

Research Article

The Appeal of Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings: The Key to Increasing Purchase Decisions through Purchase Intention

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Received: 07-08-2025; Accepted: 27-09-2026

Abstract

The study aimed to examine the effect of Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings on Purchasing Decisions among students, with Customer Purchase Intention acting as a mediating variable. The research was conducted on students from the Faculty of Economics and Business, Yarsi University, class of 2019. Using purposive sampling, 75 student respondents were selected. Data was collected through a survey method using a structured questionnaire. The results revealed that Viral Marketing has a negative and significant effect on Purchasing Decisions, while Product Photos and Ratings both have a positive and significant effect. Furthermore, Viral Marketing positively and significantly influences Customer Purchase Intentions, whereas Product Photos have a positive but insignificant effect. Customer Purchase Intentions, in turn, have a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decisions and successfully mediate the relationship between Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings with Purchasing Decisions. Managerial Implications This research suggests that e-commerce businesses, particularly on platforms like Shopee, should focus on enhancing product photo quality and encouraging positive customer ratings to strengthen purchase decisions. Although Viral Marketing may not directly lead to purchases, it significantly boosts customer interest.

Keywords: Viral Marketing, Product Photos, Ratings, Purchase Decisions, Customer Purchase Interest

JEL Classification: M31, D12, C83

How to cite: Safardi, I., Hidayati, R., (2026), The Appeal of Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings: The Key to Increasing Purchase Decisions through Purchase Intention, *Marketing and Consumer Behavior (MCB)* 2(1), 1-12

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1. Introduction

Technological developments in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era have driven major transformations in the business world, particularly in the marketing and distribution of products. This revolution is characterized by the integration of physical and digital systems through automation, the Internet of Things (IoT), and artificial intelligence, significantly increasing operational efficiency and accelerating business interactions between producers and consumers (Rizkinaswara, 2020; Saputra, 2020).

One of the most impacted sectors is the retail industry, where the shift from offline to online transactions is increasingly evident. Ease of internet access and smartphone penetration have changed the way consumers search for information, make purchases, and even provide reviews of the products or services they consume (Ariani & Widiastuti, 2022).

This trend has been further strengthened by global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has driven the widespread adoption of e-commerce. According to a report by We Are Social (2021), more than 88% of internet users in Indonesia have made online purchases. This demonstrates a shift in consumer behavior, prioritizing convenience, speed, and security. In this context, marketplace platforms such as Shopee, Tokopedia, and Lazada have become primary channels for businesses to reach a wide range of consumers, while also providing a competitive arena for entrepreneurs to develop their digital marketing strategies (Kurniawan, 2019; Pratiwi, 2020).

Shopee, as one of the largest marketplaces in Indonesia, has experienced rapid growth in recent years. According to data from iPrice.co.id (2021), Shopee ranks second in terms of website visitors, with an average monthly user count of 126 million, after Tokopedia's 147 million. However, Shopee has also excelled in the app category, becoming the number one marketplace on the Google Play Store and App Store in the second quarter of 2021. This success is supported by various superior features such as Shopee Live, free shipping, flash sales, and an integrated payment system (Grahanurdian.com, 2020; iPrice, 2021).

Furthermore, Shopee also provides various interaction mechanisms between sellers and buyers, such as product ratings, consumer reviews, and high-quality product photos. These three elements—product visuals, viral marketing, and rating systems play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. Attractive product visuals, for example, can increase initial interest and create a professional impression of the store (Kurniawan, 2019). Meanwhile, product reviews and ratings serve as benchmarks of trust, serving as a form of social validation of product quality and seller credibility (Pratiwi, 2020; Asri et al., 2019).

While numerous previous studies have explored the factors influencing e-commerce purchasing decisions, most have focused on price, consumer trust, and app usability. Few studies have in-depth examined how viral marketing, product photos, and rating systems work simultaneously to influence customer purchase intention and purchase decisions on a specific platform like Shopee. Furthermore, the mediating relationship between purchase intention and purchase decisions has rarely been empirically studied in the context of app-based marketplaces (Agesti, 2021; Yulianto & Sari, 2023).

This research also addresses the need to explore how visual communication strategies, such as product photography, can build consumer trust. Furthermore, with the rise of social media-based marketing techniques such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube viral marketing has become an indispensable strategy for online businesses. This strategy has proven effective in building brand awareness organically and expanding consumer reach without incurring large advertising costs (Lestari & Gunawan, 2022). However, to date, there has been little research specifically analyzing the synergy of these three elements in influencing purchase intention and purchasing decisions on Shopee.

This study aims to analyze the influence of viral marketing, product photography, and ratings on purchase decisions, with purchase intention as a mediating variable among Shopee app users. The research subjects focused on students from the Faculty of Economics and Business, YARSI University, graduating class of 2019, who are considered digital natives and active users of marketplace platforms. Furthermore, this study aims to provide an empirical overview of younger consumer behavior towards digital marketing strategies in the e-commerce era.

The benefits of this research include its contribution to the development of digital marketing science, particularly in the marketplace context. For business owners, the results can serve as a

reference for developing more effective marketing strategies based on visual content and customer reviews. For academics, this study adds to the growing body of literature integrating mediation analysis into digital consumer behavior studies. For marketplace app developers, the findings can be used to improve the quality of the user experience and build consumer trust more systematically (Kurniawan, 2019; Agesti, 2021).

The uniqueness of this research lies in its analytical framework, which unifies three main variables—viral marketing, product photos, and ratings which have previously been studied separately. By adding the variable of purchase intention as a mediator, this study provides a new perspective on the psychological mechanisms that occur before a purchase decision is made. This approach is expected to serve as a reference for further research and digital marketing strategy policies in addressing the ever-changing dynamics of the online market.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

Literature Review

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a marketing strategy that utilizes social networks to disseminate promotional messages quickly and widely, with the hope that the message will spread like a virus (Hsiang-Hsi Liu, 2019; Irawan, 2019). Its main components consist of a messenger (the message disseminator), a message (engaging content), and an environment (a supportive social environment) (Purba, 2016). The advantages of this strategy are cost efficiency and broad reach without geographical limitations (Suciati, 2021; Agesti, 2021).

Product Photography

Product photography is a visual communication tool that plays a crucial role in attracting consumer attention and reducing product uncertainty (Apriadi, 2017; Fauzi & Lina, 2021). Good product visualization can enhance perceived quality and shape consumer purchasing intention (Xin et al., 2016; Servanda et al., 2019). Visual dimensions such as empathy, persuasion, and visual impact are also indicators in assessing the effectiveness of product photography (Durianto, 2003).

Rating

Rating is a consumer feedback system in the form of symbols or numbers (usually stars) that describes the experience with a product or service (Auliya, 2017; Arbani, 2020). Ratings are often considered a quality indicator because they reflect collective customer satisfaction (Tsang et al., 2009; Guo et al., 2014). Ratings also function as social proof that influences the purchasing behavior of new consumers (Mukhopadhyay & Chung, 2015; Moe & Schweidel, 2012).

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is a consumer's psychological tendency to make a purchase after receiving a stimulus from a particular product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008; Fitriyani, 2017). Indicators of purchase intention include transactional, exploratory, preferential, and referential intentions (Azizuddin, 2020). Social, economic, age, and individual perception factors also influence the intensity of consumer purchasing interest (USFA, 2017).

Purchase Decision

The purchase decision is the final stage in the consumer's process of selecting and purchasing a product based on information and evaluation of available alternatives (Kotler, 2007; Nugroho, 2003). This process consists of five stages: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2009; Aeni, 2021).

Hypothesis

The Influence of Viral Marketing on Purchasing Decisions.

Viral marketing is a marketing communication strategy that spreads rapidly from one consumer to another, increasing product exposure without significant costs (Hsiang-Hsi Liu, 2019). Through engaging content shared voluntarily, consumers receive promotional messages from trusted

sources such as friends or their communities. This strategy has been shown to increase trust and encourage purchasing (Irawan, 2019). Suciati's (2021) research also demonstrated that viral marketing significantly influences consumer purchasing decisions on social media.

H1: There is a positive and significant influence between Viral Marketing and Purchasing Decisions.

The Influence of Product Photos on Purchasing Decisions.

Product photos play a crucial role in e-commerce because consumers cannot see the product directly. Attractive, clear, and communicative images can reduce uncertainty and increase trust in the product (Apriadi, 2017). According to Xin et al. (2016), the visual presentation of a product has a significant influence on perceptions and purchasing decisions. Servanda et al. (2019) also stated that product photos displayed on Shopee significantly influence purchase intention and purchasing decisions.

H2: There is a positive and significant influence between Product Photos and Purchase Decisions.

The Influence of Ratings on Purchase Decisions.

Product ratings serve as public evaluations that reflect previous customer satisfaction. The higher a product's rating, the greater the likelihood of new consumers purchasing it (Tsang et al., 2009; Auliya, 2017). Pratiwi Arbani (2020) stated that ratings significantly influence purchase decisions on the Shopee marketplace. Furthermore, research by Guo et al. (2014) shows that online ratings signal quality and serve as a primary reference for consumers before making a purchase.

H3: There is a positive and significant influence between Ratings and Purchase Decisions.

The Influence of Marketing on Customer Purchase Intention.

Purchase intention can arise from social influences, including recommendations or information from friends and social media. Effective viral marketing creates positive perceptions through entertaining, informative, and shareable content (Kotler, 2002; Jalilvand, 2012). Research by Kaloka (2016) demonstrated that viral marketing has a significant influence on consumer purchase intention, as information conveyed by a third party is perceived as more objective and convincing.

H4: There is a positive and significant influence between viral marketing and customer purchase intention.

The influence of product photography on customer purchase intention.

High-quality product photography not only attracts attention but also influences the perceptions and emotions of potential buyers (Fauzi & Lina, 2021). Product images can reduce doubts and create a desire to own the product. Research by Wei Di et al. (2014) showed that product visualization can significantly increase purchase intention. Similar findings were also presented by Servanda et al. (2019), who concluded that product photography positively influences purchase intention among Shopee users.

H5: There is a positive and significant influence between product photography and customer purchase intention.

The Influence of Ratings on Customer Purchase Intention.

Consumer ratings create perceptions of quality and trust in a product or seller. Consumers tend to imitate the purchasing behavior of previous users who have given high ratings (Mukhopadhyay & Chung, 2015). Research by Ichsan et al. (2018) shows that ratings significantly influence purchase intention because they are perceived as a form of social validation. Kang & Namkung (2019) also confirmed that reviews and ratings are key factors determining purchase intention in e-commerce.

H6: There is a positive and significant influence between Ratings and Customer Purchase Intention.

The Influence of Customer Purchase Intention on Purchase Decisions.

Purchase intention is a strong predictor of actual purchase behavior. When consumers have high purchase intention, they are more likely to proceed with a purchase (Zeng & Yuen, 2015).

According to Schiffman & Kanuk (2007), purchase intention is influenced by perceived value, satisfaction, and consumer motivation toward a product. Research by Cheng & Yee (2014) and Egger (2006) also shows that purchase intention can be converted into a purchase decision, especially in online transactions.

H7: There is a positive and significant influence between Customer Purchase Intention and Purchase Decisions.

The influence of Viral Marketing on Purchase Decisions, with Customer Purchase Intention as a mediating factor.

Viral marketing can influence purchase decisions both directly and indirectly by increasing purchase intention. According to Schiffman & Kanuk (2007), purchase intention serves as a bridge between marketing stimuli and the consumer's final decision. Irawan (2019) demonstrated that viral marketing has a direct influence and also through intervening variables such as brand awareness or purchase intention. Therefore, purchase intention can be an important pathway in strengthening the influence of viral marketing on purchase decisions.

H8: There is an influence of Viral Marketing on Purchase Decisions, with Customer Purchase Intention as a mediating factor.

The influence of Product Photography on Purchase Decisions, with Customer Purchase Intention as a mediating factor.

Product photography influences purchase decisions by forming visual and emotional perceptions that trigger purchase intention (Velita, 2012). Research by Fauzi & Lina (2021) shows that aesthetically pleasing product photos can increase purchase intention, which then drives purchase decisions. Furthermore, Xin et al. (2016) also emphasized that visual experience plays a key role in shaping purchase intention, which ultimately influences actual purchasing behavior.

H9: Product photos influence purchase decisions, with customer purchase intention as a mediating factor.

Ratings influence purchase decisions, with customer purchase intention as a mediating factor.

High ratings increase consumer trust and trigger purchase intention, which in turn increases the likelihood of purchase (Arbani, 2020; Kang & Namkung, 2019). Research by Sukron (2019) shows that purchase intention can be an intervening variable between ratings and purchase decisions. This suggests that consumers not only view ratings as an indicator of quality but also use them as a trigger to make purchases by increasing purchase intention.

H10: Ratings influence purchase decisions, with customer purchase intention as a mediating factor.

Research Conceptual Framework

Based on the explanation of previous research results, it is concluded that the variables in the conceptual framework are Viral Marketing, Product Photos, Ratings, Customer Purchase Intention as intervening variables, and Purchase Decision as the dependent variable.

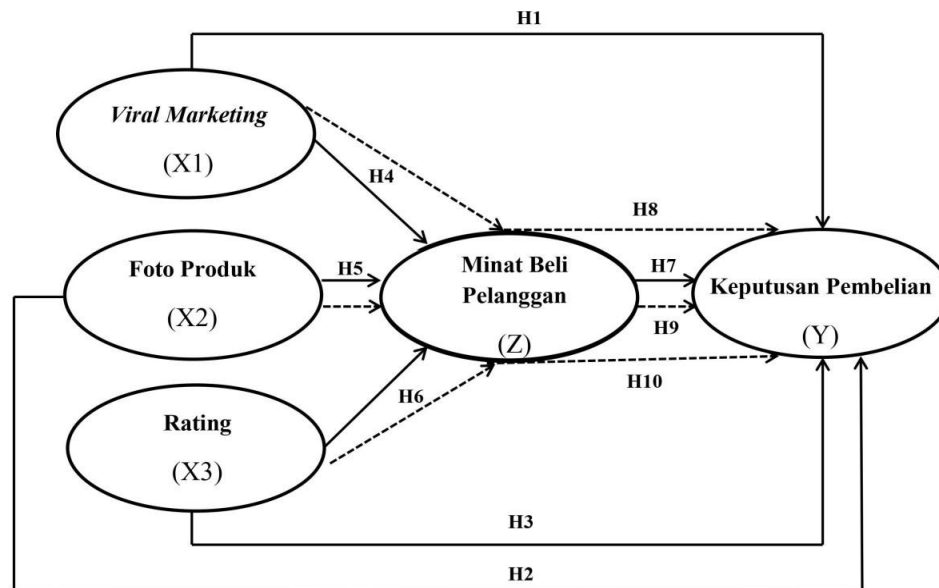


Figure 1. Research Concept Framework

3. Data and Method

Research Type

The type of research used in this study is explanatory research, which aims to explain the position of the variables studied by determining the influence of one variable on another through hypothesis testing (Sugiyono, 2016). The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of viral marketing variables (X1), product photos (X2), and ratings (X3), mediated by customer purchase intention (Z), on purchasing decisions (Y).

Population and Sample

According to (Sugiyono, 2018), a population is a generalized area consisting of objects/subjects with certain qualities and characteristics determined by the researcher to be studied and then conclusions drawn. The population that will be used as the object of this study is Yarsi University students who have purchased products on the Shopee marketplace. According to (Sugiyono, 2018), a sample is a portion of the population and its characteristics. If it is impossible for the researcher to study everything within the population, for example due to limited funds, manpower, or time, the researcher can use a sample drawn from that population. According to (Sugiyanto, 2017), a sample is a subset of the population's size and characteristics. The conclusions drawn from the sample will be used to determine the population. Therefore, samples drawn from the population must be truly representative. In this study, the author narrowed the population by calculating the sample size using the Slovin technique (Sugiyono, 2011). This study used the Slovin formula because the sample size must be representative so that the research results can be generalized. The calculation does not require a sample size table; it can be done using simple formulas and calculations.

Data Collection

Data Types and Data Sources

This study uses subject-based data, namely data obtained from the experiences, opinions, and characteristics of customer respondents. This study also uses primary data sources, namely data obtained directly from respondents, in this study, Shopee customers.

Data Collection Techniques

This study used a survey data collection method with a questionnaire instrument via Google Forms. The questionnaire was administered directly to respondents, namely Shopee customers.

Data Analysis Method

After the research data was obtained, it was analyzed using the Partial Last Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method. The data analysis method used refers to (Latan and Ghozali, 2017), which states that PLS is a path analysis approach used to analyze causal relationships between variables with the aim of determining the direct and indirect effects of independent variables on dependent variables.

4. Results

Structural Model Evaluation

Finding a suitable model (fit) is one of the objectives to be achieved, to determine whether Purchase Intention can act as a mediator between Viral Marketing and the influence of Purchase Decisions among the 2019 Faculty of Economics and Business students of Yarsi University. Table 1 shows the structural model evaluation using specific measurements and the recommended rule of thumb.

Table 1. Structural Model Evaluation Results

Evaluation Measures	Criterion Rules	Model Test Results
R21 (Viral Marketing, Product Photos, Rating on Customer Purchase Intention)	≤ 0.25 weak, $0.26 - 0.45$ moderate, $0.46 - 0.70$ strong,	$R^2 1 = 0,541$
R22 (Viral Marketing, Product Photos, Rating on Purchase Decision)		$R^2 2 = 0,763$
<i>Q2 predictive relevance</i>	≥ 0.71 is very strong	$Q^2 1 = 0,552$ $Q^2 2 = 0,692$
<i>Tenenhaus Goodness Of Fit (GoF)</i>	$Q2 > 0$ = the model has predictive relevance, $Q2 < 0$ = the model lacks predictive relevance	0,489

Source: Data processed from research results (2022)

Based on the results of the structural model analysis in Table 1, the R2 values obtained are divided into two: R2 1 (Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings on Customer Purchase Intention) with a value of 0.541, indicating that Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings influence Customer Purchase Intention as mediators by 54.1%. This value indicates a strong model, as it falls within the 0.46-0.70 range. R2 2 (Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings on Purchase Decisions) with a value of 0.626, indicating that Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings influence Purchase Decisions by 62.6%. This value indicates a strong model, as it falls within the 0.46-0.70 range. The test results of this model indicate that it has relevance in predicting relationships between variables (predictive relevance). This is indicated by the Q2 value in Table 4.12, which is >0 . The resulting Goodness of Fit (GoF) value is $0.639 \geq 0.36$, indicating a strong and very good model fit. To obtain data analysis results, this study used WarpPls software, which produced a relationship pattern between variables as shown in Figure 2.

Based on the results of the structural test, Figure 2 shows how one variable influence another. The direct influence of Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings on Customer Purchase Intention is evident, as is the direct influence between Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings on Purchase Decisions. Furthermore, the Customer Purchase Intention variable acts as a mediating factor, indirectly influencing Viral Marketing, Product Photos, and Ratings on Purchase Decisions.

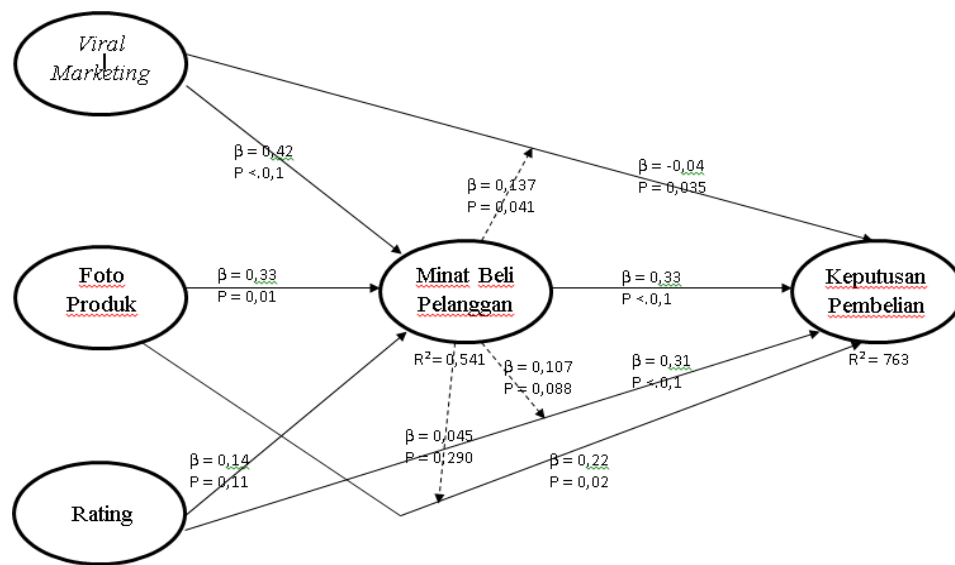


Figure 2. Path Diagram Between Variables

Research Hypothesis Testing

According to the results of the structural model evaluation calculations previously conducted, the results are shown in Figure 2, which demonstrates the path analysis that directly and indirectly influences the variables from the mediating variables. The path analysis results are used to test the ten research hypotheses.

Table 2. Results of Research Hypothesis Testing

	Variable Relationship	Koefisien	P-Value	Description
H1	Viral Marketing Purchase Decision	-0,043	0,352	Negative and Insignificant
H2	Product Photo Purchase Decision	0,223	0,020	Positive and Significant
H3	Purchase Decision Rating	0,313	0,002	Positive and Significant
H4	Viral Marketing Customer Buying Interest	0,417	<0,001	Positive and Significant
H5	Product Photo Visit Interest	0,326	0,001	Positive and Significant
H6	Customer Buying Interest Rating	0,136	0,110	Positive and Significant
H7	Customer Buying Interest Purchase Decision	0,328	0,001	Positive and Significant
H8	Viral Marketing Customer Buying Interest Purchase Decision	0,137	0,041	Positive and Mediating
H9	Product Photo Customer Buying Interest Purchase Decision	0,107	0,088	Positive and non-mediating
H10	Customer Buying Interest Rating Purchase Decision	0,045	0,290	Positive and non-mediating

Source: Data processed from research results (2022)

Based on the results of the hypothesis testing, it was found that of the ten tested variable relationships, most showed a positive and significant influence. Viral marketing did not have a significant effect on purchasing decisions (H1) but had a positive and significant effect on purchase intention (H4) and acted as a mediating variable in influencing purchase decisions through

purchase intention (H8). Product photos had a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions (H2) and purchase intention (H5) but were not proven to be a variable mediated by purchase intention in influencing purchase decisions (H9). Ratings had a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions (H3) but did not have a significant effect on purchase intention (H6) or mediate on purchase decisions (H10). Purchase intention was proven to have a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions (H7), strengthening its role as an important factor in consumer decision-making in the marketplace.

5. Discussion

Viral Marketing on Purchasing Decisions

The results of this study indicate that viral marketing has a significant negative effect on students' purchasing decisions. This finding suggests that the viral marketing strategy used by marketplaces, in this case Shopee, is not effective in encouraging students to make purchases. This could be due to viral content being less relevant to the needs or preferences of the student audience. This finding is inconsistent with the research by Suciati (2021), which stated that viral marketing can significantly increase purchasing decisions. However, this finding is supported by a study by Putri and Febrianti (2020), which found that viral marketing that is not tailored to the market segment has a negative effect. Another study by Lestari (2019) also aligns with these findings, stating that viral marketing without authenticity or strong informational value only creates a temporary impression without influencing purchasing behavior.

Product Photos on Purchasing Decisions

The results of this study indicate that product photos have a significant positive effect on purchasing decisions. This means that product visualization is an important factor in increasing students' confidence in products sold on marketplaces. This finding aligns with research by Servanda et al. (2019), which states that informative and high-quality product photos increase consumer trust. Research by Apriadi (2017) also supports this, stating that product photos serve as a visual communication medium that influences the perception of product value. Furthermore, Xin et al. (2016) also found that product visualization plays a crucial role in the online purchasing decision-making process.

Ratings on Purchasing Decisions

Ratings have been shown to have a positive and significant influence on purchasing decisions. This means that even though students tend to conduct their own research, they still rely on ratings as an indicator of product quality. This finding aligns with research by Auliya (2017), which confirms that ratings provide important social validation in the online purchasing process. Arbani (2020) also found that ratings have a positive impact on marketplace users' purchasing decisions. Meanwhile, research by Guo et al. (2014) confirms that high ratings increase consumer trust in products and sellers.

Viral Marketing on Purchase Intention

The results show that viral marketing has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. This finding indicates that, although it does not directly drive purchases, viral marketing successfully builds consumers' initial interest in a product. This aligns with research by Kaloka (2016), which found that viral marketing is effective in shaping initial perceptions and curiosity in potential buyers. Jalilvand (2012) also found that viral marketing drives purchase intention through social and psychological effects. These findings are reinforced by a study by Irawan (2019), which emphasized the importance of organically shared messages in building initial consumer engagement.

Product Photos on Purchase Intention

Product photos have been shown to have a positive and significant influence on purchase intention. This means that the visual representation of a product significantly contributes to the curiosity and interest of potential buyers. This research aligns with Fauzi and Lina (2021), who showed that attractive product photos can trigger emotional purchase intentions. Servanda et al. (2019) also

showed that the clarity and quality of product visuals on Shopee influence consumers' interest in further exploration. Furthermore, Wei Di et al. (2014) also stated that strong visualizations act as emotional triggers in the purchasing process.

Ratings on Purchase Intention

The findings indicate that ratings have a positive but insignificant effect on purchase intention. This suggests that while ratings provide information, they are not strong enough to create initial attraction to a product among students. This finding is inconsistent with research by Ichsan et al. (2018), which stated that ratings have a significant impact on purchase intention because they are perceived as validation of quality. However, this finding is supported by a study by Kang and Namkung (2019), which showed that the influence of ratings is only significant when accompanied by review content. Sukron (2019) also stated that ratings alone are not sufficient to generate purchase intention without additional information.

Purchase Intention on Purchase Decisions

Purchase intention has been shown to have a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions. This demonstrates that if consumers are psychologically attracted to a product, they are more likely to proceed to the purchase stage. This finding aligns with research by Cheng and Yee (2014), which showed that purchase intention is a strong predictor of purchase decisions. Zeng and Yuen (2015) also stated that purchase intention is closely related to actual behavior. Research by Egger (2006) confirms that high purchase intent leads to purchase conversions on digital platforms.

Purchase Intent Mediates Viral Marketing on Purchase Decisions

This study shows that purchase intent acts as a mediator in the relationship between viral marketing and purchase decisions. This finding implies that viral marketing is more effective in shaping purchase intent than directly influencing decisions. These results align with research by Irawan (2019) and Schiffman & Kanuk (2007), which states that purchase intent is the bridge between promotional stimuli and final decisions. Lestari and Gunawan (2022) also support this finding, stating that successful viral marketing creates emotional engagement that can be converted into purchase decisions.

Purchase Intent Mediates Product Photography on Purchase Decisions

Purchase intent has been shown to mediate the influence of product photography on purchase decisions. This means that visual appeal first builds interest, which ultimately leads to purchase. This finding aligns with research by Velita (2012), which states that visualization creates a first impression that leads to action. Fauzi and Lina (2021) also showed that initial perceptions of product photos trigger strong purchase intentions. Research by Xin et al. (2016) confirmed that a good visual experience significantly determines purchase intentions and final decisions.

Purchase Intention Mediates Ratings on Purchase Decisions

Purchase intention was found to mediate the relationship between ratings and purchase decisions, although the effect of ratings on purchase intention was not significant. This suggests that ratings only have an impact once consumers are already interested in the product. These results align with the findings of Sukron (2019), who stated that ratings do not directly trigger purchase intentions but rather reinforce decisions once purchase intentions are already established. Kang and Namkung (2019) also showed that ratings function optimally in the final evaluation process, not the initial stage. Ichsan et al. (2018), whose findings were inconsistent, argued that ratings trigger purchase intentions early in the process.

6. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, this study concluded that viral marketing, product photos, and ratings had varying effects on the purchasing decisions of students at the Faculty of Economics and Business, YARSI University, with purchase intention as a mediating variable. Viral marketing was shown to have a negative and significant effect on purchase decisions, indicating that Shopee's viral marketing strategy was ineffective in encouraging students to make purchases. Conversely, product

photos and ratings had a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions, indicating that the visual aspects of the product and customer feedback were able to increase students' confidence in purchasing. In terms of purchase intention, viral marketing and product photos had a positive and significant effect, indicating that these two variables were able to shape students' initial interest in the product. However, ratings only had a positive but insignificant effect on purchase intention, indicating that students did not consider ratings as a primary factor in the initial consideration stage. Furthermore, purchase intention was shown to have a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions, acting as a mediator between the influence of viral marketing, product photos, and ratings on students' purchase decisions.

Managerial Implications These findings offer several important implications for marketplace managers like Shopee. First, management needs to evaluate and strengthen its viral marketing strategy by prioritizing more relevant, personalized content that aligns with the characteristics of young consumers, particularly students. Second, the quality of product photos must be continuously improved, as they have been shown to significantly impact purchase interest and decisions. This includes high resolution, multiple angles, and engaging visual presentation. Third, while ratings have a direct impact on purchase decisions, they are not strong enough to trigger initial purchase interest therefore, the rating system needs to be optimized by educating buyers to provide informative and honest reviews.

Recommendation

For future researchers who will conduct similar research, it is hoped that they can look at different objects and increase the number of respondents and can develop it with other factors that do not have an influence on the independent variable so that they can expand the discussion in the research.

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