

The Role of Online Reviews and Source Credibility in Driving Trust and Purchase Intentions for Beauty Products

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Abstract

In today's digital marketplace, online customers reviews OC-Rs heavily steer buying choices, a trend especially noticeable in the fast-moving beauty sector. This research investigates how OCRs, together with the credibility of their sources, shape brand trust and e-commerce purchase intentions among beauty shoppers in Batam, Indonesia. A quantitative design grounded in Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling PLS-SEM evaluates the interplay of these constructs. Information was gathered via an online questionnaire completed by 300 active consumers who had ordered beauty items through e-commerce platforms in the previous six months. The analysis revealed that the quality of an argument, the overall popularity of a post, and its visual attractiveness each exert a strong, positive effect on trust in a brand. The study also confirmed that this trust significantly drives consumers' intentions to purchase, acting as an essential mediating link. Furthermore, the credibility of the review author was found to moderate this relationship; as source credibility rises, trust exerts an even greater influence on the likelihood of purchase. Taken together, these results offer clear guidance to beauty firms and e-commerce managers: by curating high-quality, credible reviews, they can enhance brand trust and, in turn, steer more shoppers toward the checkout.

Keywords: Beauty Products, E-Commerce Online, Customer Reviews, Purchase Decision, Source Credibility

Introduction

The rapid growth of e-commerce platforms like Shopee, Tokopedia, and Sociolla has transformed consumer purchasing behavior, especially in the beauty sector. Online customer reviews (OCRs) are key factors influencing online buying decisions, which provide social proof and shape consumer trust (Mulyani et al., 2021). L'Oréal Indonesia (2024) reports that 77% of Indonesian consumers rely on reviews before purchasing beauty products, emphasizing the

role of peer opinions in decision-making (Salsabilla & Indonesia, 2024). User-uploaded photos and detailed feedback are important in building trust (Ramadhan et al., 2022).

OCRs reduce uncertainty for consumers who cannot physically evaluate products before buying, making the authenticity and credibility of reviews crucial (Zhang et al., 2020). However, the rise of fake reviews and manipulated ratings, especially in Indonesian marketplaces, raises concerns about review reliability (Gaol et al., 2022; Zuleika et al., 2024). Therefore, the influence of reviews, accompanied by photos and ratings, on beauty product purchase decisions is a central focus of this study.

This research is grounded in Social Proof Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Social Proof Theory suggests that consumers mimic others' behaviors when uncertain, using online reviews as social evidence to guide purchase decisions (Handoyo, 2024). ELM proposes two pathways for processing information: the central route, where detailed information and photos are carefully considered, and the peripheral route, where consumers are influenced by quick cues like ratings and aesthetics (Huseynov & Dhahak, 2020).

Given the rapid growth of Indonesia's beauty market, with cosmetics sales up 9.61% in 2021 (Hasibuan & Indonesia, 2022), this study aims to explore how review features such as star ratings and photos impact consumer trust and purchase intentions in e-commerce. The study also examines how review credibility moderates this relationship, particularly in the beauty sector in Batam, Indonesia, where consumer behavior may differ from larger cities.

This study addresses the gap in literature by analyzing how the credibility of review sources influences trust and purchasing decisions in the beauty sector. It offers new insights into consumer behavior in Indonesia's growing e-commerce market.

Literature Review

Social Proof Theory

Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 2001) suggests that individuals follow others' behaviour, especially in uncertain situations. In e-commerce, consumers rely on online reviews, star ratings, and shared photos to guide their decisions, indicating product trustworthiness (Handoyo, 2024). This is particularly important in the beauty industry, where products cannot be physically tested. Studies by Vo et al. (2023) and Wahyuni et al. (2022) show that consumer trust is strongly influenced by the experiences and opinions of others, making social proof a key factor in purchase decisions.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) explains how consumers process information through two pathways: the central route, which involves thoughtful consideration, and the peripheral route, where consumers rely on superficial cues like star ratings and visual appeal. The central route is activated when consumers are motivated and able to process detailed information, such as product reviews or specifications, while the peripheral route is used when time or interest is limited (Huseynov & Dhahak, 2020; Asanprakit & Kraiwanit, 2023).

In beauty e-commerce, detailed reviews and photos engage the central route, prompting deeper evaluation (Agag et al., 2023), while visually appealing posts with minimal text influence less involved consumers through the peripheral route. This framework explains how argument quality, post popularity, and visual appeal affect trust and purchase intention.

Brand Trust

Brand trust is the consumer's confidence in a brand's ability to fulfil its promises (Husain et al., 2022). It is crucial for building long-term customer relationships, especially online, where direct product inspection is impossible. Trust is influenced by argument strength, reviewer credibility, and user experience (Rosário & Dias, 2023). Studies by Judianto and Yuniarinto (2023) show that brand trust mediates the link between marketing content and purchase behaviour, while Hakim & Nainggolan (2023) highlight that trust boosts consumer loyalty over time.

Source Credibility

Source credibility refers to the information source's perceived expertise, reliability, and attractiveness (Jin et al., 2019). Online reviews moderate the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention, as trustworthy sources are more persuasive and reduce scepticism (Arindaputri & Santoso, 2023). Studies by Octaviani and Selamat (2023) and Pradnyani (2024) show that credible influencers and reviewers boost trust and purchase willingness, emphasizing the importance of reviewer identity in online buying decisions.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the likelihood of a consumer buying a product, influenced by factors like brand trust, product usefulness, and review credibility (Eftimov, 2024). Higher trust levels directly boost purchase intention (Cheung et al., 2020; Karpenka et al., 2021). In e-commerce, it is a key predictor of actual behaviour, as consumers rely on available information in the absence of physical product interaction.

Argument Quality

Argument quality refers to how clearly and logically a review is presented to persuade readers (Jin et al., 2019). Strong arguments engage the central thinking route, boosting brand trust (Nurhaliza et al., 2024). Research shows that well-structured reviews enhance trust, confidence, and perceived value (Eftimov, 2024; Li et al., 2024), while compelling arguments also increase loyalty and purchase intention (Sari et al., 2023; Widyaningrum et al., 2024). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Quality Argument has a positive influence on brand trust.

Post Popularity

Post popularity refers to the number of likes, shares, or interactions a post receives (Kwan Soo Shin et al., 2019). Socially, high interaction numbers signal credibility, making popular posts feel more trustworthy (Ardiant et al., 2024). This perception extends to brand trust, where popular posts suggest better product quality and greater credibility, influencing consumer confidence (Arindaputri & Santoso, 2023). Studies show that high popularity increases engagement and trust (Rosário & Dias, 2023) and that viral posts make products seem more reliable (Dimas & Saputra, 2023). Koesuma (2022) also found that credible influencers boost brand trust. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis:

H2: Post Popularity has a positive influence on brand trust.

Post Attractiveness

Post attractiveness measures how pleasing or creatively striking a piece of content appears to an audience (Yaseen et al., 2020). Eye-catching posts naturally seize attention and can raise the odds that viewers believe and rely on the information they contain (Husain et al., 2022). Attractive images or layouts set off positive feelings toward the brand, and research shows such feelings translate into deeper trust (Su et al., 2022). Cheung et al. (2020) argue that bold visuals heighten engagement and signal higher product quality, while Karpenka et al. (2021) find that overall visual appeal steers favorable perceptions and guides consumer choices. Research by Oktaviant (2020) presented in Prologue shows that brand appeal positively affects trust. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis:

H3: Post Attractiveness has a positive influence on brand trust

Brand Trust as a Mediation Variable

Brand trust is the belief that a company has good intentions and meets consumer needs (Husain et al., 2022), which is crucial for building lasting relationships (Su et al., 2022). In online settings, trust develops through interaction with digital content like product reviews, post popularity, and clear arguments (Arindaputri & Santoso, 2023). Research by Rosário and Dias (2023) shows that stronger trust increases loyalty and word-of-mouth, while Dimas and Saputra (2023) link it to purchase decisions. Zed et al. (2024) suggest that consumer well-being mediates the relationship between argument quality and purchase intention, with brand trust playing a role in this mediation. Brilliany et al. (2022) found that brand trust mediates the effect of influencer credibility on purchase intention, while Judianto and Yuniarinto (2023) showed that e-commerce advertising appeals positively influence brand trust and purchase intention. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis:

H4: Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Argument Quality and Purchase Intention

H5: Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Post Popularity and Purchase Intention

H6: Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Post Attractiveness and Purchase Intention

Source of Credibility as a Moderation Variable

Source Credibility is the consumer's perception of the reliability and competence of the information source (Arindaputri & Santoso, 2023). According to Jin et al. (2019), Source credibility, based on expertise, trustworthiness, and appeal, enhances consumer trust. It moderates the relationship between brand trust, argument quality, popularity, and post appeal, making information from credible sources more persuasive and increasing purchase intention (Nurhaliza et al., 2024). (Li et al., 2024) indicates that the Credibility Source increases consumer acceptance of the message, while (Permata Sari et al., 2023) found that Credibility Sources moderated the influence of content popularity on purchase intention. Research by Pradnyani (2024) found that influencer credibility has a positive effect on brand trust and purchase intention, which means credibility can strengthen the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention. Study by Octaviani and Selamat (2023). It also shows that influencer credibility positively effect on brand trust and purchase intention, supporting credibility's role as a moderator. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis:

H7: Sources of Credibility Moderate the relationship between Brand Trust and Purchase Intention in a positive way

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is the tendency of consumers to buy a product or service based on their perception and trust in the brand (Eftimov, 2024). Previous studies have shown that trust in brands has a direct influence on consumer purchase intention (Kwan Soo Shin et al., 2019; Purwiant et al., 2024). In this context, consumers with high trust in a brand are more likely to buy products offered by the brand. Research by (Cheung et al., 2020) reveals that brand trust significantly increases consumer buying intention, while (Karpenka et al., 2021) shows a positive relationship between high purchase intention and consumer loyalty. Other research by (Bhat & Nagvadia, 2021) also corroborates that purchase intention often serves as a strong reason for final purchase decisions, especially in an e-commerce environment.

Research by Hakim and Nainggolan (2023) shows that brand trust has a positive and significant influence on repurchase intention. We therefore propose the following hypothesis.

H8: Brand Trust has a positive influence on Purchase Intention

Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative survey design to examine how features of online reviews—such as star ratings, written comments, and photos- affect brand trust and purchase intentions for beauty products. Data was collected via an online questionnaire from consumers aged 18-45 who have purchased beauty products on e-commerce platforms in the past six months. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, focusing on active e-commerce users who read reviews before buying. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS with Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

The survey measured six key factors: argument quality, post popularity, post attractiveness, brand trust, source credibility, and purchase intention. Respondents rated items on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey on beauty products was shared through social media and WhatsApp groups. After collecting data, responses were screened for criteria compliance, ensuring participants had read reviews before purchasing beauty products online. Data analysis revealed patterns in how these review features influence brand trust and purchasing decisions.

Variables assessed include argument quality (informativeness of comments), post popularity (interaction level of comments), post attractiveness (engagement with beauty product posts), brand trust (consumer trust in reviews and e-commerce), source credibility (trust in reviewers and platform reliability), and purchase intention (likelihood of buying based on reviews). Ethical standards were maintained, with participants informed about their rights, confidentiality, and the academic purpose of the study. Clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Business, Universitas Internasional Batam.

A Proposed Conceptual Framework

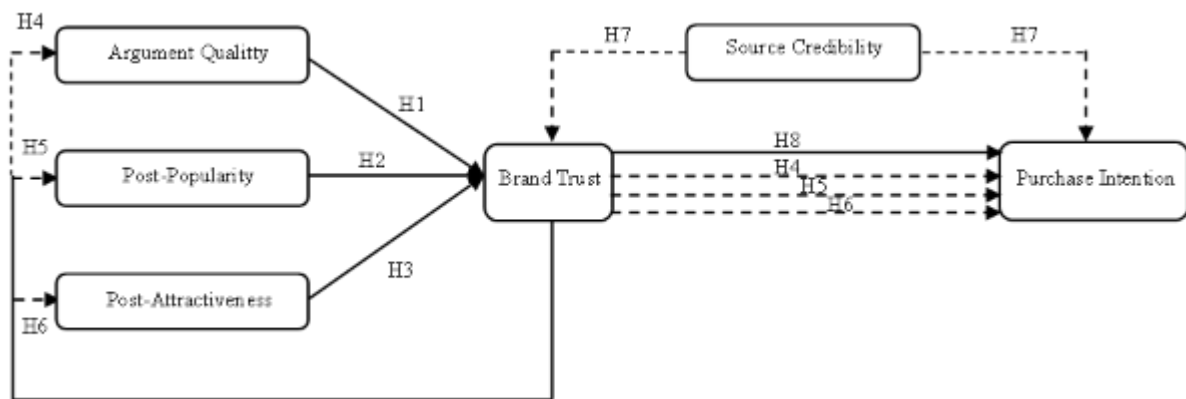


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Model

Source: Data that has been processed by the author (2025)

Results and Discussions

Table 1

Respondent Demographics

	Category	Total Respondents	Percent (%)
Gender	Woman	245	81,7
	Man	55	18,3
Age	18-25	102	34
	26-35	75	25
	36-45	54	18
	>45	69	23
Education	High School/Equivalent	138	46
	Bachelor	112	37,3
	Magister	50	16,7
	Student	97	32,3
Work	Private Employees	55	18,3
	Civil Servant	40	13,3
	Housewives	71	23,7
	Self Employed	37	12,4
Income	<Rp5.000.000	196	65,3
	Rp5.000.000 - Rp10.000.000	76	25,3
	>Rp10.000.000	28	9,4

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Based on the results of the survey that has been conducted, the demographic data of respondents shows that most respondents are women (81.7%), aged between 18-25 years old (34.0%), have a high school education/equivalent (46.0%), work as a student (32.3%), and have an income below IDR 5,000,000 (65.3%). This indicates that the research sample is dominated by young women with secondary education and working as students/students with a relatively low-income level. These demographic characteristics need to be considered in the interpretation of the results of the study to understand how these demographic factors can affect the variables studied.

Table 2

Convergent Validity Test Results

Indicator	Value Outer Loading	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)
Argument Quality				
AQ1	0.902	0,829	0,897	0,907
AQ2	0.931			
AQ3	0.897			
Post Popularity				
PP1	0.952	0,906	0,94	0,94
PP2	0.952			
Post Attractiveness				
PA1	0.830	0.719	0,902	0,903
PA2	0.839			
PA3	0.857			
PA4	0.872			
PA5	0.840			
Source Credibility				
SC1	0.950	0.890	0,896	0,896
SC2	0.940			
SC3	0.941			
Purchase Intention				
PI1	0.950	0,773	0,902	0,906
PI2	0.940			
PI3	0.941			
PI4	0.950			
Brand Trust				
BT1	0.939	0,892	0,938	0,939
BT2	0.948			
BT3	0.947			

The results showed that all constructs—Argument Quality, Post Popularity, Post Attractiveness, Source Credibility, Purchase Intention, and Brand Trust—had strong measurement results, with outer loading values above 0.70 and AVE above 0.50, meeting the feasibility standards. This indicates that the instrument accurately measures the constructs and fulfills convergent validity (Hair et al., 2013). Reliability testing using SEM-PLS confirmed internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) scores above the acceptable thresholds. For example, Source Credibility scored 0.938 on Cronbach's Alpha and 0.961 on rho-C, while Brand Trust had similarly high reliability scores. These findings confirm that all constructs meet the required standards for inclusion in structural-model analyses.

Table 3

Path Coefficient

Relationship	Hypothesis	Coefficient (original sample)	St dev	T-Statistics	P-Values	Result
AQ -> BT	H1	0.195	3.841	3.841	0.000	Accepted
PP -> BT	H2	0.393	0.056	7.054	0.000	Accepted
PA -> BT	H3	0.349	0.043	8.120	0.000	Accepted
AQ -> BT -> PI	H4	0.041	0.015	2.814	0.005	Accepted
PP -> BT -> PI	H5	0.083	0.023	3.674	0.000	Accepted
PA -> BT -> PI	H6	0.074	0.019	3.807	0.000	Accepted
SC x BT -> PI	H7	0.140	0.057	2.434	0.015	Accepted
BT -> PI	H8	0.212	0.048	4.396	0.000	Accepted

Source: Data that has been processed by the author (2025)

The first test (H1) confirms that better argument quality boosts brand trust, with a coefficient of 0.195 and a p-value of 0.000 (well below the 0.05 threshold). In plain terms, clearer and stronger reasons presented in an ad make shoppers feel the brand is worth trusting. The second finding (H2) shows that post popularity also lifts brand trust; the coefficient is 0.393, and the p-value remains 0.000. When a piece of content racks up lots of likes, shares, or comments, viewers are more inclined to believe the brand behind it. The third result (H3) reveals that post attractiveness, more simply, eye-catching images or slick design, adds lift to trust, with a coefficient of 0.349 and the exact tiny p-value. People tend to project those pleasing visuals onto the brand, deepening their sense of reliability. Hypothesis four (H4) shows that Brand Trust positively mediates the link between Argument Quality and Purchase Intention (coefficient = 0.041; $p = 0.005$, less than .05). Put simply, stronger arguments do not boost buying intention on their own; they do so by first building trust in the brand. When consumers encounter well-reasoned points, their faith in the brand rises, which drives them toward the checkout. Hypothesis five (H5) shows that Brand Trust also mediates the link between Post Popularity and Purchase Intention, again in a positive direction (coefficient = 0.083; $p = 0.000$, far below .05). The analysis therefore confirms what many marketers feel: widely shared or talked-about content earns trust, and that trust, in turn, pushes people to buy. Hypothesis six (H6) shows Brand Trust mediating the link between Post Attractiveness and Purchase Intention as well, with a strong positive coefficient (0.074; $p = 0.000$, significantly less than .05). Eye-catching visuals not only hold attention; they can also deepen trust, and that deeper trust makes shoppers more willing to pull out their wallets. The seventh hypothesis (H7) demonstrates that Source Credibility moderates the link between Brand Trust and Purchase Intention in a beneficial manner (coefficient = 0.140; $p\text{-value} = 0.015 < 0.05$). These results show that trust in buying intentions will be stronger if information comes from sources that are considered credible. Consumers are more likely to purchase if they trust the source of the information or the individual who delivers the content. The eighth hypothesis (H8) shows that Brand Trust has a Positive Effect on Purchase Intention (coefficient = 0.212; $p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$). This means that the higher the level of consumer trust in a brand, the greater the likelihood consumers will purchase the products offered.

Table 4
R-Square

	R-square
Brand Trust	0.623
Purchase Intention	0.438

Source: Data that has been processed by the author (2025)

R-square values are usually grouped into three broad bands. A value greater than 0.75 signals a strong relationship, values between 0.50 and 0.75 are considered moderate, and anything around 0.25 is regarded as weak (Hair et al., 2010). In this research, output processed by SmartPLS showed an R-square of 0.438 for Purchase Intention, placing it squarely in the moderate range. This result indicates that Argument Quality, Post Popularity, and Post Attractiveness together explain 43.8 percent of the variance in Purchase Intention. By contrast, the R-square for Brand Trust was much higher at 0.623, again within the moderate band, meaning these same three predictors plus Purchase Intention account for 62.3 percent of the variation in Brand Trust.

Conclusions

This study examined how reviewing components argument quality, post popularity, and attractiveness- affect brand trust and purchase intention for beauty products in e-commerce. The results of using Social Proof Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) showed that all three factors significantly boost brand trust, enhancing purchase intention. Trusted reviews were found to increase purchase likelihood, with post popularity and attractiveness having the most substantial impact on brand trust. This aligns with ELM, where cognitive and emotional processes influence consumer evaluation of online product information.

Practical Implications

The study offers insights for e-commerce platforms, marketers, and beauty brands: encourage detailed reviews with star ratings and photos, add "verified purchase" badges and influencer credentials for credibility, and create engaging layouts with social sharing features. Educating consumers on review quality can reduce reliance on fake metrics. Limitations, such as focusing on Batam and internal review attributes, suggest future research could explore cross-regional differences, external factors like discounts, and emerging formats like video testimonials or TikTok reviews.

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