust through authentic and credible strategies, particularly by leveraging positive online customer reviews, to enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns.

Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Online Customer Reviews, Trust, Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

Influencer marketing is one of the most prominent approaches in today's digital marketing strategy. The relationship that is established between an influencer and his followers offers a more personalized line of communication, which conventional advertising does not have. Many companies turn their attention to this strategy because it is able to create an emotional closeness that encourages loyalty and trust in the brand [1]. The presence of influencers in the digital space such as Shopee is not only a conveyor of information, but also as a strong influence on consumer decisions [2]. Online customer reviews act as the main reference for consumers in the decision-making process. The experiences of other users poured through reviews create a perception of the quality and reliability of a product [3]. Consumers no longer only rely on information from manufacturers, but rather prioritize social proof obtained from fellow users. This makes customer reviews an important tool that can strengthen purchase intent and reduce doubts in online transactions [4].

Influencer marketing provides a strategic approach that is able to build a communication bridge between brands and consumers through trusted figures. The existence of influencers who have credibility, expertise, and appeal allows for the delivery of marketing messages in a more persuasive and effective way. This influence is reinforced by the emotional connection formed through the ongoing interaction between influencers and their followers [5]. Companies that leverage this strategy gain benefits in the form of increased brand awareness, expanded audience reach, and the formation of stronger brand preferences [6].

Online customer reviews also play a big role in strengthening a company's reputation and increasing positive perceptions of products. Reviews submitted honestly by other users give potential consumers confidence to continue with their purchase intentions. On the organizational side, these reviews are an invaluable source of information for product evaluation and service improvement. Quality reviews reflect customer satisfaction and are indirectly part of the brand's communication strategy [7, 8].

Most previous studies have only highlighted the direct influence of influencer marketing and online customer reviews on purchase intent without taking into account the psychological aspects at work behind the process [9]. Trust is one of the factors that has not been studied in depth in this relationship. Trust plays an important role in the decision-making process because it serves as a basis for receiving information and forming attitudes towards products or brands [6]. The existence of trust is very important, especially in online transactions that do not allow consumers to interact directly with products [10].

Various studies have offered approaches such as improving the quality of content, selecting relevant influencers, and filtering out negative reviews. However, not many have developed a comprehensive model that combines these two main strategies with trust as a link or reinforcement of influence. In fact, trust has a key role in interpreting the credibility of information sources and strengthening the effects of digital communication on consumer attitudes and behaviors [11]. Models that integrate trust are able to explain more fully the dynamics that occur in these digital interactions.

The conceptual model used in this study positions trust as a mediator and moderator of the relationship between influencer marketing and online customer reviews on purchase intent. Trust arises from consumers' assessment of the credibility, relevance, and consistency of the message conveyed. High trust creates positive perceptions and an urge to follow recommendations or purchasing decisions [12]. This model allows for a deeper understanding of how the emotional influence of influencers and the social influence of customer reviews contribute to shaping consumer decisions [13]. Trust not only bridges the relationship between variables, but also strengthens their influence. The trust formed makes consumers more confident in the information received, thereby increasing the likelihood of a purchase action [14]. This dual position trust test provides a more realistic picture of how digital influence works in shaping consumer decisions. This model opens up space for the exploration of more complex and applicative dynamics in digital marketing practices [15].

The city of Kendari has shown a significant increase in the adoption of digital technology as well as the growth of e-commerce transactions in recent years. Shopee is one of the platforms most often used by the public to meet online shopping needs. The consumption patterns of people in this region reflect a combination of the convenience of technology and the importance of social trust. Local cultural values that are still strong also shape the way consumers judge a product or information they receive from digital media [4]. The city offers a rich backdrop to observe how digital strategies work in shaping trust and buying intent.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of influencer marketing and online customer reviews on purchase intention by considering trust as a mediator and moderator. This research is expected to contribute to the development of theory in the field of digital marketing by introducing a model that simultaneously brings together social and psychological influences. The results of this research can help organizations understand how trust is formed and how the presence of trust can strengthen the effectiveness of digital communication strategies. From a practical perspective, these findings provide direction in designing marketing campaigns that are not only attractive but also build consumer trust and loyalty, especially in local markets such as Kendari City.

2. Research Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach to test the relationship between influencer marketing, online customer reviews, trust, and consumer purchase intent. The population in this study is users of the Shopee e-commerce platform in Kendari City. The number of samples used was 410 respondents, who were selected using purposive sampling techniques with certain criteria, such as having made purchases through Shopee and having experience seeing promotions from influencers and reading customer reviews. Data collection was carried out through the dissemination of an online questionnaire compiled using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", to measure respondents' perception of each statement submitted. Data analysis was carried out using the Structural Equation Modeling method based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), which is considered suitable for testing complex relationship models with many latent variables and indicators. Data processing is carried out with the help of statistical software that supports SEM-PLS analysis.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Study Results

The respondent profile in this study reflects the diverse demographic characteristics of Shopee users in Kendari City, with a total of 410 respondents. Based on age distribution, the majority of respondents were in the 21–25 age group, followed by those aged 26–30, 31–35, and a smaller portion above 35 years old. This indicates that Shopee users in Kendari are predominantly young adults, who are generally more active in online shopping activities. In terms of gender, the sample was dominated by female respondents, although there was also a substantial proportion of male participants. This composition reflects the tendency of women to be more active users of e-commerce platforms, particularly in searching for product information and engaging with influencer content and customer reviews. Regarding educational background, most respondents held a bachelor's degree, followed by those with diplomas, senior high school education, and a smaller number with postgraduate degrees. The relatively high level of education among respondents may influence how they interpret digital marketing content, evaluate information credibility, and build trust prior to making purchase decisions. These demographic characteristics suggest that the majority of Shopee users in Kendari are young, educated, and digitally active consumers. This forms an important basis for understanding how they respond to influencer marketing and online customer reviews, as well as how trust is developed and plays a role in shaping their purchase intention.

Table 1. Measurement items and Constructs

Variables	Items	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Influencer _Marketing	IM.1	0,939	0,926	0,928	0,871
	IM.2	0,937			
	IM.3	0,923			
Online Client _Review	OCR.1	0,771	0,807	0,807	0,724
	OCR.2	0,892			
	OCR.3	0,885			
Purchase _Intention	PI.1	0,912	0,903	0,905	0,837
	PI.2	0,920			
	PI.3	0,912			
Trust	T.1	0,995	0,990	0,991	0,971
	Q.2	0,991			
	T.3	0,969			
	Q.4	0,986			

Table 1 presents the results of the measurement model assessment for each construct used in the study, namely Influencer Marketing, Online Customer Review, Trust, and Purchase Intention. All indicator loading values exceed the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. Influencer Marketing items show very high loadings above 0.92, while Trust demonstrates exceptionally high values across four items, confirming the robustness of its measurement. The reliability of each construct is further supported by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values, all of which are above 0.80, indicating high internal consistency. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs are well above the recommended minimum of 0.50, establishing strong convergent validity. These results confirm that the measurement instruments used in this study are both reliable and valid, allowing for accurate measurement of the proposed latent variables in the structural model analysis.

Table 2. Discriminant validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio Of Correlations)

	1	2	3	4
Influencer Marketing				
Online Customer Review	0,491			
Purchase Intention	0,510	0,780		
Trust	0,426	0,672	0,795	

Table 4. Hypotheses Testing

Structural Relationships	Original sample	P values
Influencer _Marketing -> Purchase _Intention	0,138	0,004
Influencer _Marketing -> Trust	0,188	0,000
Online Customer _Review -> Purchase _Intention	0,325	0,000
Online Customer _Review -> Trust	0,521	0,000
Trust -> Purchase _Intention	0,493	0,000
Mediation Moderated Analysis		
Influencer _Marketing -> Trust -> Purchase _Intention	0,093	0,001
Online Client _Review -> Trust -> Purchase _Intention	0,257	0,000
Trust x Influencer _Marketing -> Purchase _Intention	0,136	0,102
Online Customer _Review x Influencer _Marketing -> Purchase _Intention	0,165	0,009

The results of the analysis show that both influencer marketing and online customer reviews have a significant direct influence in encouraging the purchase intention of Shopee consumers in Kendari City. The coefficient value for online customer reviews ($\beta = 0.325$; $p < 0.001$) was higher than that of influencer marketing ($\beta = 0.138$; $p = 0.004$). These findings suggest that experiences and judgments from other users are more likely to influence consumer decisions than promotions made by public figures. In addition, both also make a significant contribution to shaping consumer trust, where online customer reviews show a more dominant influence ($\beta = 0.521$) than influencer marketing ($\beta = 0.188$). These results emphasize the importance of authentic perceptions in building consumer confidence.

The findings further reveal that trust plays a role as a mediating variable in the relationship between influencer marketing and online customer reviews and purchase intent. The mediated pathway from influencer marketing through trust to purchase intent showed significant influence ($\beta = 0.093$; $p = 0.001$). Similar findings were also found on the path from online customer reviews through trust to purchase intent, with greater influence ($\beta = 0.257$; $p < 0.001$). This suggests that trust contributes significantly to shaping consumer buying tendencies. A marketing strategy that is able to foster trust, especially through positive reviews from other customers, will be more effective in driving purchase decisions.

Moderation analysis showed that the combination of online customer reviews and influencer marketing had a significant influence on shaping purchase intent ($\beta = 0.165$; $p = 0.009$). This shows that there is a mutually reinforcing effect between the two marketing strategies in influencing consumers' tendency to make purchases. On the other hand, the interaction between consumer trust and influencer marketing did not show a significant influence ($\beta = 0.136$; $p = 0.102$), which means trust did not directly reinforce the role of influencers in encouraging consumers to make a purchase.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study show that influencer marketing has an influence on consumer buying intentions. These results support previous research that highlighted the important role of influencer characteristics and credibility in shaping purchase intent through the parasocial relationships that exist between influencers and their followers [16, 17]. Consumers tend to trust recommendations that come from influencers that they consider authentic and emotionally relevant. Previous research indicates that perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness significantly enhance the persuasive effectiveness of influencer-based marketing [17]. Therefore, in the context of digital marketing, emotional attachment and perception of authenticity are crucial elements in shaping purchase intent.

Empirical evidence suggests that influencer marketing supports trust formation, particularly when influencers deliver content perceived as authentic and credible [1]. Authentic communication delivered by influencers has been identified as a key factor in enhancing consumer trust toward promoted brands [1]. Trust is fostered when influencer messages are delivered consistently, evoke emotional engagement, and maintain transparency, and these effects are reinforced by influencers' expertise and personality traits in shaping brand attitudes [6]. The establishment of trust via parasocial interaction increases the capacity of influencers to mediate brand messages and amplify their persuasive impact on social media [18]. Another important finding from this study is that online

customer reviews (OCR) have a strong influence on consumer purchase intent and trust. The quality of reviews and the credibility of sources are important factors in influencing purchasing decisions [4]. In addition, the high volume of reviews reinforces social evidence and helps reduce risk perceptions [19]. Reviews that are actual, specific, and come from real users are considered more convincing and build trust in the product or platform. These findings show that OCR is not only an information tool, but also a psychological instrument that strengthens consumer trust in the e-commerce ecosystem [20].

Furthermore, this study found that trust plays a mediator in the relationship between influencer marketing and OCR on purchase intent. Trust is a key element in turning marketing information into purchasing decisions [21]. When trust is formed through influencers and customer reviews, consumers are more confident in making decisions. Trustworthy user-generated content has been shown to function as a reinforcing factor that improves the influence of consumer perception on purchase intention [22]. Therefore, an effective digital marketing strategy is one that is able to build trust consistently through various communication channels.

In the moderation analysis, it was found that online customer reviews strengthened the relationship between influencer marketing and consumer purchase intent, indicating that when consumers receive positive reviews from other users at the same time as influencer promotions, trust in the product increases and purchasing decisions are more encouraged. Empirical evidence suggests that when reviews are perceived as reliable, they provide social confirmation that amplifies the impact of influencer marketing on consumer responses [23]. Conversely, trust does not appear to play a significant moderating role in this relationship, however, prior research suggests that trust may still operate as a reinforcing mechanism that shapes how consumers interpret and respond to endorsement messages [24]. The insignificance of the trust as a moderator in this context may be due to the possibility that the trust has been formed previously through other channels, or because the influence of the trust is more dominant as a mediator than as a factor of direct interaction. Therefore, while the integration between influencer marketing and customer reviews has been shown to be mutually supportive, the role of trust in this context needs to be further examined in future research.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that influencer marketing and online customer reviews have a significant role in shaping consumer purchase intentions, with trust acting as a mediator that strengthens the relationship. Online customer reviews have been shown to moderate the influence of influencer marketing on purchase intent, while trust does not show a significant moderation effect, although it remains relevant in building indirect relationships. The implications of these results suggest that digital marketing strategies, particularly on e-commerce platforms like Shopee, should integrate influencer campaigns with credible customer reviews to increase the effectiveness of marketing messages. For practitioners, it is important to choose influencers who are not only popular, but also have high credibility and are able to build an emotional connection with the audience. However, this study has limitations in the limited geographical context of Kendari City and the use of quantitative data alone, so it has not fully described the psychological dynamics of consumers in depth. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of the region, consider qualitative or mixed methods approaches, and explore other factors such as product type, brand loyalty, or demographic characteristics that may also influence the relationship between variables in the context of digital marketing.

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