



The Influence Of Viral Marketing And Electronic Word Of Mouth On Purchase Decisions Of Kula Products On Tiktok Shop (A Study On Generation Z In Medan City)

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian beauty industry has experienced remarkable growth, with cosmetics companies increasing by 21.9% to reach 1,010 enterprises by mid-2023 (Harian Ekonomi Neraca, 2024). This expansion reflects rising consumer demand for quality beauty products, particularly in the lip care segment, where market revenue is projected to reach USD 423.09 million by 2029 (Statista, 2024). Within this thriving landscape, local brands have gained significant momentum through the "localpride" movement, challenging established international competitors and reshaping consumer preferences (Andarista et al., 2022). KULA, formerly known as KOOLA, exemplifies this trend as a local Indonesian lip product brand that has successfully leveraged digital platforms to build market presence. The brand's 2024 rebranding represented more than cosmetic changes—it signaled a strategic shift toward "value-driven beauty" with 50% of profits donated to social causes monthly (Maharani, 2024). This approach resonates particularly well

ABSTRACT

The Indonesian beauty industry, particularly the lip product segment, is rapidly expanding. One emerging local brand, KULA, utilizes TikTok Shop and relies on viral marketing and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) to attract Generation Z consumers. This study examines the influence of viral marketing and eWOM on purchase decisions of KULA products among TikTok users in Medan. A quantitative research method with an associative approach was applied, involving 96 purposively selected respondents who had previously purchased KULA products. Data were collected through online and offline questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression. The findings show that both viral marketing and eWOM significantly affect purchase decisions, individually and jointly. Viral marketing emerged as the stronger predictor, while eWOM also showed a notable positive effect. These results highlight the strategic value of social media-based marketing in shaping Gen Z's purchasing behavior, especially in digital commerce platforms like TikTok Shop.

with younger consumers who increasingly prioritize brands demonstrating social responsibility and authentic values.

The rise of TikTok Shop as an e-commerce platform has fundamentally altered how beauty brands reach consumers, especially Generation Z. With Indonesia leading global TikTok usage at 157.56 million users as of July 2024 (Data Indonesia ID, 2024), the platform provides unprecedented access to young consumers who constitute the primary demographic for beauty products. TikTok Shop's integration of entertainment and commerce through short videos, live streaming, and direct purchasing capabilities creates an ideal environment for viral marketing strategies and electronic word-of-mouth communications (Nababan & Siregar, 2022).

Viral marketing has emerged as a powerful tool in this digital ecosystem, enabling brands to create content that spreads rapidly through social networks without significant advertising expenditure. Kotler and Armstrong (2017:541) define viral marketing as "the digital version of word-of-mouth marketing that involves creating videos, ads, and other marketing content that are so infectious that customers will seek out or pass them along to friends." When executed effectively, viral campaigns can generate exponential reach and engagement, particularly among digitally native audiences (Sitorus & Utami, 2017).

Simultaneously, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become increasingly influential in consumer decision-making processes. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2017:387), eWOM leverages internet capabilities to create word-of-mouth effects that support marketing objectives. Unlike traditional advertising, eWOM involves organic sharing of experiences, reviews, and recommendations between consumers through digital platforms (Latief, 2019). Research indicates that 76% of social media users trust reviews from actual consumers over promotional content (Statista, 2023), making authentic testimonials more valuable than paid advertising. Generation Z consumers, born between 1997 and 2012, exhibit distinct characteristics that make them particularly responsive to digital marketing approaches. This demographic demonstrates high comfort with technology, values authenticity over polished marketing, and actively seeks peer recommendations before making purchases (Misra et al., 2024). They tend to research products extensively through multiple online sources and are influenced by social proof in the form of reviews, ratings, and user testimonials (Zettira et al., 2024).

The intersection of viral marketing and eWOM creates particularly powerful dynamics in the beauty industry. Research by Indriasari (2023) found that 70% of TikTok Shop users choose to purchase products after viewing reviews and recommendations from other users. This phenomenon is especially pronounced for brands like KULA that encourage authentic user engagement rather than relying solely on traditional advertising methods (Cahyani & Artanti, 2023). However, this digital marketing landscape presents challenges alongside opportunities. The authenticity that Generation Z values can be compromised when positive reviews stem from paid partnerships rather than genuine user experiences (Sri et al., 2022). This creates tension between marketing effectiveness and consumer trust, potentially impacting long-term brand credibility and purchase decisions.

Medan, as Indonesia's third-largest city with a significant Generation Z population, provides an ideal context for examining these marketing dynamics. According to the Medan City Communication and Information Department (2023), over 60% of internet users in Medan use TikTok, with the majority aged 18-30 years. Surveys indicate that 65% of these users prefer purchasing products recommended by TikTok influencers (Fitri & Syaefulloh, 2023), making it representative of broader Indonesian urban markets where digital commerce is rapidly expanding. Previous research has examined these phenomena independently. Faizah (2023) demonstrated that viral marketing and eWOM each have positive and significant effects on purchase decisions for consumer products. Similarly, Ridwan (2023) found that while viral marketing showed mixed results, the combination of digital marketing strategies significantly influenced consumer behavior on TikTok applications. However, limited research has specifically

examined these relationships within Indonesia's beauty industry context or focused on local brands with social responsibility positioning.

This study addresses these research gaps by investigating the influence of viral marketing and electronic word-of-mouth on Generation Z purchase decisions for KULA products through TikTok Shop in Medan. Through quantitative analysis of consumer responses, the research aims to quantify these relationships and provide evidence-based insights for digital marketing strategy development in Indonesia's competitive beauty market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Marketing in the Contemporary Business Environment

The digital transformation has fundamentally altered marketing paradigms, with social media platforms becoming primary channels for brand-consumer interactions (Kotler & Keller, 2021). Traditional marketing approaches have given way to more interactive, consumer-driven strategies that leverage user-generated content and peer-to-peer recommendations (Haque-fawzi et al., 2022). This shift is particularly pronounced in emerging markets like Indonesia, where mobile-first consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms for purchase decisions (Siregar & Nasution, 2023).

However, this transformation presents challenges. While digital platforms offer unprecedented reach and engagement opportunities, they also create information overload and authenticity concerns that can undermine consumer trust (Misra et al., 2024). The democratization of content creation means brands must compete not only with competitors but also with organic user-generated content that may be more influential than professional marketing campaigns.

Viral Marketing: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Applications

Viral marketing represents a paradigm shift from traditional push marketing to pull strategies that rely on consumer participation and sharing behaviors. Kotler and Armstrong (2017:541) conceptualize viral marketing as content designed to be "so infectious that customers will seek out or pass them along to friends." This definition, while influential, has faced criticism for oversimplifying the complex mechanisms underlying viral content success. Sitorus and Utami (2017) argue that viral marketing's effectiveness depends not merely on content infectiousness but on alignment with audience values, timing, and platform-specific characteristics. Their research challenges the assumption that viral success is primarily about creativity, suggesting instead that strategic targeting and cultural relevance are more critical factors.

Recent empirical studies present mixed findings regarding viral marketing's effectiveness. Faizah (2023) demonstrated positive correlations between viral marketing and purchase intentions in the food service industry. Conversely, Ridwan (2023) found limited direct effects of viral marketing on purchase decisions, suggesting that viral content may influence awareness and consideration rather than immediate purchasing behavior. These contradictory findings highlight the need for context-specific research, particularly in different product categories and cultural settings. The measurement of viral marketing effectiveness remains problematic. Many studies rely on engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments) as proxies for viral success without establishing clear links to business outcomes (Nisa, 2023). This methodological limitation undermines the theoretical development of viral marketing as a distinct marketing communication tool.

Electronic Word of Mouth: Evolution and Impact

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has evolved from simple online reviews to complex multi-platform conversations that significantly influence consumer behavior. Goldsmith's foundational work, cited in Priansa (2020), established eWOM as qualitatively different from

traditional word of mouth due to its persistence, searchability, and potential for viral amplification.

Latief (2019) identifies four key characteristics distinguishing eWOM from traditional recommendations: anonymity, accessibility, credibility assessment challenges, and scale. These characteristics create both opportunities and risks for brands, as positive eWOM can rapidly enhance reputation while negative eWOM can cause significant damage.

The credibility of eWOM has become increasingly contested. While Statista (2023) reports that 76% of consumers trust peer reviews, other research suggests growing skepticism about review authenticity (Zettira et al., 2024). This skepticism is particularly pronounced among younger consumers who are more aware of paid partnerships and fake reviews, creating a paradox where the demographic most exposed to eWOM may be least trusting of it. Prasad et al.'s framework (cited in Immanuel, 2019) identifies four dimensions of eWOM: positive reviews, product recommendations, online review reading habits, and purchase confidence from positive feedback. While widely adopted in academic research, this framework has been criticized for treating eWOM as uniformly positive, ignoring the significant impact of negative reviews and neutral feedback on consumer decision-making.

Generation Z Consumer Behavior: Digital Natives and Purchase Decisions

Generation Z consumers, born between 1997 and 2012, represent the first truly digital-native demographic, exhibiting distinct consumption patterns that challenge traditional marketing assumptions. Prastyorini and Fauziyyah (2024) identify five primary factors influencing Generation Z purchase behavior: needs assessment, environmental influences, product quality perceptions, price sensitivity, and promotional responsiveness.

This demographic's relationship with digital marketing is complex and often contradictory. While highly engaged with social media content, Generation Z consumers demonstrate increasing skepticism toward traditional advertising and strong preferences for authentic, peer-generated content (Fitri & Syaefulloh, 2023). This creates challenges for brands attempting to leverage viral marketing and eWOM strategies. Indonesian research specifically focusing on Generation Z reveals unique characteristics shaped by local cultural and economic contexts. The Medan City Communication and Information Department (2023) found that urban Generation Z consumers in Indonesia prioritize social proof and peer recommendations more heavily than their counterparts in developed markets, potentially amplifying the effects of viral marketing and eWOM strategies.

TikTok Shop and Social Commerce Evolution

TikTok Shop represents a significant evolution in social commerce, integrating entertainment, social interaction, and purchasing within a single platform. Cahyani and Artanti (2023) argue that TikTok Shop's success stems from its ability to reduce friction between content consumption and purchase decisions, creating seamless customer journeys that traditional e-commerce platforms struggle to match.

However, the platform's rapid growth has raised questions about consumer protection, review authenticity, and the potential for manipulative marketing practices. Nababan and Siregar (2022) highlight concerns about impulse purchasing behaviors encouraged by TikTok Shop's design features, suggesting that the platform may exploit psychological vulnerabilities rather than serving genuine consumer needs. The beauty industry's adoption of TikTok Shop has been particularly aggressive, with brands leveraging the platform's visual nature and influencer ecosystem to drive sales. Research by Indriasari (2023) demonstrates that beauty brands achieve higher engagement rates and conversion rates on TikTok Shop compared to traditional e-commerce platforms, though this success may be unsustainable as the platform matures and novelty effects diminish.

Synthesis and Research Gaps

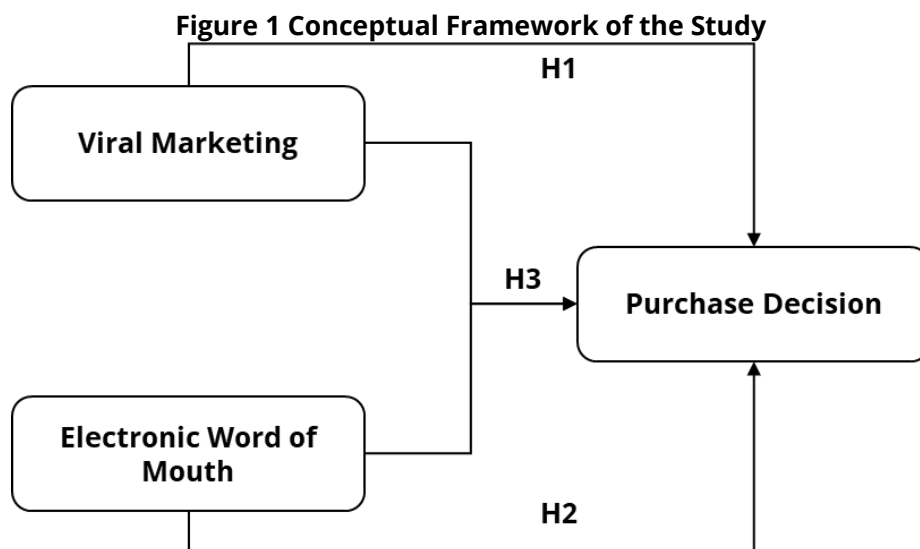
The literature reveals significant gaps in understanding how viral marketing and eWOM interact within specific cultural and industry contexts. While individual studies examine these phenomena separately, limited research explores their combined effects, particularly in emerging markets like Indonesia.

Existing research suffers from methodological limitations, including over-reliance on self-reported data, cross-sectional designs that cannot capture dynamic relationships, and measurement approaches that may not capture the full complexity of digital marketing effects. The focus on large international brands in much of the literature leaves questions about how these findings apply to local brands with different resource constraints and market positions.

The beauty industry context presents unique considerations that existing literature inadequately addresses. Beauty products involve personal and social identity expression in ways that differ from other product categories, potentially altering the mechanisms through which viral marketing and eWOM influence purchase decisions. This research addresses these gaps by examining viral marketing and eWOM effects on local Indonesian beauty brand purchase decisions, providing insights into how global digital marketing phenomena manifest in specific cultural and industry contexts.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the relationship between the independent variables—Viral Marketing (X1) and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) (X2)—and the dependent variable, Purchase Decision (Y). It serves as a theoretical roadmap that guides the research process by outlining how social media marketing strategies, particularly viral content and consumer-generated reviews, may influence consumers' decision-making. The conceptual framework is visually presented in the figure below.



METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach with an associative design to examine the relationships between viral marketing, electronic word of mouth, and purchase decisions. According to Hardani et al. (2020), quantitative research is systematic scientific research into parts and phenomena and their relationships, aimed at developing and using mathematical models, theories, and hypotheses related to natural phenomena. The associative approach was chosen to analyze the influence and relationship patterns between the independent variables (viral marketing and electronic word of mouth) and the dependent

variable (purchase decisions). The research was conducted in Medan City, North Sumatra, Indonesia, focusing specifically on Generation Z consumers who have purchased KULA products through TikTok Shop. Medan was selected as the research location due to its significant Generation Z population and high TikTok usage rates, with over 60% of internet users in the city actively using the platform (Medan City Communication and Information Department, 2023).

Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of Generation Z consumers in Medan City who are active TikTok users and have experience purchasing KULA lip products through TikTok Shop. Generation Z was defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, making them aged 18-27 years at the time of data collection in 2025. This demographic was specifically chosen due to their digital nativity and high engagement with social commerce platforms (Misra et al., 2024). The research context focused on consumers' experiences with KULA, a local Indonesian beauty brand specializing in lip tints that has implemented value-driven marketing strategies through social media platforms. KULA's unique positioning as a socially responsible brand that donates 50% of its profits to charitable causes provided an ideal case study for examining how viral marketing and eWOM influence purchase decisions in the beauty industry.

Since the exact population size of Generation Z KULA consumers in Medan was unknown, this study employed the Cochran formula for infinite populations to determine the appropriate sample size. Using the formula $n = \frac{z^2pq}{e^2}$ with a 95% confidence level ($z=1.96$), estimated proportions of success and failure ($p=q=0.5$), and a 10% margin of error ($e=0.1$), the calculation yielded a required sample size of 96 respondents. The study utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019). The sampling criteria included age requirements between 18-27 years old (Generation Z), purchase experience with KULA products through TikTok Shop at least once, active TikTok usage with regular viewing of product reviews and promotional content, Medan City residency, and experience reading or watching product reviews before making purchases.

The study successfully recruited 96 respondents who met all specified criteria, ensuring adequate statistical power for the planned analyses. Demographic information including gender, age distribution, and purchase frequency patterns were collected to characterize the sample and assess its representativeness of the target population.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed through both online and offline channels. The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms to facilitate easy distribution and automated data collection. The online distribution strategy included recruiting participants through TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups targeting Generation Z users in Medan, implementing snowball referrals where initial participants were asked to refer other eligible respondents, and collaborating with student organizations at major universities in Medan to reach target demographics. Offline data collection involved visiting popular shopping areas, cafes, and university campuses in Medan where target respondents were likely to gather. This mixed-mode approach helped ensure demographic diversity and reduced potential bias from online-only recruitment.

Secondary data were obtained from various sources to support the research framework and contextual understanding, including academic literature from peer-reviewed journals, books, and conference proceedings related to viral marketing, electronic word of mouth, and consumer behavior. Industry reports provided beauty industry statistics, TikTok usage data, and e-commerce trends in Indonesia, while brand information was gathered from official KULA marketing materials, social media content, and company communications. Government statistics offered demographic data and internet usage statistics from relevant Indonesian government

agencies. Data collection was conducted over a three-month period from February to April 2025, allowing sufficient time to reach the target sample size and ensure data quality while capturing potential seasonal variations in purchasing behavior and social media engagement patterns.

Measures

The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire with 28 items measuring three main constructs, plus demographic questions. All items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to capture respondent attitudes and perceptions. The measurement scales were adapted from established theoretical frameworks to ensure content validity and theoretical grounding.

Table 1. Measurement Scales and Indicators

Variable	Dimensions	Items	Source	Sample Items
Viral Marketing (X1)	Social Media Involvement of Opinion Leaders	2	Kotler & Keller (2016)	"I very often see KULA promotional content on TikTok Shop"
	Product Knowledge	2		"I am very interested in trying KULA after seeing consumer reviews"
	Accessibility of Information	2		"I feel KULA lip products always attract other people's attention"
	Product Word of Mouth	2		"I always find complete information about KULA on social media"
	Positive Reviews	2		"I often see TikTok users sharing positive experiences about KULA"
Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)	Product Recommendations	2	Prasad et al. (cited in Immanuel, 2019)	"I am always interested in buying KULA because of many positive reviews"
	Online Review Reading Habits	2		"I often see KULA recommendations when reading comments on TikTok Shop"
	Purchase Confidence	2		"I always read reviews before buying KULA"
Purchase Decision (Y)	Product Choice	2	Kotler & Keller (2021)	"I am very confident buying KULA on TikTok Shop because of many positive responses"
	Brand Choice	2		"I always choose KULA because I am attracted to its products"
	Channel Choice	2		"I am very interested in buying KULA because of its charity programs"
	Purchase Timing	2		"I am very comfortable buying KULA on TikTok Shop because it is easily accessible"
	Purchase Quantity	2		"I buy KULA when there are discounts or special promotions"
				"I always buy more than one KULA variant"

Content validity was established through expert review by academic supervisors specializing in marketing and consumer behavior. Construct validity was assessed using Pearson

Product-Moment correlation analysis, with items considered valid if r -calculated exceeded r -table (0.201 for $n=96$, $\alpha=0.05$). All 28 items demonstrated adequate validity with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.575 to 0.757, indicating that each item effectively measured its intended construct. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with results showing viral marketing ($\alpha = 0.863$) achieving excellent reliability, electronic word of mouth ($\alpha = 0.777$) demonstrating good reliability, and purchase decision ($\alpha = 0.869$) showing excellent reliability. All constructs exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Sugiyono, 2019).

Several measures were implemented to ensure data quality, including pre-testing the questionnaire with 20 respondents to identify potential issues with item clarity and survey flow, incorporating attention checks to identify respondents who were not paying attention, monitoring completion times to flag responses completed in unreasonably short periods, examining response patterns for internal consistency, and excluding incomplete responses from analysis to maintain data integrity. This comprehensive measurement approach ensured that the study could reliably assess the relationships between viral marketing, electronic word of mouth, and purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers in Medan.

RESULTS

Respondent Demographics

The study successfully collected data from 96 respondents who met all specified criteria. The demographic profile of participants revealed distinct characteristics that align with the target population of Generation Z consumers in Medan City. Gender distribution showed a strong female representation with 92 respondents (96%) being female and only 4 respondents (4%) being male. This distribution reflects the primary target demographic for lip cosmetic products and is consistent with typical beauty product consumer patterns, where females constitute the majority of purchasers for lip care items.

Age distribution demonstrated concentration within the core Generation Z demographic, with the largest group comprising respondents aged 21-25 years (58 respondents, 61%), followed by those above 25 years (22 respondents, 20%), and the youngest group aged 18-20 years (18 respondents, 19%). This age distribution indicates successful targeting of the intended demographic, with the majority falling within the age range most active in social commerce platforms like TikTok Shop.

Purchase frequency patterns revealed varying levels of engagement with the KULA brand through TikTok Shop. The largest segment consisted of repeat purchasers who had bought KULA products 2-3 times (48 respondents, 49%), indicating moderate brand loyalty and satisfaction. First-time buyers represented 29 respondents (30%), while frequent purchasers with more than 3 purchases comprised 19 respondents (20%). The substantial proportion of repeat customers suggests positive product experiences and effective digital marketing strategies that encourage repurchase behavior.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Viral Marketing (X1)	96	36	45	39.85	2.1
Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)	96	29	37	32.18	2.34
Purchase Decision (Y)	96	34	43	40.02	1.56

The descriptive statistics reveal important insights about respondent perceptions across all measured constructs. Viral marketing (X1) demonstrated a mean score of 39.85 (SD = 2.10) on a scale where the theoretical range spans from 10 to 50, indicating generally positive respondent perceptions of KULA's viral marketing efforts on TikTok Shop. The relatively low standard deviation suggests consistent agreement among respondents regarding their exposure to and perception of viral marketing content.

Electronic word of mouth (X2) showed a mean score of 32.18 (SD = 2.34) on a scale ranging from 8 to 40, reflecting moderately positive respondent attitudes toward user-generated reviews and recommendations. The standard deviation indicates slightly more variation in respondent perceptions compared to viral marketing, suggesting diverse experiences with eWOM content across the sample.

Purchase decision (Y) exhibited the highest mean score of 40.02 (SD = 1.56) on a scale from 10 to 50, demonstrating strong purchase intentions and behaviors among respondents. The lowest standard deviation among all variables indicates remarkable consistency in purchase decision patterns, suggesting that respondents who engage with KULA through TikTok Shop generally exhibit similar decision-making behaviors.

Reliability and Validity Assessment

Table 3. Reliability and Validity Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Validity Range	Items	Status
Viral Marketing (X1)	0.863	0.603 - 0.757	10	Reliable & Valid
Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)	0.777	0.575 - 0.698	8	Reliable & Valid
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.869	0.600 - 0.749	10	Reliable & Valid

All measurement instruments demonstrated excellent psychometric properties. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 for all constructs, with viral marketing and purchase decision achieving excellent reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$) and electronic word of mouth demonstrating good reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$). Validity testing using Pearson Product-Moment correlation showed all items significantly correlated with their respective total scores ($r > 0.201$, $p < 0.05$), confirming construct validity. The validity coefficients ranged from 0.575 to 0.757, indicating strong relationships between individual items and their underlying constructs.

Assumption Testing

Classical assumption testing was conducted to ensure the appropriateness of multiple linear regression analysis. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test yielded a significance value of 0.200 ($p > 0.05$), confirming normal distribution of residuals. Multicollinearity assessment through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) showed values of 2.469 for both independent variables, well below the threshold of 10, with tolerance values of 0.405 (> 0.10), indicating absence of multicollinearity problems.

Heteroscedasticity testing using the Glejser test produced significance values of 0.235 for viral marketing and 0.127 for electronic word of mouth (both $p > 0.05$), confirming homoscedasticity of residuals. These results validate the appropriateness of multiple linear regression for hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t-value	Significance	Decision
(Constant)	1.393	-	0.554	0.581	-
Viral Marketing (X1)	0.557	0.535	5.908	0.000	H ₁ Accepted
Electronic Word of Mouth (X2)	0.466	0.346	3.821	0.000	H ₂ Accepted

Table 5. Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-value	Significance	Decision
0.831	0.691	0.685	104.1	0.000	H ₃ Accepted

The multiple linear regression analysis produced the following equation:

$$Y = 1.393 + 0.557X_1 + 0.466X_2$$

1. Hypothesis 1: Viral Marketing → Purchase Decision The analysis revealed that viral marketing significantly influences purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers in Medan ($\beta = 0.557, t = 5.908, p < 0.001$). The standardized coefficient of 0.535 indicates that viral marketing is the stronger predictor of purchase decisions. For every one-unit increase in viral marketing perception, purchase decisions increase by 0.557 units, holding other variables constant. This significant positive relationship confirms that effective viral marketing strategies on TikTok Shop substantially impact consumer purchase behaviors.
2. Hypothesis 2: Electronic Word of Mouth → Purchase Decision Electronic word of mouth demonstrated a significant positive effect on purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.466, t = 3.821, p < 0.001$). The standardized coefficient of 0.346 indicates a moderate but meaningful influence. Each one-unit improvement in eWOM perceptions leads to a 0.466-unit increase in purchase decisions. This finding validates the importance of authentic user reviews, recommendations, and testimonials in shaping Generation Z consumer choices on social commerce platforms.
3. Hypothesis 3: Combined Effect The simultaneous influence of both viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on purchase decisions proved highly significant ($F = 104.098, p < 0.001$). The model explains 69.1% of the variance in purchase decisions ($R^2 = 0.691$), indicating substantial predictive power. The adjusted R^2 of 0.685 suggests the model remains robust even when accounting for the number of predictors, confirming that the combination of viral marketing and eWOM strategies effectively drives consumer purchase behaviors.

Model Performance and Explanatory Power

The regression model demonstrates strong explanatory capability, with 69.1% of purchase decision variance explained by the two independent variables. This substantial R^2 value suggests that viral marketing and electronic word of mouth are critical factors in Generation Z purchase decision processes on TikTok Shop. The remaining 30.9% of unexplained variance indicates potential influence from other factors not included in this study, such as price sensitivity, product quality perceptions, brand trust, or peer influence mechanisms.

The F-statistic of 104.098 ($p < 0.001$) confirms the overall model significance, indicating that the linear relationship between predictors and outcome is statistically meaningful and not due to chance. The relatively low standard error values and high t-statistics for both predictors suggest precise estimates and strong individual contributions to the model.

Comparative analysis of standardized coefficients reveals viral marketing as the dominant influence ($\beta = 0.535$) compared to electronic word of mouth ($\beta = 0.346$), suggesting that creative, engaging viral content may be more impactful than user reviews alone in driving immediate

purchase decisions among this demographic. However, both factors remain statistically and practically significant, indicating complementary roles in comprehensive digital marketing strategies for beauty brands targeting Generation Z consumers through social commerce platforms.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on Generation Z purchase decisions for KULA products through TikTok Shop in Medan City. The research contributes to understanding how digital marketing strategies operate within Indonesia's emerging social commerce landscape, particularly for local beauty brands targeting digitally native consumers. The findings provide empirical evidence for the effectiveness of integrated viral marketing and eWOM approaches in driving consumer behavior on social media platforms.

The Influence of Viral Marketing on Purchase Decisions

Based on the partial test (t-test) results, the viral marketing variable (X1) demonstrated a significance value of 0.000 with a t-calculated value of 5.908, which exceeds the t-table value of 1.986. Therefore, it can be concluded that viral marketing has a positive and significant influence on KULA product purchase decisions among Generation Z in Medan City. The regression coefficient for this variable is 0.557, indicating that every one-unit increase in viral marketing will increase purchase decisions by 0.557 units, assuming other variables remain constant.

This finding demonstrates that viral-based marketing strategies implemented by KULA, such as distributing promotional content through TikTok social media platforms, influencer participation, and delivering easily accessible product information, have significant influence on consumer purchase considerations. Generation Z, which represents the dominant age group of TikTok users, shows positive responses to content that is informative, inspirational, and easily shareable. Thus, viral marketing strategies prove to be effective communication tools for influencing purchase decisions.

The effectiveness of viral marketing in this context aligns with Sitorus and Utami (2017) who emphasized viral marketing's capacity to create rapid information dissemination within social networks. However, the magnitude of effect observed in this study exceeds that reported by Ridwan (2023) who found limited direct effects of viral marketing on purchase decisions for TikTok applications. This discrepancy may stem from contextual factors unique to the Indonesian beauty market and KULA's positioning strategy. The finding also supports Faizah (2023) who demonstrated positive correlations between viral marketing and purchase intentions, confirming that viral content can effectively influence consumer behavior when properly executed.

KULA's approach of encouraging user-generated content and leveraging social causes resonates particularly well with Generation Z's values-driven consumption patterns. The brand's charity-focused messaging creates emotional connections that facilitate viral spread, as consumers feel motivated to share content that reflects their social consciousness. This effectiveness reflects TikTok's algorithmic structure, which prioritizes engaging content and can rapidly amplify messages that resonate with target audiences, supporting the findings of Cahyani and Artanti (2023) who argued that TikTok Shop's success stems from reducing friction between content consumption and purchase decisions.

The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Decisions

The t-test results for the electronic word of mouth variable (X2) show a significance value of 0.000 and a t-calculated value of 3.821, which is greater than the t-table value. Therefore, it can be concluded that electronic word of mouth has a positive and significant influence on purchase decisions. The regression coefficient for this variable is 0.466, indicating that every one-

unit increase in electronic word of mouth will increase purchase decisions by 0.466 units. This result indicates that positive reviews, recommendations from other users, habits of reading online reviews, and consumer confidence after viewing testimonials from other users are important factors influencing purchase decisions.

Generation Z generally has the habit of seeking references or reviews before making purchases. They heavily consider previous consumer experiences communicated through social media or comment sections in TikTok applications. Reviews considered honest, transparent, and based on real experiences tend to form positive perceptions and increase trust in a product. Therefore, electronic word of mouth becomes an important element in shaping consumer purchase decisions.

This finding supports the theoretical framework established by Prasad et al. (cited in Immanuel, 2019) who identified four dimensions of eWOM: positive reviews, product recommendations, online review reading habits, and purchase confidence from positive feedback. The result also aligns with research by Indriasari (2023) who found that 70% of TikTok Shop users choose to purchase products after viewing reviews and recommendations from other users, confirming the importance of authentic user testimonials in social commerce environments.

However, the secondary role of eWOM compared to viral marketing might reflect growing skepticism among Generation Z consumers toward online reviews, particularly in contexts where paid partnerships and sponsored content are prevalent. This supports observations by Zettira et al. (2024) who noted increasing awareness among younger consumers regarding review authenticity. The moderate influence suggests that eWOM may serve more as validation mechanisms rather than primary drivers of initial purchase interest, indicating its function as a decision validation tool rather than an initial attention-grabbing mechanism.

The Combined Influence of Viral Marketing and Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Decisions

Based on the simultaneous test (F-test) results, it is known that viral marketing and electronic word of mouth variables together have a positive and significant influence on purchase decisions, with an F-calculated value of 104.098 and a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. The coefficient of determination (R^2) obtained is 0.691, indicating that 69.1% of the variation in purchase decisions can be explained by the combination of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth variables. Meanwhile, the remaining 30.9% is influenced by other factors outside this research model.

This result shows that marketing strategies conducted through social media by combining viral content and positive testimonials from other users have significant contributions to the formation of purchase intentions and decisions. TikTok, as a digital platform popular among Generation Z, enables companies to convey product value more closely and personally to consumers, supporting the arguments of Nababan and Siregar (2022) who highlighted TikTok Shop's effectiveness in reaching Generation Z consumers.

The high explanatory power of the combined model supports Faizah (2023) who demonstrated that viral marketing and eWOM work synergistically to influence consumer behavior. This finding contradicts Ridwan (2023) who found that while viral marketing showed mixed results, the combination of digital marketing strategies could significantly influence consumer behavior. The substantial R^2 value suggests that these two factors capture most of the relevant digital marketing influences on Generation Z purchase decisions within social commerce contexts.

Therefore, it can be concluded that viral marketing and electronic word of mouth are two factors that complement each other in influencing purchase decisions. Attractive and widely spread promotional content will have greater impact when supported by reviews from other consumers that can increase credibility and buyer confidence. This becomes an important

consideration in developing digital marketing strategies, especially in reaching Generation Z market segments, aligning with the digital marketing transformation discussed by Kotler and Keller (2021) where social media platforms have become primary channels for brand-consumer interactions.

The synergistic relationship between viral marketing and eWOM creates a reinforcing cycle where viral content generates initial interest and engagement, leading to increased user-generated content and reviews, which in turn provides social proof that encourages further viral sharing. This cyclical dynamic appears particularly powerful in the beauty industry, where visual demonstration and peer validation are crucial to consumer confidence, as noted by the research context focusing on Indonesia's emerging social commerce landscape where mobile-first consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms for purchase decisions (Siregar & Nasution, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth on Generation Z purchase decisions for KULA products through TikTok Shop in Medan City. The research employed a quantitative approach with 96 respondents to examine these relationships within Indonesia's emerging social commerce landscape. The findings provide valuable insights into how local beauty brands can effectively leverage digital marketing strategies to reach digitally native consumers.

The research reveals that viral marketing significantly influences Generation Z purchase decisions with a regression coefficient of 0.557 and t-value of 5.908 ($p < 0.001$), making it the dominant factor in the consumer decision-making process. This finding demonstrates the effectiveness of KULA's strategy in creating engaging, shareable content that resonates with Generation Z's values-driven consumption patterns. The brand's approach of combining product promotion with social causes through TikTok's platform successfully captures consumer attention and drives purchase behavior.

Electronic word of mouth also demonstrates significant positive influence on purchase decisions, with a regression coefficient of 0.466 and t-value of 3.821 ($p < 0.001$). While secondary to viral marketing, eWOM plays a crucial complementary role by providing validation and social proof that converts initial interest into actual purchases. Generation Z consumers rely heavily on authentic user reviews and testimonials when making purchase decisions, particularly valuing transparent, experience-based content over traditional promotional material.

The combined effect of viral marketing and electronic word of mouth proves highly significant ($F = 104.098$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 69.1% of the variance in purchase decisions. This substantial explanatory power confirms that these two digital marketing approaches work synergistically to influence consumer behavior. The relationship creates a reinforcing cycle where viral content generates engagement and user-generated reviews, which in turn provide social proof that encourages further viral sharing and purchase behavior.

The research contributes to digital marketing theory by demonstrating how viral marketing and eWOM operate within specific cultural and platform contexts. The dominance of viral marketing over eWOM challenges assumptions about the primacy of peer recommendations, suggesting that emotionally engaging, values-driven content may be more influential than previously recognized for Generation Z consumers in emerging markets. This finding has important implications for beauty brands seeking to establish market presence through social commerce platforms.

For practitioners, the study emphasizes the importance of creating authentic, shareable content that aligns with target demographic values rather than focusing primarily on accumulating positive reviews. The success of KULA's charity-focused messaging demonstrates how purpose-driven marketing can enhance viral effectiveness by providing content that

consumers feel motivated to share. However, the complementary nature of both strategies suggests that comprehensive digital marketing approaches should integrate both viral content creation and authentic user testimony cultivation.

The research also highlights TikTok Shop's effectiveness as a social commerce platform for reaching Generation Z consumers in Indonesia. The platform's integration of entertainment and commerce, combined with its algorithmic amplification of engaging content, creates an ideal environment for viral marketing strategies while simultaneously facilitating authentic user-generated content that supports purchase decisions.

Several limitations constrain the generalizability of these findings. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inference, while the focus on a single brand and platform limits broader applicability. The purposive sampling approach may introduce selection bias toward consumers already predisposed to respond positively to digital marketing. Additionally, the study's concentration on existing KULA customers may overestimate marketing effectiveness compared to broader consumer populations.

Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal designs that can capture the evolution of viral marketing and eWOM influence over time. Experimental approaches could establish causal relationships and identify optimal combinations of digital marketing strategies. Cross-brand and cross-platform studies would enhance understanding of how different brand characteristics and platform features moderate these relationships. Investigation into the mechanisms underlying the viral marketing-eWOM interaction could provide deeper theoretical insights, particularly regarding how authentic eWOM can be distinguished from sponsored content in an era of increasing consumer skepticism.

The rapid evolution of social media platforms and changing consumer behaviors necessitates ongoing research to maintain relevant insights. As Generation Z ages and new digitally native generations emerge with different platform preferences and consumption behaviors, continuous validation of these relationships will be essential for both theoretical development and practical marketing application. The findings suggest that success in social commerce requires not only understanding individual marketing channel effects but also optimizing their synergistic potential to create comprehensive consumer engagement strategies.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causal relationships between viral marketing, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and purchase decisions. The use of purposive sampling may introduce selection bias, as the respondents were already engaged with KULA and active on TikTok, possibly overrepresenting favorable attitudes toward digital marketing. Additionally, focusing solely on existing KULA customers limits generalizability, as repeat buyers may respond differently than first-time consumers.

The brand-specific context—especially KULA's social responsibility messaging—may also influence results in ways that are not transferable to other beauty brands with different positioning. The exclusive analysis of TikTok Shop as the social commerce platform further narrows the scope, as findings may not apply to other platforms with different features or user bases. Geographically, the study's focus on Medan City may not reflect the broader Indonesian market, particularly rural or less digitally connected regions.

The use of self-reported data raises concerns about recall accuracy and social desirability bias. Moreover, the static measurement instruments may not fully capture the dynamic nature of social media engagement. The study also does not account for potential confounding variables such as personal traits, shopping preferences, or economic conditions. Lastly, the timing of data collection and the rapidly evolving nature of digital platforms may limit the temporal relevance of the findings.

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