



The Influence of Online Consumer Reviews and Viral Marketing on Purchasing Decisions with Consumer Trust as an Intervening Variable for Elformula Products on TikTok Shop in Tebing Tinggi City

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ABSTRACT

This study is a quantitative study that aims to examine the influence of online consumer reviews and viral marketing on purchasing decisions, with consumer trust as an intervening variable, among consumers of Elformula products on TikTok Shop in Tebing Tinggi City. Using purposive sampling, this study involved 147 respondents who had been exposed to viral content and Elformula reviews on TikTok. Analysis was conducted using SEM-PLS techniques on 21 indicators. The results of the study indicate that online consumer reviews do not have a direct effect on purchasing decisions but significantly influence consumer trust, which in turn mediates their effect on purchasing decisions. Viral marketing was found to have a direct and significant effect on purchasing decisions and on consumer trust, and also has an indirect effect on purchasing decisions through consumer trust

INTRODUCTION

The skincare industry in Indonesia is experiencing rapid growth as public awareness of the importance of skincare increases, particularly for tropical skin conditions. The development of e-commerce and social media, especially TikTok with its TikTok Shop feature, has also changed consumer behavior and opened up new opportunities for marketing strategies such as customer reviews and viral marketing. Elformula stands out as one of the local skincare brands offering products made with natural ingredients and cutting-edge technology, with a focus on safety and effectiveness tailored to the needs of Indonesian consumers. The brand is also actively leveraging digital platforms to market its products. The graph to be displayed shows the search trends for the Elformula, Skintific, and The Originote brands in Indonesia over a specific period.



Source: Google Trends 2024

Figure 1. Skincare Interest Trend Chart

Based on Google Trends data for the period from June to August 2024, The Originote showed a sharp spike in searches in early June, but this did not continue in the following weeks. Skintific experienced two significant peaks in popularity at the end of June and mid-July, likely due to viral content or marketing campaigns. Meanwhile, Elformula showed a stable and gradually increasing search trend since early August, reflecting a sustained marketing strategy. Although its popularity is not yet as high as its two competitors, Elformula's consistent growth indicates potential for increased brand awareness in the long term. Before reviewing Elformula's sales data, it is important to understand this trend as context for the brand's performance.

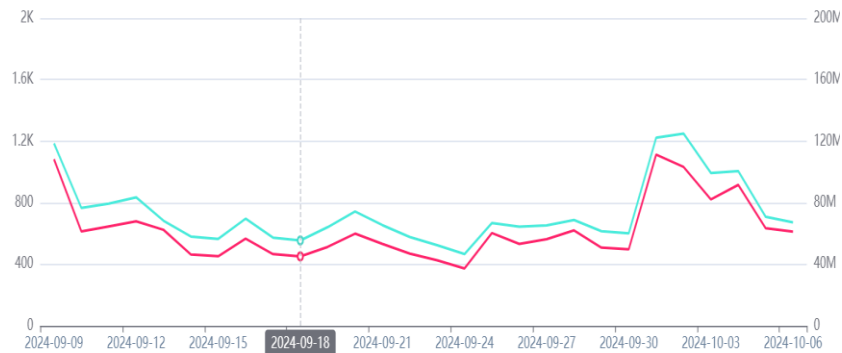


Figure 2. Elformula Product Sales Graph

Sales of Elformula skincare products on TikTok Shop showed an upward trend in early October but later declined, indicating a drop in purchasing decisions due to decreased consumer trust. Consumer trust is a key factor in purchasing decisions, with many respondents expressing dissatisfaction with product quality, leading to low repeat purchase interest.

Online consumer reviews also have a significant influence. Positive reviews can boost trust and buying interest, while negative—especially emotional—reviews can lower consumer perceptions. However, some studies show mixed findings regarding the extent of this influence.

Viral marketing through social media platforms like TikTok also affects purchasing decisions. However, Elformula's content is considered unappealing, making the impact of its viral marketing weak. While this strategy can quickly raise brand awareness, consumer trust remains the primary factor in building long-term loyalty.

Overall, purchasing decisions for Elformula products on TikTok Shop are influenced by consumer trust, online reviews, and the effectiveness of viral marketing. Future marketing success should focus on improving product quality, building trust, and creating more engaging and distinctive content.

A preliminary survey revealed that consumer trust, online reviews, and the effectiveness of viral marketing for Elformula products on TikTok Shop remain relatively low. Only 33.4% of respondents found usage guidelines clear, and just 56.6% felt sellers were helpful with returns. Trust in online reviews was also low, with only 23.3% trusting other consumers' reviews and 40% believing the reviews were honest. Most respondents also felt that Elformula's viral content was not informative or easy to understand. This issue is significant, especially as TikTok Shop grows in popularity among beauty product consumers in Tebing Tinggi City. While consumers often rely on reviews and viral content before purchasing, trust remains the key factor linking these influences to actual buying decisions.

Based on this, the study aims to examine "The Influence of Online Consumer Reviews and Viral Marketing on Purchasing Decisions with Customer Trust as an Intervening Variable" for Elformula products on TikTok Shop in Tebing Tinggi. It explores seven main research questions regarding the direct and indirect relationships among online reviews, viral marketing, customer trust, and purchasing decisions. The study's objectives include analyzing how online reviews and viral marketing influence purchasing decisions and trust, assessing the mediating role of trust, and deepening understanding of consumer behavior on digital platforms. It is expected to offer practical insights for Elformula and contribute theoretically to the field of digital marketing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a promotional strategy that uses digital media and the internet to reach consumers. It includes platforms like search engines, social media, websites, email, and apps, offering real-time performance tracking. TikTok Shop, a feature of the TikTok app, allows users to buy and sell directly, making it a subject of study for its influence on consumer behavior, especially for beauty products like Elformula.

Purchasing Decisions

Purchasing decisions involve the process consumers follow from recognizing needs to choosing a product. Influencing factors include price, quality, brand, reviews, and viral content. Kotler and Armstrong highlight key stages: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, and final purchase. Indicators include need recognition, brand information search, product evaluation, and buying actions.

Consumer Trust

Consumer trust refers to belief in a brand's reliability and honesty. It is crucial in influencing purchase decisions, especially online. Trust is built through positive reviews, consistent product quality, responsive service, and data security. Achrol and Kotler outline three dimensions: ability, benevolence, and integrity. Indicators include reliability, honesty, responsiveness, and brand credibility.

Online Customer Reviews

Online reviews are consumer feedback after using a product. On platforms like TikTok Shop, these reviews often include visuals. They can shape consumer trust and affect buying decisions. Key review dimensions are credibility, perceived usefulness, and argument quality. High-quality, honest, and useful reviews are influential in digital purchasing behavior.

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing spreads messages rapidly via digital platforms, driven by engaging or emotional content. It is cost-effective and relies on user sharing. Dimensions include informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and interactivity. Success factors include emotional relevance, trusted sources, ease of sharing, and timing. It is widely used on social media and can significantly affect consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Overall, the text emphasizes that purchasing decisions on TikTok Shop are influenced by digital marketing strategies,

particularly online reviews, viral marketing, and consumer trust. **Conceptual Framework**

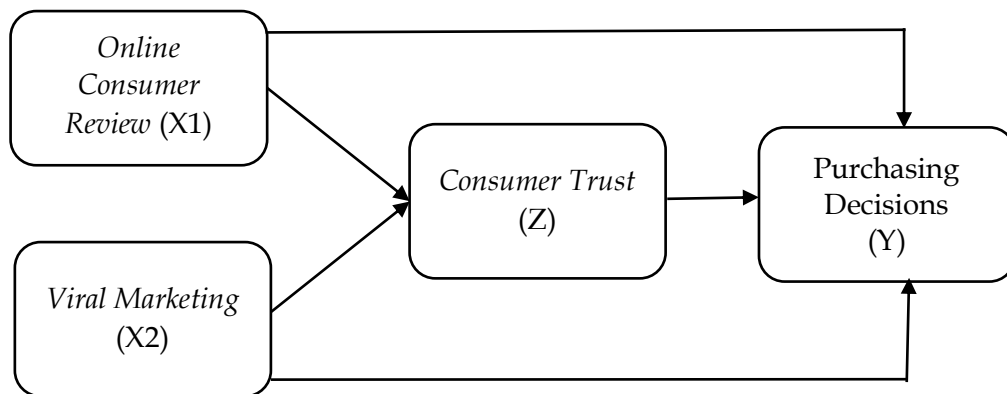


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative approach with an associative method to examine the relationship between Online Consumer Reviews (X1), Viral Marketing (X2), Consumer Trust (Z), and Purchase Decisions (Y). The research was conducted in Tebing Tinggi City from September 2024 to April 2025 using judgmental sampling, involving 147 respondents who had purchased Elformula products through TikTok Shop. Data was collected through questionnaires and documentation. Validity and reliability tests were conducted using SPSS on 30 pilot respondents. Validity was determined based on the Corrected Item-Total Correlation value compared to the r table.

RESULT

Description of Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 147 respondents who are consumers of Elformula products in Tebing Tinggi City. Data was collected through a questionnaire related to the topic of the influence of Online Consumer Reviews and Viral Marketing on Purchase Decisions with Consumer Trust as an intervening variable. Respondent characteristics included gender, domicile, age, occupation, income, and duration of TikTok Shop use, which aimed to provide a general overview of the research participants' profiles.

Description of Research Variables

Table 1. Respondents' Assessment Results for the Online Consumer Review Variable (X1)

Dimension	Item Statement	STS		TS		KS		S		SS		Mean	Note
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Credible	I trust other consumers' reviews of Elformula products	1	.7	5	3,4	19	12,9	79	53,7	43	29,3	4,0	S
	I think reviews from consumers about Elformula products are written honestly	-	-	1	.7	22	15,0	80	54,4	43	29,3	4,1	S
Total												4,05	
Perceived Usefulness	Elformula product reviews on Tiktok Shop make it easy for consumers to find product information.	2	1,4	4	2,7	13	8,8	71	48,3	57	38,8	4,2	S
	Online reviews of Tiktok Shop consumers on Elformula products allow consumers to compare similar products	5	3,4	3	2,0	11	7,5	84	57,1	44	29,9	4,0	S
Total												4,1	
Dimension	Item Statement	STS		TS		KS		S		SS		Mean	Ket
		f	%	f	%	f	f	%	f	%	f		
Quality of Argument	I am interested in buying Elformula products after seeing several reviews on Tiktok	3	2,0	5	3,4	27	18,4	66	44,9	46	31,3	4,0	S
	Elformula product	4	2,7	2	1,4	13	8,8	76	51,7	52	35,4	4,1	S

	reviews on the Tiktok Shop platform are very helpful in making choices													
Total												4,05		

Source: Data Processed by Researchers (2025)

This study shows that most respondents have a positive inclination toward purchasing Elformula products, although some still express doubts or dissatisfaction. About 44.2% felt that Elformula met their needs and wants (mean 4.0), but a few disagreed due to a lack of perceived benefits. Additionally, 48.3% searched for product information before buying (mean 4.1), though some made impulsive purchases, possibly due to unengaging or limited information. Preference for Elformula over other brands was expressed by 41.5% (mean 3.9), indicating room for improvement in brand competitiveness. Lastly, 49.0% felt confident in their purchase decisions (mean 4.0), but lingering doubts among others suggest the need for clearer information and improved customer experience to boost buyer confidence.

Table 2. Results of Respondents' Assessment of Viral Marketing Variables (X2)

Dimension	Item Statement	STS		TS		KS		S		SS		Mean	Note
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
<i>Informativeness</i>	Informativeness Information that is easy to understand about viral Elformula products on Tiktok	4	2,7	4	2,7	13	8,8	76	51,7	50	34,0	4,1	S
	I see positive reviews about Elformula products in the Tiktok comment forum	3	2,0	4	2,7	11	7,5	72	49,0	57	38,8	4,1	S
Total												4,1	
<i>Entertainment</i>	Entertainment The advertisement delivered by elformula products really caught my attention	3	2,0	4	2,7	15	10,2	66	44,9	59	40,1	4,1	S
	I think short advertisements about Elformula	4	2,7	4	2,7	16	10,9	74	50,3	49	33,3	4,0	S

	products have an attractive appearance												
Total													4,05
Dimension	Item Statement	STS		TS		KS		S		SS		Mean	Ket
		f	%	f	%	f	f	%	f	%	f		
<i>Interactivity</i>	Interactivity I have shared viral content about Elformula with friends	15	10,2	17	11,6	20	13,6	56	38,1	39	26,5	3,5	S
	I trust Elformula more because they provide quick responses to customers	2	1,4	7	4,8	22	15,0	69	46,9	47	32,0	4,0	S
Total												3,75	

Source: Data Processed by Researchers (2025)

Most of the 147 respondents gave positive responses to Elformula’s viral marketing strategy on TikTok, though some still expressed reservations. More than half (51.7%) agreed that the viral information was easy to understand, and 49% noticed positive reviews in the TikTok comment section, both with a mean score of 4.1. Additionally, 44.9% felt that Elformula's advertisements were attention-grabbing, while 50.3% found the short ad displays appealing, although some criticized the visuals for lacking aesthetic appeal or impact. However, only 38.1% had shared Elformula content with others (mean 3.5), suggesting the content is not yet strong or engaging enough to trigger widespread sharing. Lastly, 46.9% noted increased trust due to Elformula’s quick customer responses (mean 4.0), even though a few still questioned the brand's responsiveness. Overall, the viral marketing strategy shows promising results but still requires improvements in content quality and audience engagement.

Table 3. Results of Respondents' Assessment of Consumer trust Variables (Z)

Dimension	Item Statement	STS		TS		KS		S		SS		Mean	Ket
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Ability	I feel confident with Elformula products because they consistently maintain good quality	1	,7	6	4,1	19	12,9	69	46,9	52	35,4	4,1	S
				4	2,7	17	11,6	73	49,7	52	35,4	4,1	S
Total												4,1	
Kindness	Elformula is always willing to help when I face problems related to the product	6	4,1	10	6,8	14	9,5	68	46,3	49	33,3	3,9	S
Total												Total	
Integrity	I believe that Elformula products provide correct information	2	1,4	7	4,8	16	10,9	67	45,6	55	37,4	4,1	S
		1	,7	3	2,0	17	11,6	76	51,7	50	34,0	4,1	S
Total												4,1	

Source: Data Processed by Researchers (2025)

The majority of the 147 respondents showed a generally positive level of trust in Elformula products, with several key strengths and some noted weaknesses. Respondents appreciated the brand's product quality, positive TikTok reviews, helpful customer support, accurate information, and quick responses – each receiving around 45–52% agreement with an average score of 4.1. However, some respondents expressed doubts regarding product consistency, limited review visibility, slow assistance, unclear product details, and the need for stronger brand loyalty efforts. In summary, while consumer

trust in Elformula is fairly strong, improvements are still needed in product consistency, communication, and customer service.

Table 4. Results of Respondents' Assessment of Purchase Decision Variables (Y)

Dimension	Item Statement	STS		TS		KS		S		SS		Mean	Ket
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Problem introduction	I interested in purchasing Elformula products because they can meet my needs and desires.	3	2,0	7	4,8	24	16,3	65	44,2	48	32,7	4,0	S
Total												4,0	
Information search	Before buying the Elformula product, I first looked for information about the product.	2	1,4	6	4,1	12	8,2	71	48,3	56	38,1	4,1	S
Total												4,1	
Evaluasi alternatif	I prefer Elformula products compared to other products.	2	1,4	7	4,8	32	21,8	61	41,5	45	30,6	3,9	S
Total												3,9	
Buying decision	I am sure to decide to buy Elformula products	1	.7	3	2,0	28	19,0	72	49,0	43	29,3	4,0	
Total												4,0	

Source: Data Processed by Researchers (2025)

This study shows that most respondents have a positive inclination toward purchasing Elformula products, although some still express doubts or dissatisfaction. About 44.2% felt that Elformula met their needs and wants (mean 4.0), but a few disagreed due to a lack of perceived benefits. Additionally, 48.3% searched for product information before buying (mean 4.1), though some made

impulsive purchases, possibly due to unengaging or limited information. Preference for Elformula over other brands was expressed by 41.5% (mean 3.9), indicating room for improvement in brand competitiveness. Lastly, 49.0% felt confident in their purchase decisions (mean 4.0), but lingering doubts among others suggest the need for clearer information and improved customer experience to boost buyer confidence.

Validitas Convergent

Table 5. Factor Loading

Variable	Statement	Outer Loading	Information
Online Consumer Review	OCR 1	0,803	Valid
	OCR 2	0,809	Valid
	OCR 3	0,833	Valid
	OCR 4	0,881	Valid
	OCR 5	0,837	Valid
	OCR 6	0,815	Valid
Viral Marketing	VM 1	0,862	Valid
	VM 2	0,846	Valid
	VM 3	0,856	Valid
	VM 4	0,898	Valid
	VM 5	0,732	Valid
	VM 6	0,870	Valid
Consumer Trust	CT 1	0,919	Valid
	CT 2	0,907	Valid
	CT 3	0,838	Valid
Variable	Pernyataan	Outer Loading	Information
Consumer Trust	CT 4	0,903	Valid
	CT 5	0,923	Valid
Purchase Decision	KP 1	0,918	Valid
	KP 2	0,853	Valid
	KP 3	0,914	Valid
	KP 4	0,937	Valid

Source: Data Processed by Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 5, all statements in this study have an outer loading value above 0.7. This shows that each indicator has met the requirements of convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

Table 6. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Test Results

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha
Online Consumer Review	0.689
Viral Marketing	0.715
Consumer Trust	0.807
Purchase Decision	0.821

Source: Data Processed by Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 6, it can be seen that not all variables have an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value that exceeds 0.7. Therefore, it can be concluded that not all constructs in this model meet the criteria for convergent validity, so there are several constructs that are considered less valid in representing their indicators.

Composite Reliability Dan Cronbach’s Alpha

Tabel 7. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
<i>Online Consumer Review</i>	0.910	0.910
<i>Viral Marketing</i>	0.919	0.924
<i>Consumer Trust</i>	0.940	0.942
<i>Purchase Decision</i>	0.927	0.928

Source: Data Processed by Smart-PLS (2025)

Referring to Table 7, all variables in this study have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70. This shows that each construct used in this study meets reliability standards, so it can be considered a reliable instrument.

Total Effect Test

Table 8. Cronbach's Alpha & Composite Reliability Test Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistic (O/STDEV)	P Values
<i>Consumer Trust -> Buying decision</i>	0.560	0.564	0.116	4.841	0.000
<i>Online Consumer Review -> Consumer Trust</i>	0.471	0.463	0.134	3.515	0.000
<i>Online Consumer Review -> Buying decision</i>	0.270	0.273	0.112	2.410	0.016
<i>Viral Marketing -> Consumer Trust</i>	0.358	0.365	0.138	2.597	0.009
<i>Viral Marketing -> Buying decision</i>	0.536	0.534	0.114	4.691	0.000

Source: Data Processed by Smart-PLS (2025)

Based on Table 8, it can be concluded that the total effect value of the tested variables is shown as follows:

- 1) The total effect of viral marketing on purchasing decisions, both directly and through the mediation of consumer trust, is proven to be significant. This is indicated by the T-statistics ($|O/STDEV|$) value of 4.691 with a p-value of 0.000, which is smaller than the 0.05 significance limit.
- 2) The total effect of online consumer reviews on purchasing decisions, both directly and indirectly through consumer trust, also shows significance. This is reflected in the T-statistics ($|O/STDEV|$) value of 2.597 and a p-value of 0.009 < 0.05.

DISCUSSION

Online Consumer Reviews Do Not Have a Significant Effect on Purchasing Decisions

The statistical test results show that online consumer reviews do not have a significant effect directly on purchasing decisions (T-Statistic = 0.055; P-Value = 0.956 > 0.05), so hypothesis H1 is rejected. This indicates that although consumers see reviews of Elformula products on TikTok, the reviews are not strong enough to encourage them to make a purchase. The contributing factors include: reviews that are inauthentic, unconvincing, overly promotional, or irrelevant to consumers' personal needs. Trust is a key factor in the effectiveness of reviews as a promotional tool.

Suggested strategies are to increase the authenticity and credibility of reviews, for example by engaging micro-influencers, featuring real testimonials, UGC (user-generated content) programs, and simple and relatable content style

Viral Marketing has a Significant Effect on Purchasing Decisions

Viral marketing has a significant effect on purchasing decisions (T-Statistic = 2.402; P-Value = 0.016 < 0.05), so hypothesis H2 is accepted. However, the lowest mean is found in the statement regarding the desire to share Elformula's viral content, which shows that consumer participation is still low. This is due to content that is less relevant, unemotional, or less socially powerful.

To increase the impact of viral marketing, companies need to create content that touches emotions, is fun, and relatable. Other strategies include working with influencers, referral programs, challenge campaigns, and encouraging UGC. The main challenges faced are low consumer trust, high content competition, and lack of segmentation and sharing incentives.

Online Consumer Reviews Have a Significant Effect on Consumer Trust

Online consumer reviews have a significant effect on consumer trust (T-Statistic = 3.515; P-Value = 0.000 < 0.05), so hypothesis H3 is accepted. However, the level of trust in reviews still varies. Consumers tend to distrust reviews if they appear too positive, are not objective, do not come from credible sources, or do not include real evidence.

Consumer trust can be built through reviews that are honest, varied, accompanied by real evidence of use, and come from real users. This research is consistent with several previous studies that state online reviews have an impact on trust, but in contrast to research that emphasizes the importance of brand reputation and information quality.

Viral Marketing Significantly Affects Consumer Trust

The statistical test results show that viral marketing has a significant effect on consumer trust (T-Statistic = 2.597; p-value = 0.009 < 0.05), so hypothesis H4 is accepted. However, consumer trust in Elformula is still low, especially regarding the response to customers, which is considered not fast and satisfying.

To increase trust, it is recommended that Elformula present authentic and emotional content, involve credible micro-influencers, maintain communication transparency, and build an active community. These findings are consistent with the research of Riel et al. (2022) and Putri et al. (2024), but different from Wayan et al. (2024) which states that viral marketing has no effect on trust.

Consumer Trust Has a Significant Effect on Purchasing Decisions

Consumer trust has a significant effect on purchasing decisions (T-Statistic = 4.841; p-value = 0.000 < 0.05), so hypothesis H5 is accepted. However, there is still a negative perception of Elformula's readiness to help consumers who face obstacles.

To improve this perception, Elformula needs to improve customer service, provide responsive communication channels, train customer support teams, provide independent information (FAQ), and display testimonials or proof of service. This finding is supported by Solihin (2020), Fitriani & Darmayanti (2022), but is not in line with Lăzăroiu et al. (2020).

Online Consumer Review Affects Purchasing Decisions through Consumer Trust

The results show that online consumer review (OCR) has a significant indirect effect on purchasing decisions through consumer trust (p-value = 0.004), so hypothesis H6 is accepted. OCR itself does not directly affect purchasing decisions, but through the trust formed from honest and authentic reviews.

The implication is that companies need to ensure reviews are authentic, transparent and come from real experiences. That way, OCR becomes an important tool to build trust and encourage purchasing decisions. This finding is supported by Setiawan & Maulana (2020), Hussain et al. (2020), Zahara et al. (2021), and Fahrozi et al. (2022).

Viral Marketing Affects Purchasing Decisions through Consumer Trust

Viral marketing has a significant indirect effect on purchasing decisions through consumer trust (p-value = 0.027), so hypothesis H7 is accepted. Strong viral content can build trust and ultimately drive purchasing decisions. Trust acts as a key mediator in strengthening the relationship between viral marketing and purchase decisions.

Effective strategies include creating engaging, honest, informative content, as well as collaboration with relevant influencers. This finding is in line with the study of Roy et al. (2023), Sihombing & Husein (2025), and Andora & Yusuf (2021), but in contrast to Aprillio & Widodo (2020) who stated that viral marketing has no significant effect without being mediated by trust.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study shows that online consumer reviews do not directly have a significant effect on purchasing decisions, but have an indirect positive influence through consumer trust. Meanwhile, viral marketing is proven to have a direct and significant influence on purchasing decisions and also indirectly influence purchasing decisions through consumer trust. In addition, consumer trust itself has a positive and significant influence on consumer purchasing decisions. These findings confirm the importance of building consumer trust as a key mediator linking the influence of online reviews and viral marketing on purchasing decisions on digital platforms such as TikTok Shop.

This research suggests Elformula to improve the quality of consumer reviews, create interactive viral content, and improve customer service to build trust and encourage purchasing decisions. For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the scope of respondents, use a qualitative approach, and consider additional variables such as brand awareness and risk perception so that the research results are more in-depth and relevant to digital marketing strategies.

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