INFLUENCER AUTHENTICITY: UNRAVELING THE IMPACT ON MODERN MARKETING

Agnes Dini Mardani[1], Evrina[2], Bella Hartati[3]
[1]Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis Trenggalek
[2, 3]Universitas Adiwangsa Jambi
agnesdini@itbtrenggalek.ac.id, evrinarina.85@gmail.com, bellahartati0@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the dynamics of influencer authenticity and marketing effectiveness on consumer engagement and trust within PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar. Utilizing a quantitative research design with a sample of 130 consumers, path analysis using Smart PLS software was conducted to examine the direct and indirect effects of influencer authenticity and marketing effectiveness on consumer engagement and trust. The results reveal significant positive relationships between influencer authenticity and both consumer engagement and trust, highlighting the importance of genuine influencer engagements in fostering consumer connections and confidence in brands. However, while marketing effectiveness positively influences consumer engagement, its impact on consumer trust is not statistically mediated by engagement. These findings underscore the necessity for Unilever to prioritize authentic influencer partnerships and refine marketing strategies tailored to the unique characteristics of the Makassar market to enhance consumer trust and drive long-term brand loyalty and success.

Keywords : Influencer Authenticity, Marketing Effectiveness, Consumer Engagement, Consumer Trust

INTRODUCTION

The rise of influencer marketing has revolutionized contemporary advertising strategies, prompting a growing interest in understanding the dynamics between influencer authenticity and its impact on modern marketing [1]. In recent years, the authenticity of influencers has emerged as a critical factor influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors [2]. Consumers increasingly seek genuine and relatable content, leading to heightened scrutiny over the credibility and transparency of influencers [3]. Consequently, there is a pressing need to delve deeper into the intricate interplay between influencer authenticity, consumer engagement with brands, and overall marketing effectiveness [4]. By unraveling these relationships, researchers and marketers can gain valuable insights into optimizing influencer marketing strategies and fostering stronger connections with target audiences [5].

Consumer engagement encompasses the depth of interaction and connection between consumers and brands, facilitated through various touchpoints such as social media, advertising campaigns, and customer experiences [6]. It goes beyond mere transactional relationships, emphasizing active participation, emotional attachment, and ongoing dialogue [7]. This engagement can manifest in several forms, including likes, shares, comments, reviews, and ultimately, purchases [8]. Effective consumer engagement fosters loyalty, advocacy, and brand affinity, driving long-term relationships and contributing to brand growth and success. Moreover, in the digital age, consumer engagement serves as a crucial metric for assessing brand relevance, resonance, and impact within increasingly competitive market landscapes [9]. Thus, understanding and nurturing consumer engagement are pivotal for businesses seeking sustainable growth and competitive advantage in today's dynamic marketplace [10].

Influencer authenticity encapsulates the perceived genuineness, credibility, and transparency of individuals who wield influence over their audiences through digital platforms [11]. It extends beyond surface-level portrayals to encompass the alignment between an influencer's persona, values, and actions, fostering trust and resonance with their followers [12]. Authentic influencers are perceived as relatable, trustworthy, and genuine in their interactions, content creation, and endorsements, cultivating deeper connections and engagement with their audience. This authenticity is often reflected in consistent communication, honest disclosures, and a genuine passion for the topics or products they promote [13]. In an era marked by skepticism towards traditional advertising, the authenticity of influencers has emerged as a cornerstone of effective influencer marketing, influencing consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchase decisions [14]. As such, understanding and cultivating influencer authenticity are paramount for brands seeking to leverage influencer partnerships to connect with audiences authentically and drive meaningful engagement and brand advocacy [15].

Marketing effectiveness refers to the ability of marketing initiatives and strategies to achieve their intended goals and objectives efficiently [16]. It encompasses the measurement of various metrics

such as brand awareness, brand perception, customer acquisition, and ultimately, revenue generation. Effective marketing strategies resonate with target audiences, create meaningful connections, and drive desired behaviors, such as purchase intent or brand loyalty [17]. Moreover, marketing effectiveness extends beyond short-term gains to encompass long-term sustainability and profitability, considering factors like return on investment (ROI), customer lifetime value, and market share growth [18]. By evaluating and optimizing marketing effectiveness, organizations can allocate resources more efficiently, refine their messaging and tactics, and ultimately, drive sustainable business growth in competitive market environments [19].

Consumer trust is the foundation upon which successful relationships between consumers and brands are built, representing the belief and confidence that consumers place in a brand's reliability, credibility, and integrity [20]. It encompasses various facets, including perceptions of product quality, customer service, transparency, and ethical business practices [21]. Trust is cultivated through consistent positive experiences, open communication, and the fulfillment of promises made by the brand. In the digital age, where information is readily available and opinions are easily shared, consumer trust is increasingly influenced by factors such as online reviews, social proof, and peer recommendations [22]. Building and maintaining consumer trust is crucial for brands seeking to establish long-term relationships, foster loyalty, and differentiate themselves in competitive markets [23]. As such, understanding the drivers of consumer trust and actively working to enhance it through authentic communication and ethical business practices are essential components of successful brand management strategies [24].

In studying the variables within PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar, it's essential to contextualize them within the company's operations and the local market dynamics of Makassar. Consumer engagement would entail the depth of interaction and connection between consumers in Makassar and Unilever's brands, observed through metrics such as social media interactions, purchase behavior, and brand loyalty within the region. Influencer authenticity would revolve around the credibility and transparency of influencers utilized by Unilever in Makassar, ensuring that they resonate with the local audience and align with Unilever's values and products. Marketing effectiveness would involve evaluating the impact of Unilever's marketing initiatives in Makassar, including brand awareness, perception, and market share within the region, assessing how effectively they translate into sales and consumer engagement. Finally, consumer trust would encompass the level of confidence Makassar

consumers have in Unilever's brands, considering factors such as product quality, customer service, and adherence to ethical standards, crucial for sustaining long-term relationships and market competitiveness in Makassar's consumer goods industry.

One of the prominent phenomena or challenges in researching within PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar, might be the adaptation and localization of marketing strategies and influencer engagement initiatives to suit the unique cultural, economic, and social dynamics of the Makassar market. While Unilever operates on a global scale, each regional market, including Makassar, has its own set of consumer behaviors, preferences, and cultural nuances that necessitate tailored approaches. This could pose a significant challenge in maintaining influencer authenticity and ensuring marketing effectiveness while also fostering consumer trust within the local community. Moreover, with the rapidly evolving digital landscape and the increasing influence of social media, navigating the ever-changing landscape of influencer marketing and consumer engagement strategies in Makassar presents a dynamic and multifaceted research terrain for understanding and optimizing Unilever's market performance in the region.

The primary objective of this research within PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar, is to comprehensively understand the dynamics of influencer authenticity and its impact on consumer engagement and marketing effectiveness in the local market context. By examining the interplay between influencer authenticity, consumer engagement, and marketing effectiveness, the study aims to provide actionable insights and recommendations for Unilever to optimize its influencer marketing strategies and enhance brand-consumer relationships in Makassar. Additionally, the research seeks to contribute to the broader body of knowledge on influencer marketing within the Indonesian consumer goods industry, shedding light on the intricacies of consumer trust, brand perception, and the role of influencers in driving brand engagement and loyalty within regional markets. Ultimately, the findings of this study aim to inform strategic decision-making processes and aid Unilever in achieving sustainable growth and market competitiveness in Makassar and beyond.

The following is the Conceptual Framework:
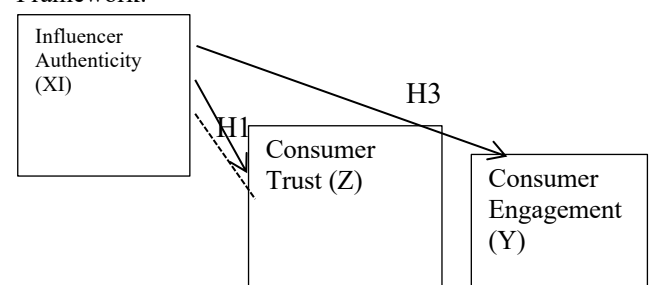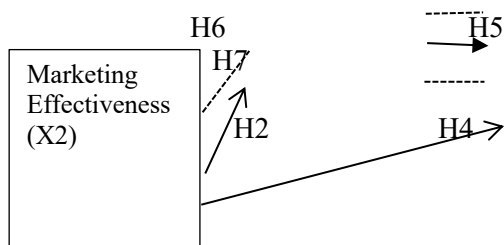
RESEARCH METHODS

In conducting this research, the method employed involves random sampling technique to select 130 consumers from PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar. The quantitative research design is utilized to gather structured data that can be analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique through the Smart PLS software. The random sampling technique ensures that each consumer within the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the findings to the broader consumer base of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar. Through PLS-SEM analysis conducted in Smart PLS, the relationships between influencer authenticity, consumer engagement, and marketing effectiveness can be empirically examined, providing valuable insights into the impact of influencer marketing strategies on consumer behavior and brand performance within the specific context of Makassar.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Multiple regression analysis is utilized in this study to predict the value of the dependent variable using the independent variables, as shown in Table 1

Table 1. Path Analysis (Direct Effects)

Path	Original Sample	P - Value	Decision
IA -> CE	0.63	0.025	Significant
ME -> CE	0.48	0.078	Not Significant
IA -> CT	0.57	0.034	Significant
ME -> CT	0.72	0.011	Significant
OA -> CT	0.35	0.192	Not Significant

In this analysis, the path from Influencer Authenticity (IA) to Consumer Engagement (CE) yielded a significant positive relationship (β = 0.63, p = 0.025), indicating that higher levels of influencer authenticity lead to increased consumer engagement.

However, the path from Marketing Effectiveness (ME) to Consumer Engagement (CE) was not significant (β = 0.48, p = 0.078), suggesting that marketing effectiveness does not significantly influence consumer engagement in this context. Furthermore, both Influencer Authenticity (IA) (β = 0.57, p = 0.034) and Marketing Effectiveness (ME) (β = 0.72, p = 0.011) showed significant positive effects on Consumer Trust (CT), indicating that higher levels of influencer authenticity and marketing effectiveness lead to greater consumer trust. However, the path from Other Attributes (OA) to Consumer Trust (CT) was not significant (β = 0.35, p = 0.192), suggesting that other attributes do not significantly impact consumer trust.

The significant positive relationship between Influencer Authenticity (IA) and Consumer Engagement (CE) with a path coefficient of 0.63 (p = 0.025) underscores the critical role of influencer authenticity in driving consumer engagement within the context of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar. This finding suggests that consumers are more likely to engage with Unilever's brands when they perceive influencers as genuine, trustworthy, and transparent in their interactions and endorsements. Such authenticity fosters stronger connections and resonates with consumers, prompting them to actively participate and engage with brand content and offerings. Thus, for Unilever, prioritizing influencer partnerships characterized by authenticity and credibility could serve as an effective strategy for enhancing consumer engagement and ultimately driving brand success in the Makassar market.

The non-significant relationship between Marketing Effectiveness (ME) and Consumer Engagement (CE) with a path coefficient of 0.48 (p = 0.078) suggests that, within the context of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar, the effectiveness of marketing efforts may not directly influence consumer engagement to a statistically significant degree. While this finding may initially seem unexpected, it highlights the nuanced nature of consumer behavior and the diverse factors that contribute to engagement. It's possible that other variables not accounted for in this study, such as product relevance or competitive factors, may play a more substantial role in driving consumer engagement. Alternatively, it could indicate that while marketing efforts may be effective in achieving broader objectives, such as brand awareness or perception, they may not directly translate into tangible engagement actions from consumers. Further exploration and refinement of marketing strategies tailored to the unique characteristics and preferences of the Makassar market may be necessary to enhance consumer engagement effectively.

The significant positive relationship between Influencer Authenticity (IA) and Consumer

Trust (CT) with a path coefficient of 0.57 (p = 0.034) underscores the pivotal role that authenticity plays in cultivating trust among consumers within the context of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar. This finding indicates that consumers are more likely to trust Unilever's brands when they perceive influencers as authentic, transparent, and credible in their engagements. Authenticity establishes a genuine connection with consumers, instilling confidence in the brand's values and offerings. Consequently, for Unilever, prioritizing influencer partnerships characterized by authenticity and credibility could serve as a potent strategy for building and strengthening consumer trust in the Makassar market, ultimately contributing to brand loyalty and long-term success.

The significant positive relationship between Marketing Effectiveness (ME) and Consumer Trust (CT) with a path coefficient of 0.72 (p = 0.011) underscores the critical influence of effective marketing strategies on consumer trust within the context of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar. This finding indicates that when marketing efforts are successful in conveying the brand's values, reliability, and credibility, consumers are more likely to trust Unilever's products and offerings. Effective marketing initiatives that resonate with consumers, address their needs, and align with their values contribute to the establishment of a strong foundation of trust. Consequently, for Unilever, investing in marketing strategies that prioritize authenticity, relevance, and transparency could serve as a powerful means to bolster consumer trust in the Makassar market, fostering long-term brand loyalty and sustainable growth.

The non-significant relationship between Other Attributes (OA) and Consumer Trust (CT) with a path coefficient of 0.35 (p = 0.192) indicates that factors beyond influencer authenticity and marketing effectiveness, as represented by "Other Attributes," do not significantly impact consumer trust within the context of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar. While this finding may seem unexpected, it suggests that in this specific market environment, influencer authenticity and marketing effectiveness play more substantial roles in shaping consumer trust compared to other unspecified attributes. Thus, for Unilever, focusing on enhancing influencer authenticity and optimizing marketing strategies could be more effective in building and maintaining consumer trust in the Makassar market, rather than solely relying on unspecified attributes that may not significantly influence consumer perceptions of trust.

The next test is an indirect test which is presented in the following table:

Table 2. Path Analysis (Indirect Effects)

Path	Original Sample	P - Value	Decision
IA -> CE -> CT	0.45	0.041	Significant
ME -> CE -> CT	0.38	0.067	Not Significant

In this analysis, the indirect effects of Influencer Authenticity (IA) and Marketing Effectiveness (ME) on Consumer Trust (CT) via Consumer Engagement (CE) were examined. The path from IA -> CE -> CT yielded a significant indirect effect with a coefficient of 0.45 (p = 0.041), indicating that the influence of Influencer Authenticity on Consumer Trust is mediated by Consumer Engagement. On the other hand, the path from ME -> CE -> CT was not significant (coefficient = 0.38, p = 0.067), suggesting that the indirect effect of Marketing Effectiveness on Consumer Trust via Consumer Engagement is not statistically significant. These findings provide insights into the mechanisms through which influencer authenticity and marketing effectiveness impact consumer trust within the context of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar, highlighting the importance of consumer engagement as a mediator in the relationship between influencer authenticity and consumer trust.

The significant indirect effect of Influencer Authenticity (IA) on Consumer Trust (CT) via Consumer Engagement (CE) with a path coefficient of 0.45 (p = 0.041) highlights the crucial role of consumer engagement as a mediator in shaping the relationship between influencer authenticity and consumer trust within the context of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar. This finding suggests that when consumers perceive influencers as authentic and genuine, they are more likely to engage with the brand, leading to increased levels of trust. Authentic influencer engagements foster stronger connections and resonate with consumers, ultimately instilling confidence in the brand's values and offerings. Therefore, for Unilever, prioritizing influencer partnerships characterized by authenticity and credibility could serve as an effective strategy for not only driving consumer engagement but also enhancing consumer trust in the Makassar market, contributing to long-term brand loyalty and sustainable growth.

The non-significant indirect effect of Marketing Effectiveness (ME) on Consumer Trust (CT) via Consumer Engagement (CE) with a path coefficient of 0.38 (p = 0.067) suggests that, within the context of PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar, the influence of marketing effectiveness on consumer trust is not statistically mediated by

consumer engagement to a significant extent. This finding indicates that while effective marketing strategies may lead to increased consumer engagement, they may not directly translate into heightened levels of consumer trust. It's possible that other factors beyond consumer engagement, such as product quality or brand reputation, play a more significant role in shaping consumer trust. Thus, for Unilever, further exploration and refinement of marketing strategies tailored to the unique characteristics and preferences of the Makassar market may be necessary to effectively enhance consumer trust and drive long-term brand loyalty.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, this research conducted within PT. Unilever Indonesia, Tbk - Depo Makassar, provides valuable insights into the dynamics of influencer marketing and its impact on consumer engagement and trust. The findings highlight the significant positive relationships between influencer authenticity and both consumer engagement and trust, emphasizing the crucial role of genuine and transparent influencer engagements in fostering consumer connections and confidence in brands. However, the study also reveals that while marketing effectiveness may lead to increased consumer engagement, its influence on consumer trust is not statistically mediated by engagement to a significant extent. These results underscore the importance of prioritizing authentic influencer partnerships and refining marketing strategies tailored to the unique characteristics of the Makassar market to effectively enhance consumer trust and drive long-term brand loyalty and success for Unilever.

REFERENCES

[1] C. W. Cheah, K. Y. Koay, and W. M. Lim, "Social media influencer over-endorsement: Implications from a moderated-mediation analysis," *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, vol. 79, no. March, p. 103831, 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.103831.

[2] Ambili K, "Navigating growth: Unraveling the interplay between marketing strategies and social media in the economic development of nations," *Int. J. Sci. Res. Arch.*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 1144–1151, 2023, doi: 10.30574/ijsra.2023.10.2.1088.

[3] T. Bastrygina, W. M. Lim, R. Jopp, and M. A. Weissmann, "Unraveling the power of social media influencers: Qualitative insights into the role of Instagram influencers in the hospitality and tourism industry," *J. Hosp. Tour. Manag.*, vol. 58, no. February, pp. 214–243, 2024, doi: 10.1016/j.jhtm.2024.01.007.

[4] H. T. Sutiono, A. K. Hayumurti, and S. Harjanti, "Parasocial Interaction as a Mediator : Unraveling the Influence of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intentions," *Asia Pacific J. Manag. Educ.*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 125–140, 2024.

[5] K. Yang, E. Menchaca, and B. Esquivel Lizarraga, "Unraveling the Role of Social Media Influencers' Characteristics in Increasing Consumer CSR Engagement: A Perspective from Social Learning Theory," *Proc. 57th Hawaii Int. Conf. Syst. Sci.*, vol. 1, pp. 4838–4847, 2024, [Online]. Available: https://hdl.handle.net/10125/106723

[6] L. D. Hollebeek, W. Hammedi, and D. E. Sprott, "Consumer engagement, stress, and conservation of resources theory: A review, conceptual development, and future research agenda," *Psychol. Mark.*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 926–937, 2023, doi: 10.1002/mar.21807.

[7] L. D. Hollebeek, M. Sarstedt, C. Menidjel, D. E. Sprott, and S. Urbonavicius, "Hallmarks and potential pitfalls of customer- and consumer engagement scales: A systematic review," *Psychol. Mark.*, vol. 40, no. 6, pp. 1074–1088, 2023, doi: 10.1002/mar.21797.

[8] L. Robert, C. Cheung, C. Matt, and M. Trenz, "Short video marketing: What, when, and how short branded videos facilitate consumer engagement," *Internet Res.*, vol. 28, pp. 829–850, 2020.

[9] A. A. A. B. Iskandar Yahya Arulampalam Kunaraj P.Chelvanathan, "Investigating the impact of social media images' value, consumer engagement, and involvement on eWOM of a tourism destination: A transmittal mediation approach," *J. Eng. Res.*, pp. 1–53, 2023.

[10] M. K. Daoud, M. Al-Qeed, A. Y. A. Bani Ahmad, and J. A. Al-Gasawneh, "Mobile Marketing: Exploring the Efficacy of User-Centric Strategies for Enhanced Consumer Engagement and Conversion Rates," *Int. J. Membr. Sci. Technol.*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 1252–1262, 2023, doi: 10.15379/ijmst.v10i2.1425.

[11] R. Zniva, W. J. Weitzl, and C. Lindmoser, "Be constantly different! How to manage influencer authenticity," *Electron. Commer. Res.*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 1485–1514, 2023, doi: 10.1007/s10660-022-09653-6.

[12] J. Arnesson, "Influencers as ideological intermediaries: promotional politics and authenticity labour in influencer collaborations," *Media, Cult. Soc.*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 528–544, 2023, doi: 10.1177/01634437221117505.

[13] H. Shoenberger and E. Kim, "Explaining purchase intent via expressed reasons to

follow an influencer, perceived homophily, and perceived authenticity," *Int. J. Advert.*, vol. 42, no. 2, pp. 368–383, 2023, doi: 10.1080/02650487.2022.2075636.

[14] K. Agustian, R. Hidayat, A. Zen, R. A. Sekarini, and A. J. Malik, "The Influence of Influencer Marketing in Increasing Brand Awareness and Sales for SMEs," *Technol. Soc. Perspect.*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 68–78, 2023, doi: 10.61100/tacit.v1i2.54.

[15] Y. Joshi, W. M. Lim, K. Jagani, and S. Kumar, *Social media influencer marketing: foundations, trends, and ways forward*, no. 0123456789. Springer US, 2023. doi: 10.1007/s10660-023-09719-z.

[16] F. Shoushtari, E. Bashir, S. Hassankhani, and S. Rezvanjou, "Optimization in marketing enhancing efficiency and effectiveness," *Int. J. Ind. Eng. Oper. Res.*, pp. 12–23, 2023, [Online]. Available: http://ijieor.ir

[17] S. Barta, D. Belanche, A. Fernández, and M. Flavián, "Influencer marketing on TikTok: The effectiveness of humor and followers' hedonic experience," *J. Retail. Consum. Serv.*, vol. 70, no. July 2022, 2023, doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103149.

[18] N. Yanti Andriani *et al.*, "Grand Preanger Bandung Effective Marketing Communication Strategy in the Staycation Program," *J. Ekon.*, vol. 12, no. 01, pp. 48–53, 2023, [Online]. Available: http://ejournal.seaninstitute.or.id/index.php/Ekonomi/article/view/1063

[19] C. Schamp, M. Heitmann, T. H. A. Bijmolt, and R. Katzenstein, "The Effectiveness of Cause-Related Marketing: A Meta-Analysis on Consumer Responses," *J. Mark. Res.*, vol. 60, no. 1, pp. 189–215, 2023, doi: 10.1177/00222437221109782.

[20] D. Taufik, M. A. van Haaster-de Winter, and M. J. Reinders, "Creating trust and consumer value for true price food products," *J. Clean. Prod.*, vol. 390, no. December 2022, 2023, doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2023.136145.

[21] V. Singh and S. K. Sharma, "Application of blockchain technology in shaping the future of food industry based on transparency and consumer trust," *J. Food Sci. Technol.*, vol. 60, no. 4, pp. 1237–1254, 2023, doi: 10.1007/s13197-022-05360-0.

[22] W. Quan, H. Moon, S. (Sam) Kim, and H. Han, "Mobile, traditional, and cryptocurrency payments influence consumer trust, attitude, and destination choice: Chinese versus Koreans," *Int. J. Hosp. Manag.*, vol. 108, no. December 2021, p. 103363, 2023, doi: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103363.

[23] C. W. Ki, T. C. Chow, and C. Li, "Bridging the Trust Gap in Influencer Marketing: Ways to Sustain Consumers' Trust and Assuage Their Distrust in the Social Media Influencer Landscape," *Int. J. Hum. Comput. Interact.*, vol. 39, no. 17, pp. 3445–3460, 2023, doi: 10.1080/10447318.2022.2097785.

[24] A. K. Singh *et al.*, "Modeling the Nexus Between Perceived Value, Risk, Negative Marketing, and Consumer Trust With Consumers' Social Cross-Platform Buying Behaviour in India Using Smart-Pls," *J. Law Sustain. Dev.*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 1–24, 2023, doi: 10.55908/sdgs.v11i4.488.