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The Influence of Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Decisions through Trust as an Intervening Variable (A Study of The Originote Product Consumers on TikTok in Malang City)

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology has transformed the way consumers engage with products and brands, making online customer reviews a primary source of information prior to purchasing. Such reviews shape consumers' perceptions and levels of trust toward a product. This study seeks to examine the relationship between online customer reviews and purchase decisions, with trust functioning as an intervening variable. Employing a quantitative research design, the study involved respondents who had used The Originote products on TikTok. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through SmartPLS 3 software, enabling the simultaneous testing of relationships among variables and the assessment of both direct and indirect effects of online customer reviews on purchase decisions via trust. The findings indicate that online customer reviews exert a positive effect on consumer trust, which subsequently influences purchase decisions. Accordingly, the main hypothesis proposes that online customer reviews positively impact purchase decisions through the mediating role of trust. These results highlight the significance of marketing strategies that leverage online reviews to strengthen consumer trust and enhance purchasing behavior in the contemporary digital era.

Keywords: *online customer review, purchase decision, trust*

INTRODUCTION

Advances in information and communication technology have brought about significant changes in the way consumers interact with products and brands. One significant impact of this change is the emergence of online customer reviews as a primary source of information for consumers before making a purchase. Reviews provided by other users can describe real-life experiences with a product, thus influencing consumer perceptions and trust levels. Various studies have shown that online customer reviews have a positive influence on trust, which in turn contributes to purchasing decisions. However, some research findings suggest that not all consumers consider online reviews a determining factor in their purchasing decisions.

Research by Halila T. H. et al. (2020) demonstrated that online customer reviews have a positive influence on consumer trust, consumer trust has a positive influence on online shopping intentions, and online customer reviews have an indirect influence on shopping intentions through trust. Conversely, research by A. Rahmawati (2021) showed

different results, indicating that online customer reviews had no influence on purchasing decisions. This is due to the perception of some consumers that reviews from other users cannot necessarily be used as the primary basis for making purchasing decisions for a product or service. These differing research findings indicate a research gap that requires further investigation.

A purchasing decision is a process of selecting a course of action from various available alternatives, considering input, process, and outcomes to resolve a consumer problem. According to Kotler and Keller (2012), the purchasing decision-making process consists of several stages: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. Consumers evaluate various options before making the final decision that best suits their needs (Daulay & Putri, 2018). Several factors influence purchasing decisions during this process, including online customer reviews and consumer trust.

Online customer reviews are a service that allows consumers to freely provide comments and assessments about products and services they have used. These reviews are part of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and are based on personal experiences and opinions, rather than promotional messages or advertisements (Elwalda et al., 2016). Online customer reviews are a source of information considered credible because they come from fellow consumers who have made previous purchases. Therefore, online reviews play a crucial role in helping consumers assess a product's quality before making a purchasing decision.

Trust is the primary foundation of business activities, particularly in transactions involving more than one party. A transaction can only occur if there is trust between the parties involved. Trust is not formed instantly but must be built from the outset through consistent behavior and commitment from business actors (Hendratta et al., 2013). In the context of digital marketing, the level of consumer trust in a product and seller is a crucial factor determining the success of a transaction and the sustainability of the relationship between the consumer and the company.

Online customer reviews are also closely linked to purchasing decisions. Fakri et al. (2016) stated that the number and quality of reviews can be indicators of a product's popularity and value, which ultimately influence consumers' willingness to purchase. Furthermore, Sparks et al. (2011) revealed that positive online customer reviews can increase consumers' trust in a product. Thus, online reviews serve not only as a source of information but also as a means of building trust in the purchasing decision-making process.

The relationship between trust and purchasing decisions has also been extensively studied in various studies. Ovaliana and Mahfudz (2022) emphasized that trust is a key element to consider in online transactions. A high level of consumer trust in a product significantly impacts purchasing decisions. Consumers tend to choose products that are perceived as safe, reliable, and meet their expectations based on the information they obtain.

The relationship between online customer reviews and purchasing decisions, mediated by trust, suggests that reviews provided by previous consumers can facilitate potential consumers' access to product information. Kanitra and Kusumawati (2018)

stated that online customer reviews have the potential to have a greater influence on purchasing decisions than promotions via social media. However, this influence is highly dependent on the level of trust established (Mulyati & Grace, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of online customer reviews on purchase decisions, with trust as an intervening variable, among consumers of The Originote products on TikTok.

METHODS

According to Emzir (2009: 28), the quantitative approach is grounded in the postpositivist paradigm in the development of science, emphasizing causal relationships, variable reduction, hypothesis formulation, and specific research questions that rely on measurement, observation, and theory testing. This approach commonly employs research strategies such as experiments and surveys that require statistical data analysis. Consequently, quantitative research is closely associated with the use of numerical data, beginning from data collection and processing to interpretation and presentation of research results (Arikunto, 2006).

In quantitative research, population refers to a generalization area consisting of objects or subjects that possess certain characteristics and qualities determined by the researcher for analysis and conclusion drawing. A sample, on the other hand, represents a subset of the population selected to reflect these characteristics (Sugiyono, 2014).

Primary data are data obtained directly from the research object. Sugiyono (2013) explains that primary data sources are those that provide data directly to the data collector. In this study, primary data were gathered using a questionnaire as the main instrument to obtain information from respondents relevant to the research objectives. Secondary data, according to Sugiyono (2013), are data sources that do not provide information directly to the researcher, but through intermediaries such as other individuals or documentation. In this research, secondary data consisted of various sources including journal articles, books, and other published documents that had previously been compiled and analyzed by individuals or institutions.

In quantitative research, questionnaires are among the most frequently used data collection techniques. A questionnaire is a tool designed to gather data through a set of structured questions aimed at measuring research variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In addition, structured observation is also applied, in which researchers conduct observations based on predetermined criteria (Creswell, 2014). Research instruments in quantitative studies include questionnaires, structured observation sheets, and measurement tools that enable data to be quantified and statistically analyzed (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this study, data were collected by distributing online questionnaires or surveys through the Google Form platform.

Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) was employed to conduct variance-based structural equation analysis that allows simultaneous testing of both the measurement model and the structural model (Ghozali, 2014). The measurement model (outer model) was used to assess construct validity and reliability. Furthermore, evaluation of the structural model (inner model) was conducted to obtain the R-square value as an indicator of the explanatory power of latent variables, the F-square value to determine the magnitude of the influence of independent variables on dependent

variables, path coefficients to describe the direction and strength of relationships among variables, and T-statistics to test hypotheses and determine the significance of structural path coefficients.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (n = 40)

Characteristics	Dominant Category	n	%
Gender	Female	34	85,4
Age	17-22 years old	36	90,2
Domicile	Lowokwaru	26	65,9
Highest Education	High School/Vocational High School/Islamic Senior High School	30	75,6
Income	Rp1,000,000-Rp2,000,000	20	48,8

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Test (Outer Model)

Variables	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Information
Online Customer Review	0.603	0.835	0.883	Valid and Reliable
Purchase Decision	0.653	0.819	0.882	Valid and Reliable
Trust	0.712	0.864	0.908	Valid and Reliable

Table 3. R-Square (Inner Model)

Endogenous Variables	R-Square	Interpretation
Purchase Decision	0.745	Strong influence (74.5%)
Trust	0.506	Moderate influence (50.6%)

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing (Path Coefficient and T-Statistic)

Variable Relationship	Koefisien (O)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
Online Customer Review → Purchase Decision	0.604	3.907	0.000	Significant
Online Customer Review → Trust	0.712	7.361	0.000	Significant
Trust → Purchase Decision	0.322	1.959	0.051	Not significant

Table 5. Mediation Test

Mediation Path	Koefisien	T-Statistic	P-Value	Conclusion
Online Customer Review → Trust → Purchase Decision	0.229	1.792	0.074	Not significant (does not mediate)

Based on the research results, the majority of respondents were female (85.4%), aged 17-22 years (90.2%), domiciled in Lowokwaru (65.9%), had a high school/vocational high school/Islamic high school education (75.6%), and had an income of Rp. 1,000,000-Rp. 2,000,000 (48.8%). The results of the outer model test showed that all variables met the

validity and reliability criteria with an AVE value above 0.5 and a Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability value above 0.7. The inner model test showed an R-square value of 0.745 for the Purchase Decision variable and 0.506 for the Trust variable, which indicated that Online Customer Reviews were able to explain 74.5% of the variation in purchasing decisions and 50.6% of the variation in trust. Hypothesis testing showed that Online Customer Reviews had a positive and significant effect on Trust and Purchase Decision, while Trust had no significant effect on Purchase Decision. In addition, the results of the mediation test prove that Trust is not able to significantly mediate the influence of Online Customer Reviews on Purchase Decisions, so that purchasing decisions are more directly influenced by Online Customer Reviews than through the Trust variable.

The results of the study indicate that online customer reviews have a significant influence on purchase decisions, with trust as an intervening variable. This finding confirms that consumer reviews on social media, particularly TikTok, play a crucial role as a source of information before consumers make purchasing decisions. In the context of The Originote products, consumers consider not only price or promotions but also the experiences of other users shared through comments, ratings, and video reviews. Online customer reviews function as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) that can shape consumer perceptions of product quality and seller credibility. This aligns with consumer behavior theory, which states that social information from other users is more credible than company promotional messages because it is perceived as more objective and based on real-life experiences.

The influence of online customer reviews on trust has been proven to be positive and significant, indicating that the better the reviews a product receives, the higher the level of consumer trust. Reviews containing positive testimonials about product quality, benefits, and seller honesty can reduce consumer hesitation in online transactions. On the TikTok platform, reviews are not only in text form but also in the form of videos that show the results of product use directly, thereby increasing the transparency and credibility of the information. This trust arises because consumers feel they have a realistic picture of the product before purchasing. Thus, online customer reviews serve as an important trust-building mechanism in a digital environment with relatively high levels of uncertainty and risk.

Furthermore, the research results show that trust has a positive influence on purchase decisions, although not statistically significant. This finding indicates that trust remains an important factor in the purchasing decision-making process, but it is not the sole determinant. Consumers who have a high level of trust in products and sellers tend to feel safer making transactions because they perceive lower risk. Trust also influences consumers' belief that the product they purchase meets their expectations and will not cause harm. However, in the context of this research, purchasing decisions are likely also influenced by other factors such as price, social media trends, promotions, and product popularity on TikTok, so the role of trust is not entirely dominant.

The results of the mediation test indicate that trust is unable to significantly mediate the relationship between online customer reviews and purchase decisions. This means that the influence of online customer reviews on purchasing decisions is more direct than through trust. Consumers can be immediately motivated to purchase a

product after reading or viewing a positive review without first going through a deep trust-building process. This reflects the characteristics of consumer behavior in the digital era, which tends to be impulsive and influenced by visual content and viral trends on social media. TikTok, as a short-video-based platform, allows information to spread quickly and shape purchasing decisions instantly. Therefore, while trust remains important, the main strength of online customer reviews lies in their ability to directly influence perceptions and purchase intentions.

Overall, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of marketing strategies that utilize online customer reviews as a primary tool in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Companies or sellers of The Originote products need to encourage consumers to provide honest and positive reviews and actively manage their online reputations. Furthermore, the results of this study also imply that building trust alone is not enough without being supported by engaging, informative, and easy-to-understand review content. In the digital marketing era, a product's success is greatly influenced by how consumer experiences are communicated to the public through social media. Therefore, integrating review strategies, consumer trust, and purchasing decisions is key to increasing product competitiveness in the increasingly competitive online market.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

There is a meaningful association between online customer reviews, trust, and purchase decisions. The findings indicate that online customer reviews exert a positive effect on trust, as favorable evaluations from other consumers are able to enhance potential buyers' confidence in the products offered. Trust serves as an intervening variable that reinforces the impact of online customer reviews on purchasing decisions. The analysis demonstrates that the greater the level of consumer trust formed through the reviews they access, the stronger the tendency for them to proceed with a purchase. These results highlight the crucial role of marketing strategies that rely on online reviews to establish consumer trust and stimulate purchasing behavior, particularly within social media platforms such as TikTok. Furthermore, this study implies that companies need to actively motivate customers to provide positive feedback and respond promptly to reviews in order to maintain and improve their reputation among consumers. Consequently, online customer reviews function not only as an informational reference but also as an effective strategic instrument in shaping consumer behavior in the current digital environment.

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