THE ROLE OF PARASOCIAL INTERACTION IN MEDIATING THE INFLUENCE OF VLOGGER POPULARITY AND CREDIBILITY ON PURCHASE INTENTION OF GADGET PRODUCTS

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Abstract

This research examines the impact of social media on brand marketing strategies, specifically focusing on the utilization of video content displaying vloggers as influential figures. The objective of the study is to assess the relationship between popularity, credibility, and parasocial interaction towards purcase intention of reviewed product. A sample of 125 subscribers of a gadget vlogger has participated in data collection. The collected data was analyzed using the PLS-SEM method using SmartPLS 3.0. The findings indicate that credibility exerts a stronger influence on purchase intention compared to popularity. Furthermore, it was discovered that vlogger's credibility positively and significantly affects parasocial interaction, whereas popularity does not. Parasocial interaction partially mediates the effect of vlogger's credibility on purchase intentions. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of vlogger credibility in effectively increasing purchase intention and suggest that companies should identify credible vloggers to foster parasocial relationships with subscribers, to significantly strengthen displayed product purchase intention, particularly among subscribers.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas merek memasarkan produk dan layanan mereka melalui konten video yang menampilkan vlogger sebagai pemimpin opini. Penelitian ini bertujuan untukmengetahui hibungan popularitas, kredibilitas dan interaksi parasosial terhadap niat beli. Data dikumpulkan dari sampel 125 subscribers vlogger Gadgetin. Data kemudian dianalisis menggunakan metode SEM berbasis PLS dengan SmartPLS 3.0. Ditemukan menunjukkan bahwa kredibilitas memiliki pengaruh yang lebih besar pada niat beli dibandingkan popularitas. Ditemukan pula bahwa interaksi parasosial secara positif dan signifikan dipengaruhi oleh kredibilitas, tetapi tidak oleh popularitas. Interaksi parasosial secara parsial memediasi pengaruh kredibilitas vlogger terhadap niat beli subscribers. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah vlogger harus dianggap dapat dipercaya untuk meningkatkan niat beli subscribers dengan efisien, dan perusahaan harus mengidentifikasi vlogger yang kredibel untuk menciptakan hubungan parasosial dengan subscribers, yang dapat meningkatkan niat beli produk, terutama bagi subscribers vlogger tersebut.

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INTRODUCTION

Digitalization has changed the way brands market their products and services. There are many opinion leaders on social media as a source of information and advice (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015: 245). The information conveyed by these opinion leaders can range from recommendations for choosing the best brand, using products correctly, to where to buy products. Consumers read website reviews such as blogs and watch videos to gather information and recommendations in their pre-purchase decision-making process (Ladhari et al., 2020). Based on this phenomenon, it has become important for brands to identify the right influencers to promote their products and services (Arora et al., 2019).

Specifically, YouTube has become a popular site for accessing and sharing video blogs or vlogs (Hill et al., 2017). The widespread use of social media has led to an increase in the number of vloggers (Misra & Mukherjee, 2019). Vloggers are a type of social media influencer who upload videos about their personal lives, products or services they use (Hill et al., 2017; M. T. Liu et al., 2019). Vlogs are a digital medium that contain individual monologues about opinions or personal experiences (Sugiono & Irwansyah, 2019). Vlogs combine blogging with the richness of expression that can be accessed in a video, making it a powerful new medium for sharing information post-pandemic (Liu, 2021). Vloggers are driven by the belief that the opinions posted on their vlogs can effectively influence consumer purchase intentions (Hill et al., 2017). The emergence of vlogs and the success of "YouTube celebrities" have provided marketing tools for brands to connect with consumers (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Becoming popular on YouTube has become a fundamental way to promote oneself, services, or products (Chatzopoulou et al., 2010). The emergence of internet communication not only makes users become viewers but also producers and disseminators of information (Liu, 2021). Lin & Kao (2010) argue that the popularity of a blog refers to its ability to drive interactive behavior in other bloggers. The novelty of the content has an important effect on popularity. Chatzopoulou et al., (2010) assess the popularity of vloggers through several parameters such as the number of views, i.e., how many times the video is watched, the number of likes, the number of comments, and the average rating. When watching content uploaded by vloggers, viewers will get information about the gadget products they are interested in. Viewers can then compare, eliminate products they consider less attractive, and then intend to buy their chosen gadget products. Viewers' perception of vloggers' popularity was found to positively influence their purchase intention of the products reviewed by vloggers (Folkvord et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2017; Ladhari et al., 2020; Prabowo, 2021). Based on the theoretical framework and previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H_1: Vlogger's popularity has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

A vlogger is generally considered to have expertise or credibility in their field. Credibility is defined as the extent to which a source, in this case a vlogger, is perceived as trustworthy and reliable (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Vlogger's credibility is also considered the extent to which a vlogger is perceived as interesting, knowledgeable, and trustworthy (Kharisma & Kurniawati, 2021). The more skilled, interesting, and trustworthy a vlogger is, the more they can influence consumer purchasing intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). The trust that young online consumers have in online stores significantly influences their purchase intentions (Giantari et al., 2013). Authenticity is also a driving source of vlogger's credibility and is essential to their success (Ladhari et al., 2020). The more authentic, engaging, and interesting a vlogger is, the easier it is for them to stimulate viewers' purchasing intentions because they are perceived as a credible source of information. The perceived

credibility of a vlogger by their audience has been found to have a positive effect on purchasing intentions for products that the vlogger reviews (Saima & Khan, 2020; Sesar et al., 2022; Waisnawa & Rastini, 2020). Based on the framework and previous research, a hypothesis is proposed:

H$_2$: Vlogger's credibility has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

Viewers will evaluate the brand supported by vloggers positively when they are motivated to seek entertainment or build relationships in the vlog. Viewers will spend a lot of time in the vlog, so parasocial interaction may occur between viewers and vloggers (Liu et al., 2019). If the audience is continuously exposed to YouTube video content featuring vloggers, a close psychological relationship with the vlogger called parasocial interaction can be created (Kurtin et al., 2018). In the context of vloggers, parasocial interaction describes the psychological closeness between viewers and vloggers that occurs as if it were a direct social interaction.

Social attraction refers to the tendency of influencers to increase the emotional liking of their followers beyond just collecting "likes" on social media platforms (Masuda et al., 2022). This refers to the social attraction that causes the popularity of vloggers to influence the emotional attachment of viewers. There are some differences in previous findings regarding the influence of vlogger's popularity on parasocial interaction. It was found that when a beauty vlogger is perceived as popular by the audience, they tend to develop a strong parasocial interaction with the vlogger (Manchanda et al., 2021). There is a parasocial relationship between young viewers and popular vloggers that significantly affects the intention to purchase food and beverage products (Folkvord et al., 2019). Based on the framework and previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H$_3$: Vlogger's popularity has a positive and significant effect on parasocial interaction.

Credibility refers to the quality of reliable opinions. A vlogger who is perceived as credible may make viewers rely on them for information. Viewers will feel that the vlogger is trustworthy and continue to seek information through them, thus creating a close interpersonal relationship. Expert and trustworthy travel influencers have an impact on the parasocial interaction of followers (Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021). Similar research conducted by Manchanda et al., (2021)also shows that the credibility of beauty vloggers has a positive effect on parasocial interaction. Based on the framework and previous research, the hypothesis is proposed:

H$_4$: Vlogger's popularity has a positive and significant effect on parasocial interaction.

Focusing on various types of video advertising, it was found that PSI has a positive effect on purchase intention in social media influencer marketing in South Korea (Masuda et al., 2022). Previous empirical research conducted by Hwang & Zhang (2018) found that the parasocial relationship between followers and online social networking celebrities in China positively influences consumer purchase intention. Based on the framework and previous research, the hypothesis is proposed:

H$_5$: Parasocial interaction has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

Consumer behavior is very important in the foundation of this research because it describes the process of a consumer (in this context, the audience) in creating or strengthening the intention to purchase gadget products reviewed by vloggers on the YouTube platform. Purchase intention is a learning and thinking process that shapes perception (Giantari, 2021: 60). At the input stage, the audience's purchasing behavior process is influenced by extrinsic communication sources in the form of advice and recommendations in the form of video content that contains potential products that can meet the audience's needs. In the process stage, the audience's behavior will be influenced by psychological aspects such as perceived popularity, perceived credibility, and perceived parasocial interaction regarding the vlogger (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015: 368). When the information source

(in the context of this study, vloggers) has high credibility, the vlogger is considered more persuasive than a vlogger with low credibility (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015: 368: 245). Based on the framework and previous research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_6: The role of parasocial interaction mediates the effect of vlogger's popularity on purchase intention.

H_7: The role of parasocial interaction mediates the effect of vlogger's popularity on purchase intention.
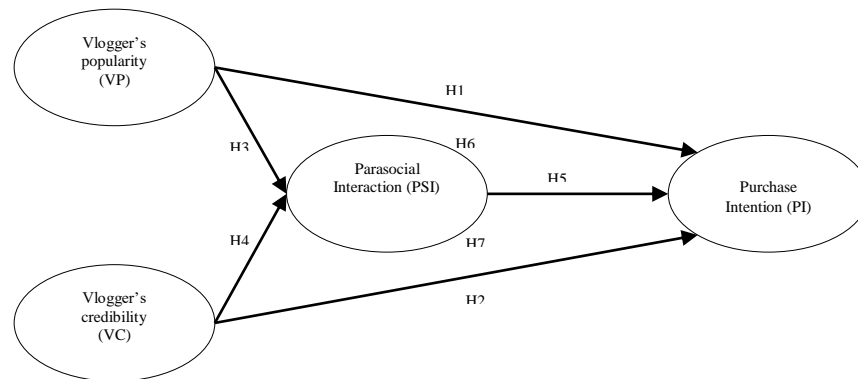
Source: Previous research studies.

Image 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is causal associative research with a quantitative technique. This study aims to explain the causal relationship between parasocial interaction variables in mediating the influence of vlogger's popularity and credibility on purchase intention. Each variable is measured by a series of indicators that are then analyzed after all data is collected. This research was conducted in Denpasar, Bali. The population in this study are the subscribers of the Gadgetin YouTube channel in Denpasar. The sampling technique used in this study is non-probability sampling because there is no complete list of the population. The data collection method in this study is by survey method by distributing offline and online questionnaires through Google Form to target respondents. Each statement is measured using a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree). The analysis technique used is multivariate analysis using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) model with SmartPLS 3.0 software. The data analysis method in this study is divided into two, that descriptive analysis and inferential statistical analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was distributed in two ways, namely physical questionnaire and online questionnaire using Google Form. A total of 128 questionnaires were filled out and 125 respondents were screened who answered according to the screening criteria and answered completely.

Table 1.
Respondent Characteristics

No.	Characteristics	Classification	Number of People	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	66	52,8
		Female	59	47,2
2	Age (Years Old)	18-22	83	66,4
		23-27	30	24
		28-32	8	6,4
		33-37	2	1,6
		≥38	2	1,6
3	Last Education Level	High school/ equivalent	85	68
		Diplomma 1	4	3,2
		Diplomma 4	6	4,8
		Bachelor's degree (S1)	26	20,8
		Magister's degree(S2)	5	4
4	Job	Students	85	68
		Civil servants	8	6,4
		Private sector employees	26	20,8
		Enterpreneurs	6	4,8
5	Earnings (per month)	≤ Rp 1.000.000	34	27,2
		Rp 1.000.001 - Rp 3.000.000	46	38,6
		Rp 3.000.001 – Rp 5.000.000	27	21,6
		≥ Rp 5.000.001	18	14,4

Source: processed primary data, 2023

For the descriptive analysis, the average answers of respondents for each research indicator within the variable can be grouped into five classes: 1.00 - 1.79 = very low; 1.80 - 2.59 = low; 2.60 - 3.39 = quite high; 3.40 - 4.19 = high; 4.20 - 5.00 = very high. In the outer model test for confirmatory research, the LF (Loading Factor) value must be the same as or greater than 0.5; CR (Composite Reliability) must be greater than 0.7; and the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) value must be greater than 0.5 for the model to be categorized as accurate and consistent (Ghozali, 2021: 71). Indicators with the highest loading are considered the strongest in reflecting latent variables. The square root value of AVE must be greater than the correlation value between latent variables for the model to be considered valid. The results showed that all measurement instruments met the requirements for being reliable and valid.

Table 2.
Descriptive Analysis

Variable		Indicator	Source	Mean	Description
Vlogger Popularity (VP)	VP1	Considered famous	Ladhari *et al.* (2020), Chen *et al.* (2021)	4,384	Very high
	VP2	Has many subscribers		4,4	Very high
	VP3	Popularity is seen as increasing		4,312	Very high
	VP4	Has very active subscribers		4,096	High
	Total			4,298	Very tigggi
Kredibilitas *Vlogger* (KV)	VC1	Honest	Sokolova & Kefi, 2020, Munnukka *et al.* (2019)	4,336	Very high
	VC2	Trustworthy		4,192	High
	VC3	Knowledgeable about the product		4,256	Very high
	VC4	Competent in making statements		4,376	Very high
	VC5	Regularly updates content		4,112	High
	Total			4,254	Very high
Parasocial Interaction (PSI)	PSI1	Looking forward to watching the video	Lee & Watkins (2016)	3,536	High
	PSI2	Feeling like a part of the fan		3,08	High enough

		community			
	P3	Wanting to meet in person		2,928	High enough
	IP4	Following news about the vlogger in various media		2,816	High enough
	Total			3,09	High enough
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	Willing to use the featured product	Kim & Lennon (2013) dan Choi & Lee (2019)	4,008	High
	PI2	Interested in buying the featured product		3,08	High
	PI3	Helped in making purchase decisions		4,416	Very high
	PI4	Visited the website if planning to buy the product in the near future		4,264	Very high
	Total			4,168	High

Source: processed primary, 2023

Table 3.

Outer Model Analysis

Indicator	LF≥0,5	CR>0,7	AVE>0,5	√AVE
VP1	0,783			
VP2	0,811	0,867	0,621	
VP3	0,701			0,788
VP4	0,850			
VC1	0,744			
VC2	0,817			
VC3	0,749	0,872	0,577	
VC4	0,775			0,759
VC5	0,709			
PSI1	0,822			
PSI2	0,854	0,896	0,684	
PSI3	0,782			0,827
PSI4	0,848			
PI1	0,794			
PI2	0,725	0,857	0,599	0,774
PI3	0,812			
PI4	0,763			

Source: processed primary data, 2023

Table 4.
Latent Variable Correlations

	VP	VC	PSI	PI
VP	0,788			
VC	0,601	0,759		
PSI	0,320	0,355	0,827	
PI	0,480	0,560	0,434	0,774

Source: processed primary data, 2023

Table 5.
Inner Model Analysis

	Hypotheis	Standardized beta	t-values	p-values	Explanation
H₁	VP→ PI	0,183	2,171	0,030	Supported
H₂	VC→ PI	0,362	3,528	0,000	Supported
H₃	VP→ PSI	0,168	1,474	0,141	Not Supported

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H$_4$	VC→ PSI	0,254	3,223	0,001	Supported
H$_5$	PSI → PI	0,246	3,476	0,001	Supported
H$_6$	VP→ PSI → PI	0,041	1.219	0.223	Not Supported
H$_7$	VC→ PSI → PI	0,063	2.474	0.014	Supported

Source: processed primary data, 2023
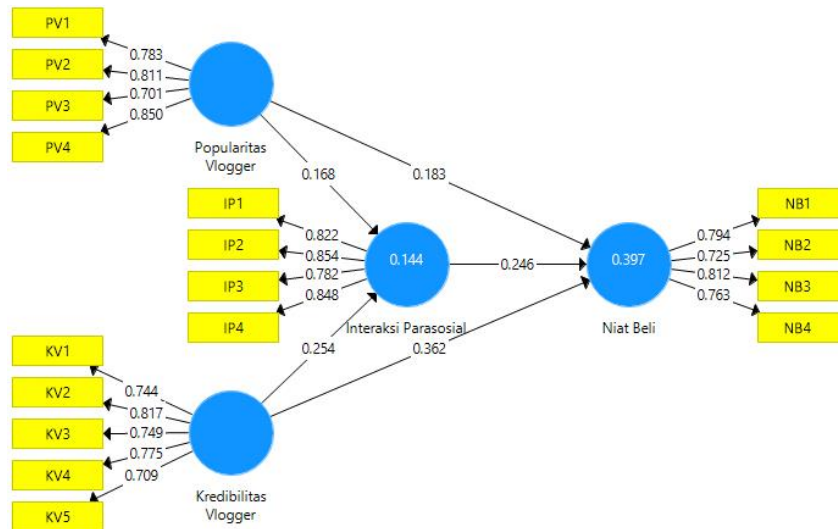
Source: Data processed, 2023

Figure 2. PLS Algorithm

To obtain the VAF test results, the value of the direct influence (a) is known when the parasocial interaction variable has not been included in the mediation model yet. After the parasocial interaction variable is included in the mediation model, a significant indirect influence (bxc) is also obtained. Thus, VAF is calculated using the formula:

$$\text{VAF} = \frac{b \times c}{b + c \times a}$$
$$= \frac{0,254 \times 0,362}{0,254 + 0,362 \times 0,246}$$
$$= \frac{0,092}{0,343}$$
$$= 0,268 \text{ or } 26,8\% \text{ (partial mediation)}$$

The results of the H$_1$ test show that the positive standard beta value is 0.183 with a significance of 0.030 < α = 0.05, indicating that popularity has a significant positive effect on purchase intention. This can be interpreted as meaning that the more popular a vlogger is perceived by their subscribers, the higher the perceived purchase intention of the subscribers. This research finding is an application of the consumer behavior model which states that there is an input process received by subscribers. Input can be in the form of information received from external communication sources. The external communication source in this case is the YouTube platform, which provides various product information in the form of videos uploaded by various sources. One of the popular content watched regarding gadget products is the product review content uploaded by the Gadgetin channel. In the process stage, subscribers will search for pre-purchase information that is influenced by consumer

psychological factors such as perception of the information source. Subscribers may perceive Gadgetin vlogger as a popular figure. This perception can help consumers create an intention to make a purchase which ultimately leads to a purchasing decision. This finding is in line with previous research which found that opinion leader in this case vlogger's popularity significantly influences audience purchase intention (Folkvord et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2017; Irpansyah et al., 2019; Ladhari et al., 2020; Prabowo, 2021).

The results of testing H_2 show that the positive standard beta value is 0.361 with significance of $0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$, indicating that credibility has a significant positive effect on purchase intention. It can be interpreted that the higher the perceived credibility of the vlogger by their subscribers, the higher the purchase intention perceived by the subscribers. Besides influencing perceptions of popularity, psychological factors can also affect perceptions of credibility. Similar to perceptions of popularity, perceptions of credibility held by subscribers can also help generate purchase intention. This is in line with research conducted which found that opinion leader in this case vlogger's credibility significantly influences audience purchase intention (Irpansyah et al., 2019; Prabowo, 2021; Saima & Khan, 2020; Sesar et al., 2022; Waisnawa & Rastini, 2020).

The results of testing H_3 indicate that the positive standard beta value is 0.168 with significance of $0.141 > \alpha = 0.05$, so popularity does not have a significant effect on parasocial interaction. It can be interpreted that the higher the popularity of the vlogger perceived by their subscribers, the parasocial interaction perceived by subscribers does not increase significantly. The findings of this study are not in line with Manchanda et al., (2021) research that found vlogger's popularity can create significant parasocial interaction between vloggers and viewers. Differences in findings may be due to differences in dimensions of measurement and research subjects.

The results of testing H_4 indicate that the positive standard beta value is 0.254 with significance of $0.001 < \alpha = 0.05$, so credibility has a significant positive effect on parasocial interaction. It can be interpreted that the more credible the vlogger is perceived by their subscribers, the closer the parasocial relationship felt by the subscribers. This finding is in line with the research which found that opinion leader's credibility in this case vlogger significantly influences parasocial interaction (Manchanda et al., 2021; Sesar et al., 2022; Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021).

The results of hypothesis testing H_5 indicate that the positive standard beta value is 0.246 with a significance of $0.001 < \alpha = 0.05$, indicating that parasocial interaction has a significant positive effect on purchase intention. It can be interpreted that the closer the parasocial interaction perceived by subscribers, the higher the purchase intention of those subscribers. This result is consistent with previous studies that found purchase intention is significantly influenced by parasocial interaction (Lestari et al., 2021; Masuda et al., 2022; Purwanto, 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Yang & Sanchi, 2022; Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021).

The results of hypothesis testing H_6 indicate that the positive standard beta value is 0.041 with a significance of $0.223 > \alpha = 0.05$, indicating that parasocial interaction does not have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between vlogger's popularity and purchase intention. This finding shows that the variable of parasocial interaction has not been able to mediate the influence of Gadgetin vlogger's popularity on subscribers' purchase intention. This is because the relationship path between vlogger's popularity and parasocial interaction does not have a significant relationship, so the mediation fails to occur.

The results of hypothesis testing H_7 indicate that the positive standard beta value is 0.063 with a significance of $0.014 < \alpha = 0.05$, indicating that parasocial interaction has a significant mediating

effect on the relationship between vlogger's credibility and purchase intention. Based on the VAF test, it is obtained that parasocial interaction has a partial mediating effect. This shows parasocial interaction can partially explain the relationship between vlogger's credibility and purchase intention. It also shows that the independent variable of vlogger's credibility can directly affect the dependent variable of purchase intention without involving the parasocial interaction mediating variable.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, several conclusions can be drawn: 1) Purchase intention of displayed product is positively influenced by vlogger's popularity and credibility. This means the more popular and credible a vlogger is perceived by its subscribers in Denpasar City, the higher the purchase intention felt by subscribers for the gadget product reviewed. 2) Parasocial interaction felt by subscribers is positively influenced by subscriber's perception of a vlogger's credibility but not by his/ her popularity. This means to enhance parasocial relationship between vlogger as opinion leader and their subscribers in Denpasar City, subscribers need to feel that the vlogger they watch is credible enough to be trusted. 3) Purchase intention is positively influenced by parasocial interaction. This means the closer the subcribers feel with the vlogger the watch, the stonger purchase intent they have. 4) Parasocial interaction is unable to mediates the effect of vlogger's popularity towards purchase intention. This means intention to purchase can solely be seen from subscribers' parasocial interaction without having to see subscriber's perception on a vlogger popularity. 5) Parasocial interaction partially mediates the effect of vlogger's credibility towards purchase intention. This means parasocial interacion has some direct effect between the relationship vlogger's credibility and purcase intention of a displayed product.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations are formulated. First, gadget companies and distributors need to carefully identify the vloggers who will be selected for marketing through YouTube video content. Gadget companies should not only focus on vloggers who are popular among the internet community, but also vloggers who are credible. Second, the selected vloggers need to prioritize and maintain their credibility as opinion leaders in the field of gadget technology. The selected vloggers will be perceived as experts and trustworthy by their subscribers, thereby directly increasing efficiency in enhancing audience buying intention, especially among subscribers.

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