

DO KEY OPINION LEADERS (KOL) MATTER IN DIGITALLY MARKETED BEAUTY PRODUCTS? THE IMPACT OF KOL ON TIKTOK

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ABSTRACT

In the era of digital marketing, the role of Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) has become critical to attract new customers. However, previous studies reveal inconsistent results. This study aims to investigate the influence of Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) on purchasing interest in cosmetics products. The study employs a descriptive quantitative method, using a survey questionnaire distributed to 200 respondents. The respondents have TikTok accounts and follow Key Opinion Leaders in the beauty sector on TikTok. The research employs a quantitative study with a survey questionnaire. Data was analyzed using SmartPLS 4 software. The study reveals interesting results. First, there is a positive influence of KOL Expertise on followers' buying interest. However, KOL Attractiveness and Trustworthiness do not have a positive influence on followers' buying interest. The research findings provide strategic implications for marketers and business owners who plan to optimize their digital marketing strategies by employing Key Opinion Leaders.

Keywords: Key Opinion Leader; Familiarity; Expertise; Trustworthiness; Buying Interest; TIKTOK

INTRODUCTION

The astonishing speed of development in digital technology has significantly changed many aspects of human life, including the change in consumer shopping behavior from brick-and-mortar shops to online shops in e-commerce platforms (Savila et al., 2019; Pasaribu et al., 2022). At the start of January 2023, there were 160.7 million users of social media in Indonesia with 60.4% being active social media users (Kemp, 2023). Kemp (2023) reported that the social media platform with the highest advertisement reach is YouTube with 65.3% of Indonesian active internet users. The second place goes to Facebook with 56.3% of active internet users in Indonesia. TikTok comes third with 51.6% advertisement reach, followed by Instagram in the fourth place with 41.25 advertisement reach.

To reach consumers who have gone digital, many businesses adopt creative marketing strategies. They embrace social media as their new marketing ground to capture a bigger market share (Kotler & Keller, 2016). To grab a huge number of customers on social media platforms, businesses can collaborate with influencers online, such as celebrities, endorsers, brand ambassadors, and key opinion leaders (AJ Marketing, 2023). Using Key Opinion Leaders is gaining more acceptance by businesses as a new avenue of digital marketing (Zhang et al., 2023).

Previous studies revealed various results on the role of KOL on purchase intention. Sofiyanti and Novita (2020) found that Key Opinion Leaders' attractiveness does not influence purchase intention. However, all attributes of Key Opinion Leaders (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and credibility) positively influence purchase intention (Tartaraj et al., 2024). Osei-Frimpong et al. (2019) also found all characteristics of KOL influence purchase intention.

Existing previous studies have indeed offered valuable contributions to the role of influencers and KOL on consumer behavior. Still, there are a few gaps that require more investigation to get deeper insights into the influence of KOLs on consumer behavior. First,

this study addresses the role of KOL on purchase intention on a specific social media platform, that is TikTok. Next, this study aims to address a specific range of products: beauty products. By considering these gaps, this study aims to investigate the characteristics of KOLs (attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise) on the purchase intention of beauty products on the TikTok social media platform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TikTok

TikTok is a social media platform that has recently entered Indonesia's social media industry. It offers a unique video-based format that has successfully attracted a massive number of users (Tartaraj et al., 2024). TikTok has also been recognized by scholars as a powerful digital marketing tool (Zhang et al., 2023; Nurjannah & Suriyanto, 2022). TikTok was also found to have engaging content provided by TikTok influencers (Indrawati et al., 2023). Despite all the positive marketing features of TikTok, this social media platform still ranks third in advertising effectiveness in Indonesia. Thus, this study will further investigate the impact of KOLs in TikTok on the purchase intention of their followers.

Key Opinion Leader (KOL)

KOL refers to a group of people with a significant influence on their followers in particular field (Godey et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2020). He and Jin (2022) define KOL as a minority of people having a big impact on consumers in the decision-making process, attitude, and behavior. KOL has three significant attributes: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (Xiong et al., 2021; Xu et al. 2020).

KOL Attractiveness

KOL Attractiveness refers to the level of attractiveness of a public figure or endorser. It is reflected in the physical appearance, posture, and voice of the KOL (Xiong et al, 2021; Xu et al., 2020; Ohanian, 1990).

KOL Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness characteristic of KOL is key in effectively promoting a certain product to consumers (Gupta et al., 2015). Xiong et al. (2021) and Xu et al. (2020) describe KOL Trustworthiness as the ability to be trusted and relied on by followers.

KOL Expertise.

KOL expertise refers to the knowledge, experience, and skills of the KOL (Xiong et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2020). The expertise of KOL should well correlate with the product or service endorsed (Putri & Patria, 2018).

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is considered an effective tool to predict purchase decisions. It is defined as an individual inclination to buy a particular product or service (Liu, 2023; Zhou, 2013).

KOL Attractiveness and Purchase Intention

Attractiveness is an important factor in attracting people's attention (Sundar et al., 2014). KOLs with attractive appearances are more likely to influence the purchase intention

of their followers (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2019; Nan et al., 2022). Therefore, this study posits the following hypothesis:

H1: KOL attractiveness positively influences the purchase intention of their followers.

KOL Trustworthiness and Purchase Intention.

The high credibility of KOL as the source of purchase information positively corresponds with the desire of their followers to purchase a certain product or service (127). Trustworthiness is also found to have a positive link with purchase intention (Liu, 2023). Zhou (2013) demonstrates the significant influence of trust on purchase intention. The results of the previous studies led to the formulation of the following hypothesis.

H2: KOL trustworthiness positively influences the purchase intention of their followers.

KOL Expertise and Purchase Intention

KOL expertise has a big impact on successfully influencing followers' purchase intention (25). Expertise of KOL influences the level of credibility as well as customers' purchase behavior (Schouten et al., 2020). Consumers have a stronger tendency to purchase a certain product endorsed by KOL with high expertise (Xiong et al., 2021). Accordingly, the following hypothesis for this study is formulated.

H3: KOL expertise positively influences the purchase intention of their followers.

The Research Model

The hypotheses formulated lead to the development of the following research model below (Figure 1), involving three independent variables (KOL attractiveness, KOL trustworthiness, and KOL Expertise, and one dependent variable (Purchase Intention). The model is replicated from the study conducted by Sofiyanti and Novita (2020).

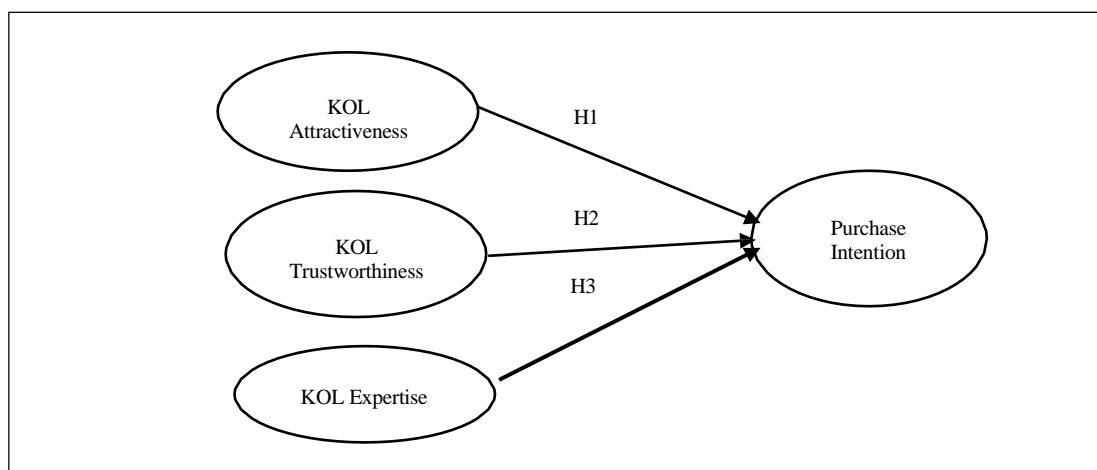


Figure 1. Research model developed for this study.

Adapted from: Sofiyanti & Novita (2020)

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a descriptive quantitative study with a survey questionnaire as the data collection tool.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all active TikTok users in Indonesia. The sample criteria are active TikTok users in Indonesia, following beauty key opinion leaders. The 200 respondents were recruited using the purposive, non-probability sampling method.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection was conducted using a survey questionnaire. This study employs Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with a 5% level of significance, and a Critical Ratio (CR) of 1.96.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of Respondents

Female respondents (93% or 186 respondents) far exceed male respondents (7% or 14 respondents). The majority of respondents are between 24 - 30 years old (55% or 109 respondents), followed by those who are between 19-23 years old (24% or 48 respondents). Some respondents are above 30 years old (14% or 28 respondents), and the rest are between 15 to 18 years old (8% or 15 respondents). Most respondents (82% or 164 respondents) reside in Jakarta and its surrounding areas or JABODETABEK (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok Tangerang, and Bekasi). The remaining respondents live in other places outside JABODETABEK. Private and government employees dominate the occupation of the respondents (85% or 169 respondents). The remaining respondents are high school and university students (15% or 29 respondents) and others (1% or 2 respondents). The respondents mostly earn above the regional minimum wage monthly or between Rp. 5 million to Rp. 7 million (61% or 122 respondents). Those earning less than Rp. 5 million are 23% or 46 respondents. Some respondents earn more than Rp. 7 million (17% or 32 respondents).

Research Instrument and Measures

A survey questionnaire was used as the research instrument tool in this study. The scale measures for KOL Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise were taken from Ohanian (1990) and Spry et al. (2011), and the measure for Purchase Intention was taken from Schiffman and Kanuk (2006). All indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 describing completely disagree, and 5 describing completely agree. The five-point Likert scale is used as it is faster to complete, and convenient to fit mobile device screens. It also gives neutral options. The measures of the constructs are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measures of constructs

No	Variable	Items	Source
1	KOL Attractiveness	1. I watch attractive content of influencers on TikTok. 2. I like the content created by influencers on TikTok. 3. I like the content created by attractive influencers on TikTok. 4. I like the content created by elegant influencers on TikTok. 5. I like the content created by sexy influencers on TikTok.	Ohanian (1990) and Spry et al. (2011)
2	KOL Trustworthiness	1. I trust the reviews presented by beauty influencers. 2. I feel that beauty influencers are honest in delivering their message. 3. I feel that the messages presented by beauty influencers are reliable. 4. I feel that the messages presented by beauty influencers are true. 5. I trust the products used by beauty influencers.	Ohanian (1990) and Spry et al. (2011)

3	KOL Expertise	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I follow the tutorial presented by beauty influencers. 2. I assess the message presented by beauty influencers based on their experience using the products. 3. I understand the explanation given by beauty influencers. 4. I assess the message of beauty influencers based on their credible background. 5. I select beauty influencers based on their relevant skills. 	Ohanian (1990) and Spry et al. (2011)
4	Purchase Intention	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am interested in finding more information about beauty products. 2. I am interested in buying beauty products soon. 3. I often watch reviews of beauty products before purchasing the products. 4. I have an interest in buying beauty products that I have never tried before. 5. I have the desire to buy beauty products based on reviews by beauty influencers. 	Schiffman and Kanuk (2006)

Measurement Model

The measurement model provides Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Outer Loading, and Discriminant Validity (Hair et al., 2016). The AVE should be > 0.5 . The outer loading should be > 0.6 . Finally, the Discriminant Validity, which is the root of the correlation value of each variable, should be $>$ the cross-squared correlation of the variable compared with other variables in the study.

Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity

Table 2 gives the outputs of Convergent Validity and Table 3 shows the outputs of Discriminant Validity of this study.

Table 2. Convergent Validity

Variables	Indicator	Convergent Validity			
		Outer Loading (> 0.7) but (0.5 $< x < 0.7$) Acceptable	Results	AVE (> 0.5)	Results
KOL Attractiveness (AT)	AT1	0.852	Valid	0.677	Valid
	AT2	0.850	Valid		
	AT3	0.869	Valid		
	AT4	0.834	Valid		
	AT5	0.698	Valid		
KOL Trustworthiness (TW)	TW1	0.849	Valid	0.642	Valid
	TW2	0.847	Valid		
	TW3	0.767	Valid		
	TW4	0.814	Valid		

	TW5	0.725	Valid		
KOL Expertise (EX)	EX1	0.765	Valid	0.617	Valid
	EX2	0.835	Valid		
	EX3	0.877	Valid		
	EX4	0.713	Valid		
	EX5	0.809	Valid		
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	0.849	Valid	0.643	Valid
	PI2	0.847	Valid		
	PI3	0.767	Valid		
	PI4	0.814	Valid		
	PI5	0.725	Valid		

Source: Processed Data of 200 respondents for this study (2023)

The results in Table 2 show that all indicators of all the variables in this study are valid. The next table (Table 3) shows the results of the Discriminant Validity test with cross loading values.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity with HTMT Values

	AT	EX	MB	TW
AT				
EXP	0.745			
MB	0.660	0.915		
TW	0.707	0.884	0.720	

Source: Processed Data of 200 respondents for this study (2023)

HTMT values should be > 0.9 . Table 3 shows that most values are below 0.9, and there is one value that is slightly above 0.9 (still within the acceptable range). Thus, we can say that all indicators are reliable.

Composite Reliability

Table 4 shows the composite reliability test results, which are all above 0.70.

Tabel 4. Composite Reliability Actual Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha (>0.70)	Composite Reliability (>0.70)	Result
AT	0.875	0.895	Reliable

TW	0.879	0.865	Reliable
EX	0.839	0.862	Reliable
PI	0.899	0.847	Reliable
Customer Loyalty	0.810	0.913	Reliable

Source: Processed Data of 200 respondents for this study (2023)

All variables in Table 4 are confirmed to be reliable as the Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability values are > 0.7 (Hair et al., 2016). Therefore, the model is considered valid and reliable. The next structural model test can be conducted.

Structural Model of Inner Model

First, the Multicollinearity test is measured using the Variance Inflation Factor or VIF coefficients. The threshold value of the structural VIF coefficients should not be higher than 4.0 (Garson, 2016). Table 5 below shows that the VIF values are all less than 4. Thus, we can conclude there is no multicollinearity issue, or the model is free from common bias.

Table 5. Multicollinearity test

Variables	Variance InflationFactor
Attractiveness → Purchase Intention	2.108
Trustworthiness → Purchase Intention	2.601
Expertise → Purchase Intention	2.895

Source: Processed Data of 200 respondents for this study (2023)

The multicollinearity test outputs of this study as provided in Table 5 show no collinearity issues.

Coefficient of Determination (R²)

The Coefficient of determination or R-square statistically shows the power of the independent variables to explain the changes in the dependent variable.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination (R²)

Variable	R square	Results
Purchase Intention	0.619	Moderate to Strong

Source: Processed Data of 200 respondents for this study (2023)

The value of R² for purchase intention falls within the range of moderate to strong (0.619). This means that Purchase Intention can be explained by its independent variables (Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise) by 61.9%. The rest is explained by other variables outside this existing study.

Q-Square (Q²)

Table 7 below provides the Q² value of this research. Q² shows predictive relevance value.

Table 7. Hasil Pengujian Q-square (Q²)

Variable	Q-square (Q ²)	Remarks
Minat Beli	0,373	has predictive relevance

Source: Processed Data of 200 respondents for this study (2023)

The model of this study has predictive relevance > 0 , which means the model can be recommended to be replicated.

Hypothesis Test

The hypothesis test uses a p-value, t-test, and original sample. The p-value should be $< 0,05$ to be considered significant, and the t-test should be > 1.645 to be considered supported (Hair et al., 2016). The test is a one-tailed test, which indicates the direction of the influence. The test also employs a 0.05 significance level, with 500 bootstrap samples testing, processed using Smart PLS 4.

Table 8. Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Original Sample	T-Statistics (>1.645)	P-Value (<0.05)	Hypothesis Analysis
H1: KOL Attractiveness positively influences the purchase intention of beauty products on TikTok	0,101	1.242	0.215	Not Supported
H2: KOL Trustworthiness positively influences the purchase intention of beauty products on TikTok	0,022	8.722	0,00	Supported
H3: KOL Expertise positively influences the purchase intention of beauty products on TikTok	0,695	0.247	0.805	Not Supported

Source: Processed Data of 200 respondents for this study (2023)

Table 8 displays the hypothesis test results of this study. The results show that KOL trustworthiness positively influences the followers' purchase intention of beauty products (H2 is supported). The t-statistics, -value, and original sample of H2 meet the criteria of being significant and supported. However, KOL attractiveness and Expertise do not positively influence the purchase intention of beauty products on TikTok (H1 and H3 are not supported).

The respondents of this study are dominated by female respondents (93% or 186 respondents). The majority of them are from the younger generations between 24-30 years old (55% or 109 respondents). They mostly reside in Jakarta and surrounding cities (82% or 164 respondents). The respondents are dominated by working people (85% or 169 respondents). Their monthly income is mostly above the minimum wage of between Rp. 5 million to Rp. 7 million (61% or 122 respondents).

The study shows that all the independent variables (Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise of KOL) have moderate to strong positive influence on the followers' purchase intention of beauty products on TikTok, with an R-square of 0.619. This means that when the independent variables change by 1 point, they will change the purchase intention by 61.9%. Other variables not included in this study also influence purchase intention. The study also revealed the existence of predictive relevance of the model used in this study, with the Q-

square value of 0.373 (above 0). This means that the model is quite robust to be replicated in future studies.

Next, the result of the hypothesis test points out that the Trustworthiness of KOL positively influences the purchase intention of beauty products in TikTok. A study by Sofiyanti and Novita (2020) also reveals trustworthiness as a critical factor that can trigger the purchase intention of followers. Another study also unveils the importance of KOL trustworthiness in the Instagram platform (Ridha et al., 2018). When followers trust the message delivered by a KOL, they tend to purchase the product endorsed by the KOL. A similar finding also confirms the key role of KOL trustworthiness in endorsing a product that can motivate followers to purchase it (Gupta et al., 2015).

In this study, the hypothesis test shows that KOL attractiveness does not positively influence the purchase intention of followers to buy beauty products on TikTok. This is because most respondents in this study are working people with monthly earnings above the minimum wage level. They evaluate what they plan to buy by getting information more than just physical attraction. The same results are revealed in the other previous studies conducted by Sofiyanti & Novita (2020). They also found that when followers trust the KOL, they are most likely to purchase the items endorsed by the KOL. However, a different result was confirmed by Ridha et al. (2018) that revealed followers tend to agree with the message delivered by physically attractive KOLs.

This study also finds that the expertise of KOL does not positively influence the purchase intention of followers to buy endorsed beauty products. Followers in this study tend to base their evaluation on the level of trust they put on the KOL, rather than on their expertise. This is probably due to the short video content on TikTok. Followers have limited time to watch the message presented for them to understand it well. Therefore, they rely on the credibility of the KOL. An opposing result is presented by other previous studies (Sofiyanti & Novita, 2020; Ridha et al., 2018; Ul Hassan and Jami, 2014; and Ohanian, 1990). This is probably because these previous studies used other social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook) which allow longer video content.

CONCLUSION

This study's goal is to analyze the influence of KOL attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise on the followers' purchase intention of beauty products on TikTok. The study, involving 200 respondents, supports one hypothesis (H2): Trustworthiness positively influences the purchase intention of beauty products on TikTok. Thus, this study underscores the critical role of the trustworthiness of KOL in beauty products to influence their followers to purchase the endorsed beauty products on TikTok. Thus, KOLs of beauty products are recommended to develop trustworthiness characteristics. They can do this by providing transparency in their content. They should openly share their genuine intention behind creating the content. They should also be open about their affiliation to a certain product, brand, or institution. They need to tell their followers their honest opinion (the pluses and minuses) of the endorsed products or brands. Another recommendation for KOL is to actively engage their audience in all content creations. They need to positively respond to comments, questions, and feedback for improvement. Finally, KOLs are recommended to be consistent in their attitude towards a certain issue to gain the trust of their followers. For businesses, it is recommended to find relevant KOLs to endorse or review their products with trustworthiness criteria. If the business involves selling eco-friendly beauty products, business owners and top management need to find KOL that consistently supports eco-friendly programs.

This study is only limited to examining three independent variables (Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise of KOL) and one dependent variable (Purchase Intention). The R-square results confirmed that there are other variables not included in this study that may influence purchase intention. Therefore, future researchers are recommended to include digital marketing-related variables other than KOL that may influence the purchase intention of a bigger number of customers, such as AI-generated content, User-generated content, or AI-enhanced KOL.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Sincere gratitude goes to the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Pelita Harapan. This study can be completed because of the opportunity provided by the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Pelita Harapan. The authors would also like to convey their appreciation to the publisher, reviewer, and editor of the journal for their valuable input for improvement.

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