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Author Name(s): Owen De Pinto Simanjuntak, Robert Roy Purba, Eva Margareth Sarah

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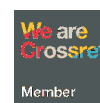
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The role of influencer marketing moderation in consumer journeys and digital trust in online purchasing decisions

Owen De Pinto Simanjuntak^{*)}, Robert Roy Purba, Eva Margareth Sarah
Universitas Sari Mutiara Indonesia, Medan, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of consumer journey, digital trust, and consumer purchasing decisions with influencer marketing as a moderation variable in students who are active users of the Shopee e-commerce platform in Batam City. This study also examines the role of influencer marketing as a moderation variable in the relationship between consumer journey and digital trust on consumer purchase decisions. The method used is quantitative research with a descriptive and verified approach. The research population is students in Batam City and has made transactions on Shopee in the last six months. The sampling technique used purposive sampling with a total of 100 respondents. Data analysis was carried out using multiple linear regression analysis with the help of SmartPLS software version 4.0. The results of the study show that consumer journey, digital trust, and influencer marketing have a positive and significant effect on consumer purchase decisions. Additionally, influencer marketing has been shown to moderate the relationship between consumer journeys and digital trust in consumer purchasing decisions positively. This means that the existence of relevant and popular influencers among students is able to strengthen the influence of shopping experience and digital trust on purchase intentions. These findings underscore the importance of digital marketing strategies that combine a good user experience, digital trust, and collaboration with influencers in improving purchasing decisions among college students. The implications of this study for e-commerce like Shopee are that marketing strategies that optimize the consumer experience, build digital trust, and collaborate with relevant influencers can increase purchase conversions, especially from the student segment.

Keywords:

Consumer journey
Digital trust
Influencer marketing
Consumer purchases

Corresponding authors:

Owen De Pinto Simanjuntak,
Universitas Sari Mutiara Indonesia
Email: depintojuntak@gmail.com

Introduction

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way consumers interact with brands (Herman et al., 2024) and make purchasing decisions. Today's consumers no longer rely solely on information from conventional advertising, but are more active in looking for references through digital (Anatan, 2023) media, such as online reviews, social media, and content shared by public figures or influencers. In this context, the consumer journey (De Wijk et al., 2025) process becomes more complex and dynamic, where consumers go through various digital stages before finally deciding to buy a product or service (Valentini et al., 2024). The rapid development of e-commerce (Inoue & Hashimoto, 2023; Trihudyatmanto, 2024) platforms such as Shopee has changed consumer behavior in making digital product purchases. The consumer decision-making process is now taking

place in a more complex digital context, known as the consumer journey which includes various stages ranging from awareness, consideration, to purchase decisions. However, many Shopee consumers experience confusion in undergoing these stages due to the large selection of products and sellers available. In addition, consumer trust (J. Li et al., 2025) in transaction security and product credibility known as digital trust is still a major challenge (An & Ngo, 2025). Many consumers (Sparacino et al., 2025) have doubts about the authenticity of products and the reliability of sellers on Shopee because this platform facilitates various types of sellers, including those who do not have a clear reputation. This distrust can hinder the process of making a purchase decision (J. Liu, 2025).

In this context, influencer marketing emerged as a strategic marketing strategy to assist consumers (Agarwal et al., 2025) in navigating the digital purchasing process (Spörl-Wang et al., 2025). Influencers with their reach and credibility on social media play a role in building awareness, providing trusted product information, and influencing consumer purchase decisions (Dhiman & Bhati, 2025). However, the effectiveness of influencer marketing in this context is not always consistent. There are times when influencer recommendations are considered less objective or even confusing, causing skepticism (Handoko, 2022) and reducing consumer digital trust (Ben-Ner & Halldorsson, 2010). In addition, the reviews and testimonials available on Shopee are often questioned for their authenticity, which makes it difficult for consumers (Alex et al., 2025) to evaluate product alternatives appropriately. This condition shows that influencer marketing needs to play a strategic role as a factor that moderates the relationship between consumer journey and digital trust on digital consumer purchase decisions (Vigolo et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to examine how the role of influencer marketing can strengthen or improve the relationship between consumer (Jacobs et al., 2025) experience in the consumer journey and the level of digital trust (Guiso, 2009), so that it can encourage better purchasing decisions for Shopee users. Understanding these dynamics is important to increase the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in a highly competitive e-commerce era.

The study (Shizhen Bai, 2025) used product information and customer-generated reviews of JD.com-branded products to investigate the impact of consumer (Kokins et al., 2021) perception of product titles. To measure the level of perceived conformity that customers feel towards product titles in their reviews, we propose an index of perceived conformity intensity, which is measured through topic modeling and string matching. Furthermore, the results of the (Tissayakorn, 2025) research where research was conducted in Thailand actively promote the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) to improve environmental sustainability and reduce dependence on fossil fuels. The results show an important role in demographic characteristics, travel behavior (Tang, T.W., & Chi, 2016), and infrastructure availability in shaping consumer preferences. In addition, sustainable government support through subsidies, financing schemes, and public infrastructure development is essential to promote equitable access.

The urgency of this research Changing Consumer Patterns in the Digital Era has significantly changed consumer behavior (Lankin et al., 2023), where the purchase decision-making process now takes place online and involves various complex stages in the consumer journey. Understanding how consumers move through those stages and what factors infl

uence their decisions becomes crucial for companies to be able to compete in the digital market (Glassberg et al., 2025). Digital trust (An & Ngo, 2025) is one of the main factors that determine the success of online transactions. In situations where consumers cannot physically verify products, digital trust in platforms, sellers, and information sources becomes a key determinant in purchasing decisions. This research provides urgency to explore the extent to which digital trust can affect digital consumer behavior in real terms.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of customer reviews on the Shopee platform as an important indicator in consumer purchase decisions. Although factors such as the consumer journey and digital trust have been extensively researched, the incorporation of buyer reviews as determinants of consumer decisions provides a new dimension. This is because buyer reviews are considered more authentic, come from real experience, and have high credibility in the eyes of

consumers compared to commercial promotions alone. In addition, this study also places influencer marketing as a moderation variable in the relationship between consumer journey and digital trust in consumer purchase decisions. This is important because the phenomenon that occurs in the field shows that not all influencers convey product reviews objectively, considering the commercialization factor where influencers are often paid by brands or sellers. Thus, this study not only assesses the power of influencer marketing in influencing consumers, but also criticizes the authenticity and reliability of the recommendations provided. This novelty makes a significant contribution to the academic literature, as it combines the factor of authenticity of consumer reviews with the strategic role of influencer marketing as a moderation variable. Practically, the findings of this study can help e-commerce players and digital marketers to be more selective in utilizing influencers and optimize the role of buyer reviews as a strategy to increase consumer trust and purchase decisions.

The Phenomenon of Influencer Marketing as an Effective Marketing Strategy. Influencer marketing is growing rapidly and has become one of the marketing strategies widely used by companies to reach digital consumers. However, there is still little research that specifically examines how influencer marketing can play a role as a moderator in the relationship between the consumer journey, digital trust, and purchase decisions. In (Sorooshian, 2025) research, brands can choose influencers based on the number of followers, interactions, frequency of posts, and content value focus on the importance of influencer credibility and the emotional connection that followers build with SMI as the main drivers of influencer marketing success. In addition, brands can choose influencers whose personal positions align with the brand (Saguansap et al., 2025) or those that show positive characteristics, such as sincerity, authenticity, and credibility. Another study (Chang et al., 2025) suggests five criteria for choosing SMI: (1) the number of followers; (2) previous campaigns; (3) budget; (4) target market; and 5) SMI's position (Arango-Kure & Garz, 2025). Another study (Rabby et al., 2025) emphasizes that the style and power of an influencer's content affects how convincing consumers are of the message.

In this study, the theory of Consumer Decision Making is an important framework because the consumer journey is a modern representation of the consumer decision-making process in the digital world. The stages of the consumer journey (awareness, consideration, decision, loyalty) are in line with the stages in decision-making theory. Digital Trust influences the stages of alternative evaluation and purchase decisions because digital consumers tend to choose products (De et al., 2024) that they trust their security and credibility in the online world. Influencer Marketing plays an external factor that can affect every stage in decision-making. Influencers can help increase awareness, provide trusted information (digital trust) (Jiang & Stylos, 2021), and influence purchasing decisions with their recommendations. Influencer Marketing Moderation means the role of influencers indirectly but strengthening or weakening the relationship between the consumer journey and digital trust on purchasing decisions. So, this research integrates traditional (Y. Liu et al., 2025) decision-making theory with the modern digital context, where influencer marketing serves as a strategic force that modifies the way consumers make decisions in the digital age. Digital trust is one of the main factors that determine the success of online transactions. In situations where consumers cannot physically verify products (De et al., 2024), digital trust (Jiang & Stylos, 2021) in platforms, sellers, and information sources becomes a key determinant in purchasing decisions. This research provides urgency to explore the extent to which digital trust can affect digital consumer behavior in real terms (Y. Liu et al., 2025). This study aims to analyze the influence of consumer journey, digital trust, and consumer purchasing decisions with influencer marketing.

Method

This study is a quantitative research with a descriptive and verified analysis approach, which aims to determine the influence of independent variables on dependent variables based on empirical data obtained from respondents. The population in this study is all students in Batam City who are active users of the Shopee e-commerce platform. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) students who are domiciled in Batam City, (2) at least 17 years old, and (3) have

made transactions on Shopee in the last six months. The number of samples used in this study was 100 respondents. The data analysis technique used in this study uses multiple linear regression analysis to determine the simultaneous and partial influence between variables. The analysis was carried out with the help of SmartPLS software version 4.0.

Overview of Research Objects

In this study, the researcher used samples from five public and private universities in Medan City. The number of samples used in this study is 100 students of the Management study program.

Respondent Profiles by Gender

The results of data processing by Gender are presented in table 1 below. Based on table 1, it was obtained that the profile of respondents based on male gender was 27 people with a percentage of 27%. Meanwhile, the profile of respondents based on female gender was 73 people with a percentage of 73%. Therefore, it can be concluded that in this study, the majority of respondents who use Shopee based on gender are women with a total of 73 people.

		Gender		Legitimate percent	Cumulative percent
		Frequency	Percent		
Legitimate	Man	27	27.0	27.0	100.0
	Woman	73	73.0	73.0	73.0
	Entire	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 1. Respondent Profiles Based on Student Gender of Shopee Users

Results and Discussion

Reliability Test

The construction reliability test in the Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis can be carried out using two measures, namely Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Latent construction is declared to have good reliability if the Alpha and Cronbach Composite Reliability values exceed 0.70. This value indicates that the indicator in the construction is consistent and reliable in measuring the variables in question.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity of the Constitution

	Consumer Journey	Digital Trust	Influencer Marketing	Consumer Purchase Decision
Alpha Cronbach	0,855	0,887	0,886	0,994
rho_A	0,976	0,894	0,906	0,951
Composite Reliability	0,987	0,921	0,801	0,984

Based on the results of the data processing, the Alpha and Composite Cronbach values for each latent variable show a number above 0.70. This shows that all the latent variables in this study have met the reliability criteria, so they can be declared reliable.

Test the Auter model

Testing the external model begins by estimating the parameters via the Partial Least Square (PLS) method. According to Ghazali (2008), the indicator is said to be valid if it has a loading factor value above 0.70. Loading factor values between 0.50 and 0.60 are still acceptable under certain conditions, especially in exploratory research. However, indicators with loading factor values below 0.50 should be excluded from the model as they are considered invalid in measuring the construction in question. Based on the results of data calculation using the PLS Algorithm method, the loading factor value of each indicator for each variable can be seen in figure 1.

Based on figure 1, it can be seen that all indicator items are declared valid. This is indicated by the loading factor value of each indicator greater than 0.70, which corresponds to the convergent validity criteria. Thus, all indicators are declared feasible and can be used in this study to measure the construction in question.

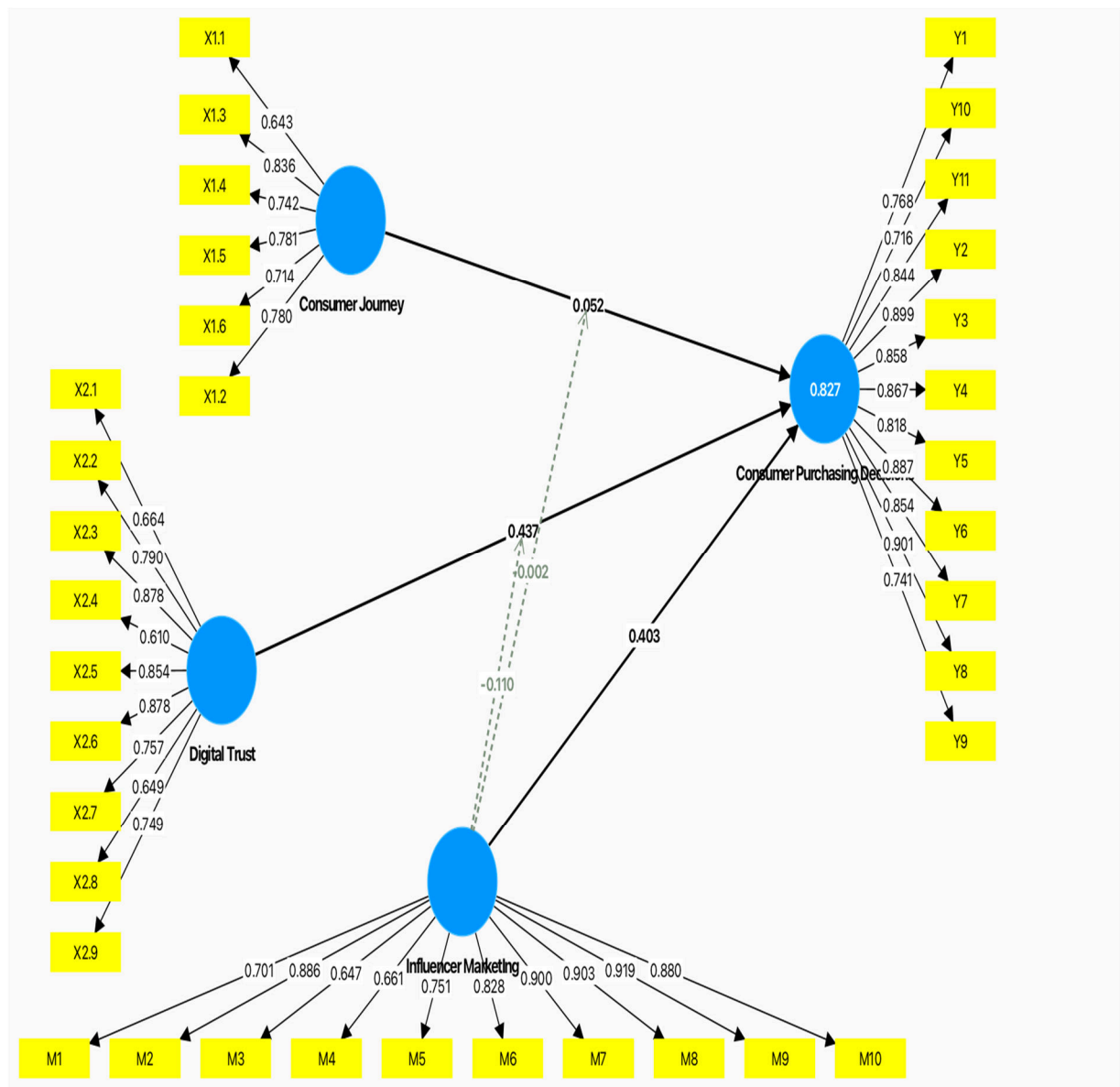


Figure 1 Validity Test Results Based on External Loading

Moderation Testing

The moderation test was conducted to test whether influencer marketing is significant in moderating the influence of consumer journey and digital trust on consumer purchase decisions. Table 2 presents the results of influencer marketing testing in moderating the influence of consumer travel and digital trust on consumer purchase decisions.

Based on table 3, it can be concluded that influencer marketing is a variable that moderates the consumer journey and digital trust in consumer purchases. Influencer marketing is a variable that strengthens the relationship between customer journey and digital trust in consumer purchases among Shopee user students because influencers, especially those who are popular among students (such as celebrities, TikTokers, or campus YouTubers), have a great influence in introducing products.

Students are more easily exposed to new products when they are introduced by the figures they follow. Content such as Shopee reviews, unboxing, or product recommendations is the starting point of the consumer journey (awareness phase).

Table 3. Statistics T Value of the Moderation Variable

	Original Sample (O)	Std Deviation (STDEV)	t-Statistics	P value	Conclusion
IM*CJ ->CPD	0.140	0.069	2.159	0.0489	Accepted
IM*DT ->CPD	-0.328	0.140	2.340	0.010	Accepted

College students tend to trust testimonials or real experiences from influencers rather than formal advertisements. Influencers give an authentic and relatable impression, especially if they convey their personal experiences while shopping on Shopee. It builds digital trust, which is trust in online platforms and products (Eddleston & Kellermann, 2007; Olaoye et al., 2018).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is carried out using t-statistical values obtained through the bootstrapping process. A hypothesis is declared accepted or supported if the t-statistical value is greater than 1.96 at a significance level of 5% (one-tailed) (Creswell, 2016).

Table 4. T-Statistical Value

	Original Sample (O)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	Statistics T	P value	Conclusion
The Consumer Journey-> Consumer Purchasing Decisions	-0,262	-0,278	3,248	0,001	Accepted
Digital Trust-> Consumer Purchase Decision	-0,454	-0,466	3,861	0,000	Accepted
Influencer Marketing -> Consumer Purchase Decisions	0,186	0,187	2,907	0,004	Accepted

Based on the test results in table 4, it is known that the consumer journey influences consumer purchasing decisions, digital trust influences consumer purchasing decisions and influencer marketing influences consumer purchasing decisions. Based on the consumer journey, digital trust, and influencer marketing each influence consumer purchasing decisions. In addition, this study places influencer marketing as a moderation variable in the relationship between consumer journeys and digital trust in consumer purchasing decisions. These findings are in line with the field picture that buyer reviews and influencer recommendations are seen as sources of information that greatly influence consumer perception of products/brands. The consumer journey represents a series of awareness, considerations, and decisions that Shopee consumers experience. The smoother, more informative, and more consistent the experience at each stage, such as ease of finding product reviews, checkout experiences, and after-sales service, the more likely consumers are to make a purchase decision. These findings suggest that good touchpoint management reduces uncertainty and speeds up the decision-making process. The results of this study are supported by the research Shizhen (2025) which presents a method to extract the intensity of perceived conformity from a large amount of product information and consumer reviews in the online retail environment. Consumers find it easier to understand the experience attributes of keywords in product titles, both search attributes and experience attributes have a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions (Al-Adwan et al., 2022). This finding is also in line with the theory of planned behavior explaining that purchase intent is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and behavioral control. The consumer journey influences consumer attitudes through a seamless experience. Digital trust shapes norms and beliefs about the security and credibility of transactions. Influencer marketing reinforces intent with social norms through recommendations and validation.

The influence of digital trust on consumer purchasing decisions. Digital trust lowers risk perception in online transactions. For example, data security, honesty of product information, credibility of reviews. When consumers trust platforms, reviews, and sellers, purchase intent and realization increase. Therefore, trust signals (seller verification, rating, return policy) are important determinants. In the context of e-commerce applications such as Shopee, digital trust is formed through several mechanisms: first, the existence of a data security system that protects consumer information; second, the honesty of the product information presented by the seller; and third, the credibility of consumer reviews that are considered to reflect real experiences. Overall, consumers tend to trust the reviews presented on the platform despite the few disappointing reviews. This shows that while not all buying experiences are as expected, consumer confidence levels remain high because the proportion of negative experiences is relatively small compared to positive reviews. However, the existence of review manipulation practices, such as sellers using other accounts to provide fake reviews, can undermine digital trust. If consumers find a significant difference between positive reviews and a disappointing real experience, then the credibility of the platform and seller can be questioned. Therefore, consumers develop selective mechanisms in reading reviews, such as paying more attention to reviews with original photos/videos, trusting reviews from verified accounts, and seeing patterns of rating consistency (L. Li et al., 2023).. These findings support a trust-based decision-making theory that states that trust reduces uncertainty and increases consumer confidence in making purchasing decisions. This means that the higher the level of digital trust that consumers feel, the more likely they are to make a transaction, even on a product or seller that they have never tried before. Therefore, e-commerce platforms need to maintain and enhance digital trust by enforcing anti-manipulation review regulations, strengthening security systems, and ensuring the transparency of product information

The influence of influencer marketing on consumer purchasing decisions. Influencers act as social proof. Influencer reviews or recommendations can speed up product evaluation because they are considered representative or representative of other people's real experiences. However, this effect depends on the perception of the influencer's credibility. Influencers who are considered authentic and relevant tend to improve purchasing decisions. Influencers who are too "commercial" or not in line with the segment can actually trigger skepticism. The role of influencer marketing moderation puts influencer marketing as a moderator. When influencers are seen as credible and authentic, their presence amplifies the positive influence of the consumer journey and digital trust on their purchasing decisions, reinforces the message at the touchpoint, and magnifies the effect of trust signals. Students as digital natives are highly exposed to social media content. In many cases, they integrate the shopping experience in e-commerce with influencer-recommended content. Thus, the role of influencer marketing is stronger in emphasizing the relationship between the consumer journey and digital trust in consumer purchasing decisions. Brands and e-commerce platforms such as Shopee need to choose influencers that match the characteristics of the target market (e.g. students) and maintain the transparency of endorsements. In conclusion, influencer marketing is a moderation variable because it is able to strengthen the consumer journey and digital trust in shaping purchasing decisions. Despite the risk of bias due to paid reviews, among college students, influencer recommendations still have a huge influence as additional validation in the decision-making process.

Conclusion

Consumer journeys, digital trust, and influencer marketing have a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions. A smooth, consistent, and informative consumer journey (from awareness, consideration, to decision-making) can reduce uncertainty and speed up the decision-making process. Influencer marketing plays a moderating variable in the relationship between the consumer journey and digital trust in purchasing decisions. Credible influencers reinforce the positive influence of these two variables by providing additional validation to consumers. The implications of this study for e-commerce like Shopee are that marketing strategies that optimize the consumer experience, build digital trust (e.g. through transaction security and honest reviews), and collaborate with

relevant influencers can increase purchase conversions, especially from the student segment. For brand influencer marketers, collaborating with influencers who are close to student life (campus celebrities, educational TikTokers, young YouTubers) will strengthen the influence of marketing messages and help convey product value in a more relatable and convincing way. For the next researcher, this study opens up the opportunity to explore more deeply the role of influencer marketing moderation in other market segments or different e-commerce platforms, as well as explore what types of influencer content are most effective in shaping purchasing decisions.

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