THE ROLE OF VIRTUAL YOUTUBER KOBO KANAERU AS AN INFLUENCER IN TOKOPEDIA'S WAR CAMPAIGN

By
Cattleya Rejito[1*], Mochammad Chairul Ihsan[2], Wahyu Arif Firmansyah[3]
[1,2] Vocational School, Universitas Padjadjaran
[3]Bachelor of Digital Business, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Padjadjaran
*Email: [1]cattleya@unpad.ac.id

Abstract: : This study explores the role of Kobo Kanaeru, a Virtual YouTuber (VTuber) associated with Hololive Indonesia, as an influencer in Tokopedia's WAR campaign. Utilizing the source credibility model, the research examines the influence of three key attributes—Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness—on consumer Purchase Intention. A quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) was employed to analyze data collected from 100 respondents aged 18–27 years, who were exposed to the WAR Tokopedia campaign. The results demonstrate that while Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness significantly contribute to Purchase Intention, their individual effects are relatively weak, with path coefficients of 0.040, 0.040, and 0.041, respectively. The model explains 32.4% of the variance in Purchase Intention, highlighting the need for incorporating additional variables such as emotional connection and brand reputation. This study provides insights into the strategic advantages and challenges of using virtual influencers in digital marketing and recommends future research directions to optimize their effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital marketing has fundamentally transformed how brands engage with consumers, particularly in the context of increasing internet penetration and the proliferation of social media platforms. Influencer marketing has emerged as a particularly effective strategy for businesses aiming to enhance brand awareness and foster consumer engagement. The global influencer marketing industry is projected to reach $24 billion in 2024, underscoring its significance in shaping consumer behavior and preferences (Noveriyanto & Adawiyah, 2021).This marketing approach capitalizes on individuals with substantial social media followings to promote brands and products, often resulting in higher

levels of trust and engagement compared to traditional advertising methods (Mohammad, 2022).

In Indonesia, the effectiveness of influencer marketing is amplified by the country's high social media usage, with platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok being extensively utilized for brand promotions (Hasanah et al., 2021). However, the rise of ad-blocking technologies and growing consumer resistance to direct advertising have compelled brands to explore alternative strategies, such as collaborating with virtual influencers. These computer-generated personalities have gained traction as innovative marketing tools, particularly in a digital landscape where authenticity and relatability are highly valued by consumers (Orazymbetova et al., 2020). A notable example of a successful virtual influencer in Indonesia is Kobo Kanaeru, a Virtual YouTuber (VTuber) associated with Hololive Indonesia. With over 2.4 million subscribers on YouTube, Kobo has cultivated a highly engaged fanbase, making her an attractive partner for brand collaborations (Radchenko et al., 2021). Recognizing the potential of virtual influencers, Tokopedia, one of Indonesia's largest e-commerce platforms, enlisted Kobo Kanaeru for its WAR Tokopedia marketing campaign. This initiative aimed to enhance customer engagement and increase purchase intentions among Tokopedia users, demonstrating the effectiveness of integrating virtual influencers into digital marketing strategies (Wijayani, 2023)

The increasing reliance on digital marketing strategies, including influencer collaborations, reflects a broader trend in which brands must adapt to the evolving digital landscape. As consumers become more discerning and resistant to traditional advertising, leveraging the unique appeal of virtual influencers presents a promising avenue for brands seeking to connect with their target audiences in meaningful ways (Kapustina et al., 2021)
This study aims to examine the role of Kobo Kanaeru as an influencer in Tokopedia's WAR campaign by analyzing how key attributes—expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—impact consumer purchase intention. Additionally, it seeks to explore the credibility of virtual influencers compared to traditional human influencers in influencing purchasing decisions. Furthermore, the study intends to identify strategic advantages and challenges that brands may encounter when implementing VTuber-based marketing campaigns. By doing so, this research will provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of virtual influencers and offer insights into optimizing their use in digital marketing strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW
1. Influence Marketing and Consumer Behavior

Influencer marketing has rapidly transformed the landscape of advertising, significantly impacting consumer behavior. Studies have shown that influencers, whether human or virtual, can effectively shape consumer attitudes and purchasing intentions. For instance, Miah et al., (2022) highlight how social media influences online shopping behavior, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that influencers play a crucial role in shaping purchase intentions and consumer satisfaction. This aligns with findings from Choi et al., (2023), which emphasize the importance of influencer type in the context of Gen Z travelers, revealing that trust in influencers directly correlates with purchase intentions. The effectiveness of influencer marketing is further supported by Dinh & Lee, (2021), who explore the psychological mechanisms behind influencer impact, particularly the "fear of

missing out" (FOMO) that drives consumers to purchase products endorsed by social media influencers. This phenomenon illustrates the emotional and social dimensions of consumer behavior influenced by marketing strategies that leverage social media personalities.

2. Virtual Influencers and Human Influence

The emergence of virtual influencers has introduced a new dynamic in influencer marketing. Kholkina (2024)investigates the comparative effectiveness of virtual versus human influencers, particularly among Gen Z consumers. The study suggests that while both types of influencers can drive engagement and purchasing behavior, virtual influencers may resonate more with younger audiences due to their innovative and often relatable digital personas. This is echoed by Zhou (2023), who examines the characteristics of virtual influencers, emphasizing the roles of attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness in shaping consumer responses. Moreover, Sands et al., (2022) provide empirical evidence on how consumers perceive AI-generated influencers compared to traditional human influencers. Their findings indicate that while human influencers often evoke a sense of authenticity and relatability, virtual influencers can engage consumers through novel and visually appealing content, thus creating a unique marketing niche. This duality in influencer types raises questions about the future of influencer marketing and its implications for brand strategies.

a. Source Credibility Model: Expertise, Trustworthiness, Attractiveness

The source credibility model remains a foundational framework for understanding the effectiveness of influencer marketing. According to Zhou (2023), the characteristics of influencers—specifically their attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness—are critical in determining consumer engagement and purchase intentions. This model is supported by research from Hugh et al., (2022), which emphasizes that influencers' perceived credibility significantly influences consumer attitudes toward brands and products. Furthermore, the interplay between these characteristics can vary based on the type of influencer. For instance, virtual influencers may leverage their unique digital aesthetics to enhance perceived attractiveness, while human influencers often rely on personal narratives and experiences to establish trustworthiness (Barari, 2023). This distinction highlights the need for brands to carefully consider the type of influencer they engage, as the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns can be heavily influenced by the credibility of the chosen influencer.

METHODE

This study employs a quantitative research approach through secondary data analysis using SEM-PLS. The primary data source for this study is the thesis, which collected survey responses from 100 respondents aged 18-27 years through purposive sampling. These respondents were selected based on specific criteria: they followed Kobo Kanaeru on social media, had used Tokopedia, and had been exposed to the WAR Tokopedia campaign featuring Kobo Kanaeru. The data was gathered through an online questionnaire, and the analysis was conducted using SmartPLS software to examine the direct relationships between variables. The use of SEM-PLS allowed for a robust assessment of how credibility attributes influenced purchase intention. The survey instruments were designed by the author based on prior research to ensure the validity of the questionnaire items. Responses to all items were

recorded on a seven-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with total of 11 questions. A descriptive table is provided below, summarizing the survey, which involved a total of 100 respondents from different background.

Table 1. Summary of Respondents Demographic

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	87	87%
Female	13	13%
Age Group		
18 - 22	62	62%
23 - 27	38	38%
Status		
Students	56	56%
Working Professionals	44	44%

RESULTS

The structural equation model (SEM) depicted in the image illustrates the relationships between three latent variables—Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness—and their impact on Purchase Intention. Each of these latent variables is measured by multiple indicators, and their loadings represent the strength of the relationship between the indicators and the corresponding latent variable. Expertise is measured by three indicators (EP1, EP2, and EP3), with loadings of 0.891, 0.853, and 0.871, respectively. These values indicate that the indicators strongly represent the construct of Expertise. Similarly, Trustworthiness is measured by two indicators (TR1 and TR2), which show very high loadings of 0.914 and 0.894, respectively, signifying that Trustworthiness is well-captured by these indicators. Attractiveness, the third latent variable, is measured by two indicators (DT1 and DT2), with loadings of 0.842 and 0.915. These loadings confirm that Attractiveness is also well-represented in the model. Purchase Intention, the dependent latent variable, is measured by four indicators (MB1, MB2, MB3, and MB4). The loadings for these indicators range from 0.808 to 0.890, which indicates that the measurement model for Purchase Intention is robust. These high loadings ensure that the construct is reliably assessed in the model. The path coefficients between the three predictor variables (Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness) and Purchase Intention are relatively small, at 0.040, 0.040, and 0.041, respectively. While these relationships are statistically significant, the low coefficients suggest that each variable has only a weak individual effect on Purchase Intention. However, when combined, their cumulative impact contributes to the model's overall explanatory power.
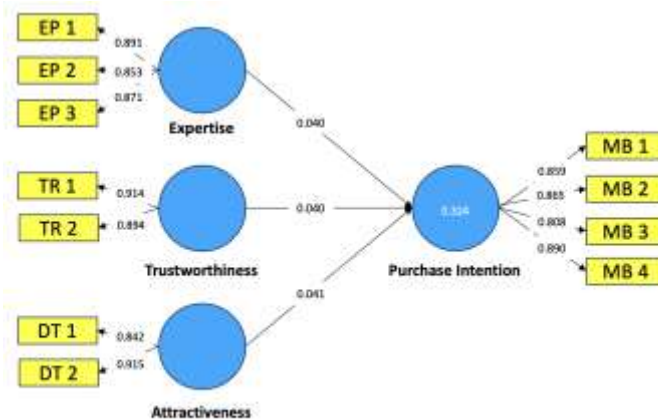
Figure 1. Result of the Model

The explained variance (R^2) for Purchase Intention is 0.324, which means that 32.4% of the variance in Purchase Intention is explained by Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. This represents a moderate level of explanatory power, suggesting that other factors not included in the model may also influence Purchase Intention.

CONCLUSION

This research provides valuable insights into the relationships between Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness as predictors of Purchase Intention. The results reveal that while each of these variables significantly contributes to Purchase Intention, their individual effects are relatively weak, as indicated by the low path coefficients (0.040 for Expertise and Trustworthiness, and 0.041 for Attractiveness). Collectively, the model explains 32.4% of the variance in Purchase Intention, suggesting that other factors beyond these three constructs play a significant role in influencing consumer behavior. Furthermore, the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability, with all indicator loadings exceeding 0.8, ensuring that the constructs are well-represented.

The findings highlight the importance of Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness as attributes influencing consumers' intention to purchase. However, the modest explanatory power of the model indicates the need for a more comprehensive approach to understanding Purchase Intention, potentially incorporating additional variables such as emotional connection, brand reputation, pricing strategies, or product quality.

Future Research

Future research should consider expanding the model to include additional variables that may influence Purchase Intention. Factors such as emotional appeal, product quality, pricing strategies, or brand reputation could provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior. By incorporating these variables, future studies could improve the explanatory power of the model and capture the complexity of the decision-making process more effectively. Another important direction for future research is to focus on strategies for strengthening the individual impacts of Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. The relatively weak path coefficients suggest that businesses could benefit from targeted efforts to enhance these attributes. For example, emphasizing expertise through thought leadership

or educational content, building trust through transparency and ethical practices, and improving the attractiveness of products or services through innovative designs could collectively contribute to stronger consumer engagement. Researchers should also explore segment-based analysis to determine whether the influence of Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness varies across different demographic groups. Market segments such as age, income, or cultural background may exhibit unique patterns of behavior, and identifying these differences could provide businesses with valuable insights for tailoring their marketing strategies. In addition, future studies should investigate synergistic strategies that integrate the three constructs of Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness. For instance, campaigns that feature trusted experts who are both appealing and credible can amplify the overall impact on Purchase Intention. Such holistic approaches could yield more actionable insights for practitioners. Finally, qualitative research methods, such as focus groups or in-depth interviews, could complement the quantitative findings. These methods would allow researchers to explore the deeper motivations and perceptions of consumers related to these constructs. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, future research could provide a more nuanced and well-rounded understanding of what drives Purchase Intention.

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