



The Influence of Viral Marketing and Celebrity Endorsers on Purchase Decisions for Bittersweet by Najla Products through E-Commerce Platforms

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of e-commerce has intensified competition among food and beverage brands, encouraging marketers to combine viral marketing strategies with celebrity endorsements to influence consumer purchasing decisions. However, limited studies have simultaneously examined the relative influence of these two marketing approaches in the context of local F&B brands operating through e-commerce platforms. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of viral marketing and celebrity endorsers on purchase decisions for Bittersweet by Najla products. A quantitative survey was conducted with 479 respondents, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that viral content information, celebrity attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise significantly influence purchase decisions, whereas viral content credibility and usefulness show no significant effects. These findings demonstrate that consumers' purchase decisions are driven more by the persuasive and emotional characteristics of celebrity endorsers than by the perceived credibility or usefulness of viral content. This study contributes to digital marketing communication literature by providing empirical evidence that the effectiveness of integrated marketing strategies in e-commerce depends more on emotional engagement and endorser quality than on informational aspects of viral content, offering practical implications for developing more effective promotional strategies for digital-based local brands.

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed consumer purchasing behaviour and the global business landscape. One of the most significant outcomes of this transformation is the rapid expansion of e-commerce, which enables consumers to purchase products and services regardless of geographical and temporal limitations. In Indonesia, this transformation has been accelerated by the increasing number of internet users, reaching approximately 229 million people, alongside substantial growth in online transactions and mobile commerce (Haryanto, 2025). Consequently, businesses across various industries, particularly the food and beverage (F&B) sector, have increasingly adopted digital marketing strategies to remain competitive within the evolving digital ecosystem (Faza & Deslia, 2024; Irawanda, 2025).

The expansion of e-commerce has also altered the way consumers make purchasing decisions. Rather than relying solely on traditional advertising, consumers increasingly seek product information through social media, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), online reviews, and recommendations from public figures before making purchase decisions (Loupiac & Le Nagard, 2024; Putra & Darma, 2021). This behavioural shift has strengthened the importance of digital marketing communication strategies that are capable of generating engagement, trust, and persuasive influence in online environments. Among these strategies, viral marketing and celebrity endorsement have become two of the most widely adopted approaches for influencing consumer purchase decisions (Bukit et al., 2023; Kholiq & Sari, 2021; Nggilu et al., 2019).

Viral marketing refers to a digital marketing strategy that encourages consumers to voluntarily disseminate marketing messages through social networks and online platforms, creating a rapid electronic word-of-mouth effect (Zhang & Huang, 2022). The effectiveness of viral marketing depends not only on the dissemination of information but also on the informativeness, credibility, and usefulness of the shared content. Previous studies have suggested that viral marketing positively influences consumer purchase decisions because it increases product awareness and facilitates information exchange among consumers (Maulida et al., 2022). However, contradictory findings have also been reported. Parmariza (2019), for instance, found that viral marketing did not significantly influence purchase decisions because the products examined were already familiar to consumers and lacked viral characteristics. Similarly, Angelica & Tj (2025) emphasized that although social media marketing facilitates promotional activities, its effectiveness depends on consumers' perceptions of message relevance and engagement. These findings indicate that the influence of viral marketing remains inconclusive and may vary across different industrial contexts.

Another communication strategy that has attracted considerable attention is celebrity endorsement. Celebrity endorsers utilize their popularity, credibility, attractiveness, and expertise to strengthen persuasive communication and influence consumer perceptions toward a brand (Parmariza, 2019). According to the Source Credibility Theory, consumers are more likely to accept persuasive messages delivered by communicators perceived as trustworthy and knowledgeable. Previous studies generally reported that celebrity endorsement positively affects purchase decisions because consumers tend to develop stronger trust in products promoted by well-known public figures (Alifyanti et al., 2022). Nevertheless, inconsistent findings remain evident. Parmariza (2019) demonstrated that celebrity endorsement did not significantly influence purchasing decisions because consumers focused more on product quality than on the celebrity promoting it. These inconsistencies suggest that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers may depend on contextual factors, including product characteristics, industry type, and consumer behaviour.

Although viral marketing and celebrity endorsement have been extensively examined in previous studies, the empirical findings remain inconsistent. Kristanto et al. (2017); Kholiq & Sari (2021) found that both variables significantly influenced purchase decisions. In contrast, Karisma & Hanifah (2023) reported that viral marketing had no significant effect, whereas celebrity endorsement remained significant. Meanwhile, Katiandagho & Syarif Hidayatullah (2023) concluded that neither viral marketing nor celebrity endorsement significantly influenced purchase decisions when examined individually. These contradictory findings reveal an important research gap, suggesting that the effectiveness of digital marketing communication strategies may differ depending on the industrial context, product characteristics, and consumer behaviour. Therefore, further empirical investigation is necessary to clarify these inconsistencies, particularly within rapidly growing digital industries (Azhar et al., 2023).

The Indonesian culinary industry provides an appropriate context for addressing this research gap. In recent years, the dessert box segment has experienced remarkable growth, largely driven by social media exposure, influencer marketing, and changing consumer lifestyles. One of the most prominent brands within this industry is Bittersweet by Najla, which has successfully developed its market through intensive digital marketing communication, electronic word-of-mouth, and collaborations with celebrity endorsers across multiple social media platforms. The substantial number of online product reviews and millions of views generated by celebrity content indicate that both viral marketing and celebrity endorsement play central roles in building consumer awareness and stimulating purchasing intentions. Consequently, Bittersweet by Najla represents a relevant empirical setting for examining the effectiveness of contemporary digital marketing communication strategies.

This study offers several contributions to the digital marketing communication literature. First, it addresses the inconsistent findings reported in previous studies by simultaneously examining the influence of viral marketing and celebrity endorsement on purchase decisions within a single research model. Second, unlike earlier studies that primarily focused on conventional retail products or other industries, this research investigates the rapidly growing digital culinary industry represented by Bittersweet by Najla, thereby extending the empirical context of digital marketing communication research. Third, this study employs contemporary measurement dimensions of viral marketing, including Viral Content Informativeness, Viral Content Credibility, and Viral Content Usefulness Singh et al. (2025), together with the dimensions of Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise for celebrity endorsers (Andita et al., 2021). This integrated approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how informational and persuasive communication jointly influence consumer purchase decisions in e-commerce environments. Finally, the findings are expected to provide practical insights for digital marketers regarding the relative effectiveness of viral marketing content and celebrity endorsement strategies in enhancing consumer purchasing decisions. Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the influence of viral marketing and celebrity endorsers on consumers' purchase decisions regarding Bittersweet by Najla products through e-commerce platforms.

2. Method

Research Approach

This study employed a quantitative research approach with an explanatory research design to examine the causal relationships between viral marketing, celebrity endorsement, and consumers' purchase decisions. An explanatory design was selected because the study aims to test hypotheses regarding the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. The relationships among variables were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for simultaneously estimating complex relationships between latent constructs and their indicators while accommodating non-normal data distributions and prediction-oriented research objectives.

Type and Source of Data

Respondents are given questionnaires to complete in order to collect quantitative data for this study in numerical form. The original data used in this study came directly from individuals who fit the predetermined research criteria. Data were collected through an online questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale, in which a score of 5 corresponds to “strongly agree” and a score of 1 corresponds to “strongly disagree.” This scale is applied to systematically evaluate respondents' attitudes, perceptions, and assessments of each variable indicator.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of consumers who had purchased Bittersweet by Najla products through e-commerce platforms. Since the exact population size could not be determined, purposive sampling was employed. Respondents were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Have purchased Bittersweet by Najla products through Shopee, Tokopedia, or Lazada.
2. Have been exposed to Bittersweet by Najla's viral marketing content.
3. Have viewed celebrity endorsement content promoting Bittersweet by Najla.
4. Are between 21 and 25 years old.
5. Are active users of at least one e-commerce platform.

According to the minimum sample size recommendations for PLS-SEM, the required sample should be at least five to ten times the largest number of structural paths or indicators. A total of 479 valid questionnaires were successfully collected and analysed, exceeding the recommended minimum sample size and ensuring sufficient statistical power.

Research Variables

This study includes one dependent variable, purchase decision, and two independent variables, viral marketing and celebrity endorsement. The viral marketing variable is broken down into three dimensions: Viral Content Information, Viral Content Credibility, and Viral Content Usefulness. The celebrity endorsement variable is characterized by three core dimensions: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. The dependent variable, the purchase decision variable, measures how customers choose and acquire Bittersweet by Najla items. Each variable is translated into a set of measurable indicators formulated on the basis of established theoretical frameworks and relevant prior research.

Data Collection Technique

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to respondents who fulfilled the predetermined sampling criteria. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure respondents' perceptions of each research variable. Prior to the main survey, the research instrument was evaluated through a pilot test involving forty respondents to assess item validity and internal consistency. All measurement items satisfied the validity requirements, while Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for predictive research models involving multiple latent variables and does not require multivariate normality assumptions. The analysis consisted of two stages:

Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The outer model evaluation assessed the reliability and validity of the measurement model through: Indicator reliability using outer loading values (>0.70); Internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (>0.70); Convergent validity using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (>0.50); Discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

Structural Model (Inner Model)

After confirming that the measurement model met the required criteria, the structural model was evaluated by examining: Coefficient of Determination (R^2); Predictive Relevance (Q^2); Effect Size (f^2) and Path Coefficients. Hypothesis testing was performed using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. The significance of each hypothesis was determined based on the t-statistic (>1.96) and p-value (<0.05).

3. Result and Discussion

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Characteristics	Dominant Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	345	72.09%
Age	21–25 years	248	51.63%
Education Level	High School or Equivalent	249	52.09%
Occupation	Student	265	55.35%
Monthly Expenditure	IDR 2.000.000 – IDR 5.000.000	201	41.96%

Based on the respondent profile, the sample in this study is predominantly composed of female respondents (72.09%), falling within the 21–25 age bracket (51.63%), holding a high school diploma or its equivalent (52.09%), and largely identifying as students (55.35%) in Table 1. With regard to monthly expenditure, the majority of respondents allocate between IDR 2.000.000 and IDR 5.000.000 per month (41.96%). These characteristics suggest that the sample is largely constituted by young consumers who are actively embedded in the digital ecosystem and e-commerce environment, a demographic that is highly pertinent to the digital marketing landscape of Bittersweet by Najla.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Category
Viral Content Information	479	3.962	Agree
Viral Content Credibility	479	4.055	Agree
Viral Content Usefulness	479	4.105	Agree
Attractiveness	479	4.162	Agree
Trustworthiness	479	4.066	Agree
Expertise	479	4.107	Agree
Purchase Decisions	479	4.048	Agree

Based on the descriptive statistical analysis, mean scores for all variables fall within the "agree" category. Attractiveness recorded the highest mean value (4.162), followed by Expertise (4.107) and Viral Content Usefulness (4.105), while the Purchase Decision variable yielded a mean of 4.048 in Table 2. These figures collectively suggest that respondents hold favorable perceptions toward viral marketing, celebrity endorsers, and their own purchasing behavior with respect to Bittersweet by Najla products.

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The outer model assessment reveals that all variables attain satisfactory levels of reliability, as reflected by Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values surpassing the prescribed minimum thresholds. In terms of convergent validity, the Purchase Decision variable fulfills the recommended Average Variance Extracted (AVE) benchmark (>0.50). While certain other variables yield AVE values falling short of this threshold, they remain acceptable given that their Composite Reliability values exceed the minimum permissible level. The measurement model is therefore regarded as reliable and adequate for further analytical procedures in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Test

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Remarks
Attractiveness	0.336	0.752	0.606	Reliable
Expertise	0.455	0.769	0.600	Reliable
Purchase Decisions	0.513	0.807	0.682	Valid & Reliable
Trustworthiness	0.443	0.799	0.686	Reliable
Viral Content Credibility	0.420	0.782	0.657	Reliable
Viral Content Information	0.477	0.820	0.726	Reliable
Viral Content Usefulness	0.359	0.797	0.703	Reliable

Table 4. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Variable	Attractiveness	Expertise	Purchase Decision	Trustworthiness	VCC	VCI	VCU
Attractiveness	0.580						
Expertise	0.594	0.674					
Purchase Decisions	0.546	0.586	0.716				
Trustworthiness	0.590	0.625	0.563	0.666			
Viral Content Credibility	0.582	0.568	0.488	0.678	0.648		
Viral Content Information	0.515	0.514	0.573	0.595	0.616	0.691	
Viral Content Usefulness	0.644	0.610	0.555	0.644	0.598	0.598	0.599

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to evaluate discriminant validity. The findings indicate that the square root of AVE values along the diagonal typically surpasses inter-construct correlations. This confirms that each construct possesses sufficient discriminant validity, establishing that the variables are empirically distinguishable and adequately differentiated within the research model.

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination Results

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Purchase Decision	0.482	0.476

As seen in Table 5, the adjusted R^2 value of 0.476 indicates that the proposed model explains approximately 47.6% of the variance in purchase decisions, suggesting a moderate explanatory power according to Hair et al. (2022). This finding indicates that although viral marketing and celebrity endorsement contribute substantially to consumer purchase decisions, other factors, such as brand image, perceived quality, price perception, and consumer trust, may also play important roles in shaping purchasing behavior.

Table 6. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Endogenous Variable	Q^2	Conclusion
Purchase Decision	0.237	Has Predictive Relevance

As seen in Table 6, the Purchase Decision variable has a Q -square value of 0.237, which is higher than zero. This outcome suggests that the dependent construct can be explained by the model with moderate predictive relevance.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	Result
H1a	Viral Content Information → Purchase Decision	0.263	3.841	0.000	Accepted
H1b	Viral Content Credibility → Purchase Decision	-0.051	0.937	0.349	Rejected
H1c	Viral Content Usefulness → Purchase Decision	0.087	1.536	0.125	Rejected
H2a	Attractiveness → Purchase Decision	0.156	2.615	0.009	Accepted
H2b	Trustworthiness → Purchase Decision	0.138	2.197	0.028	Accepted
H2c	Expertise → Purchase Decision	0.247	3.828	0.000	Accepted

The results demonstrate that viral content information positively and significantly influences Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.263$, $t = 3.841$, $p < 0.001$) in Table 7. This finding indicates that consumers are more likely to purchase Bittersweet by Najla products when viral content provides clear, relevant, and attractive information. In the context of e-commerce, informative content reduces information asymmetry and helps consumers evaluate products before making purchasing decisions. This finding is consistent with the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which explains that online information shared among consumers facilitates purchasing decisions by reducing uncertainty (Romadhoni et al., 2023). It also supports previous studies by Setiawan et al. (2023); Tungki & Balqiah (2023), who found that informative e-WOM significantly enhances consumers' purchase decisions. These findings suggest that informative viral content functions as an effective digital marketing communication strategy by strengthening consumers' confidence and encouraging purchasing decisions.

The results reveal that Viral Content Credibility does not significantly influence Purchase Decision ($\beta = -0.051$, $t = 0.937$, $p = 0.349$). Although consumers perceive viral content as credible, credibility alone is insufficient to directly encourage purchasing decisions. From a digital marketing communication perspective, consumers are simultaneously exposed to multiple information sources, including online reviews, influencer recommendations, and user-generated content. Consequently, purchasing decisions are influenced by a combination of informational and emotional factors rather than by credibility alone. This finding is consistent with Chen et al. (2021), who reported that e-WOM credibility mainly shapes consumer attitudes rather than directly influencing purchasing decisions. Likewise, Kadang & Berlianto (2022); Amarullah et al. (2022) found that credibility primarily influences consumer trust and perceived usefulness, which subsequently affect purchase intention. Therefore, credibility should be viewed as a complementary communication attribute rather than the primary determinant of purchasing decisions.

The findings indicate that Viral Content Usefulness does not significantly influence Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.087$, $t = 1.536$, $p = 0.125$). Although respondents considered the viral content useful, usefulness alone was insufficient to stimulate actual purchasing decisions. One possible explanation is that consumers of food products are more strongly influenced by visual appeal, emotional engagement, and viral trends than by functional information. This finding differs from Astuti and Pratama & Rahmawati (2023), who reported that perceived usefulness positively affects purchase decisions in e-commerce. However, it is consistent with Romadhoni et al. (2023), who suggested that useful information tends to influence purchase intention indirectly rather than directly affecting purchase decisions.

These findings imply that, in digital marketing communication, useful information should be integrated with persuasive and emotionally engaging content to maximize its effectiveness. The results demonstrate that Attractiveness positively and significantly influences Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.156$, $t = 2.615$, $p = 0.009$). This finding supports the Source Attractiveness Model, which explains that attractive communicators are more effective in capturing consumers' attention and creating positive attitudes toward promoted products. The finding is consistent with [Wiedmann & von Mettenheim \(2021\)](#); [Sokolova & Kefi \(2020\)](#); [Lou & Yuan \(2019\)](#), who reported that attractive influencers and celebrity endorsers positively influence consumer responses and purchasing behaviour. For Bittersweet by Najla, visually attractive celebrity endorsers successfully enhance product appeal and strengthen the effectiveness of digital marketing communication.

The findings reveal that Trustworthiness positively and significantly influences Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.138$, $t = 2.197$, $p = 0.028$). This result is consistent with Source Credibility Theory, which argues that trustworthy communicators increase audience acceptance of persuasive messages. Consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from endorsers who are perceived as honest, authentic, and reliable. This finding is supported by [Sokolova & Kefi \(2020\)](#); [Kim & Kim \(2021\)](#); [Djafarova & Rushworth \(2017\)](#), who found that trustworthiness strengthens consumer confidence and positively affects purchasing behaviour. Therefore, trustworthy celebrity endorsers play an essential role in improving the effectiveness of digital marketing communication.

The results indicate that Expertise positively and significantly influences Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.247$, $t = 3.828$, $p < 0.001$). This finding supports Source Credibility Theory, which emphasizes that consumers perceive knowledgeable and experienced endorsers as more persuasive and credible. Consumers are more likely to trust product recommendations delivered by endorsers who demonstrate relevant expertise. This finding is consistent with [Sokolova & Kefi \(2020\)](#); [Lou & Yuan, \(2019\)](#); [Wiedmann & von Mettenheim \(2021\)](#), who concluded that endorser expertise significantly enhances consumer evaluations and purchasing decisions. In the context of Bittersweet by Najla, expertise enables celebrity endorsers to communicate product quality more convincingly, thereby increasing consumers' confidence in purchasing the product.

Taken together, these findings indicate that consumers' purchase decisions are influenced more strongly by informative viral content and the characteristics of celebrity endorsers than by the credibility or usefulness of viral content alone. Viral Content Information, Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise significantly influence purchase decisions, while Viral Content Credibility and Viral Content Usefulness do not show a significant effect. This suggests that effective digital marketing communication for Bittersweet by Najla requires more than simply providing credible or useful information. The content needs to deliver relevant information while also creating an appealing and convincing communication experience through the characteristics of the endorser. In this context, celebrity endorsers who are attractive, trustworthy, and knowledgeable can make the information presented in viral content more persuasive and encourage consumers to make purchasing decisions. These findings highlight that communication effectiveness in Indonesia's digital culinary industry depends on the combination of informative content and persuasive endorsement, rather than on a single communication attribute.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of viral marketing and celebrity endorsement on consumers' purchase decisions for Bittersweet by Najla products through e-commerce platforms. The findings indicate that the dimensions of viral marketing do not contribute equally to consumer purchasing behaviour. Among the viral marketing dimensions, only Viral Content Information positively and

significantly influences purchase decisions, suggesting that informative content helps consumers understand product value and reduces uncertainty during online purchasing. In contrast, Viral Content Credibility and Viral Content Usefulness do not significantly affect purchase decisions, indicating that consumers are not solely influenced by the credibility or usefulness of viral content. Furthermore, all three dimensions of celebrity endorsement, Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and Expertise, positively and significantly influence purchase decisions, demonstrating that consumers are more responsive to persuasive communication delivered by credible and appealing endorsers. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the digital marketing communication literature by demonstrating that emotional and persuasive communication through celebrity endorsers exerts a stronger influence on purchase decisions than rational evaluations of viral content. These findings extend previous research by showing that the effectiveness of digital marketing communication depends not only on the quality of information but also on the communicator's ability to establish trust, attractiveness, and expertise in highly competitive e-commerce environments.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that digital businesses, particularly those operating in the food and beverage industry, should prioritize the development of informative viral content while simultaneously collaborating with celebrity endorsers who possess strong attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. Rather than focusing solely on increasing the credibility of promotional content, companies should design integrated communication strategies capable of creating emotional engagement and strengthening consumer confidence toward their products. This study is subject to several limitations. First, the research focused exclusively on consumers of Bittersweet by Najla, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or product categories. Second, the study examined only viral marketing and celebrity endorsement without considering other factors that may influence purchase decisions, such as brand image, perceived value, consumer trust, or purchase intention. Therefore, future research is encouraged to investigate additional variables, employ different industrial contexts, and examine potential mediating or moderating variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer purchasing behaviour in digital marketing communication.

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