

This file has been cleaned of potential threats.

If you confirm that the file is coming from a trusted source, you can send the following SHA-256 hash value to your admin for the original file.

6bc947d06ae2fb10f1f0267db1e45719a22f90f0ef3d613f3724406781725fd2

To view the reconstructed contents, please SCROLL DOWN to next page.

Trust Factors Toward Virtual Influencers and Their Influence on Consumer Attitudes and Purchase Intentions in Thailand

Thanapat Jongkongka¹, Pachoke Lert-asavapatra^{2*} and Sathapath Kilaso³

^{1,2,3}College of Innovation and Management, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

*Corresponding author

E-Mail: ¹s66127364024@ssru.ac.th, ²pachoke.le@ssru.ac.th, ³sathapath.ki@ssru.ac.th

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of trust in Virtual Influencers on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in Thailand, a context where digital commerce has grown rapidly alongside advancements in artificial intelligence. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through questionnaires from 400 Thai consumers across different regions. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to validate the measurement model and test the proposed hypotheses. The results indicate that trust in Virtual Influencers has a significant direct effect on both consumer attitudes ($\beta = 0.59, p < 0.001$) and purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.001$). Additionally, consumer attitude exerts a significant direct influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$). Together, trust and attitude explain 24% of the variance in purchase intention. These findings highlight the central role of trust in shaping consumer behavior in digital marketing contexts, suggesting that credible Virtual Influencers can foster positive attitudes and strengthen consumer purchase decisions. The study contributes to both academic understanding and practical applications by offering insights for entrepreneurs and marketers seeking to leverage Virtual Influencers as a competitive strategy in Thailand's expanding e-commerce landscape.

Keywords: Virtual Influencers, Trust, Attitudes, Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

In 2022, the total value of business transactions conducted via online platforms and social media in Thailand reached approximately 280 billion baht. By 2024, this figure had increased to 350 billion baht, demonstrating a consistent upward trend (Electronic Transactions Development Agency, 2024). As a result, the use of digital media to enhance competitive capabilities and attract consumer segments has become increasingly intense (Phornsiri Virunphan, 2024).

Technological advancements have significantly shaped modern lifestyles (Suthip Patum, 2022). One of the most notable developments is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to create virtual personas that resemble real individuals, serving as media agents for product presentation in online marketing. These AI-generated figures, known as *Virtual Influencers*, represent a relatively novel phenomenon in Thailand (Ninaroon et al., 2023) and are gaining traction within the digital marketing sector (Saichana Suchanya & Phumpan Patamaporn, 2023; Khemthong Chaisuwan, 2023).

A literature review by Sands et al. (2022) revealed that, despite significant technological advancements in Virtual Influencers, certain consumer segments perceive these figures as “inauthentic,” leading to a lack of trust in both the content and products they endorse. Similarly, Mouritzen et al. (2024) emphasized the issue of perceived artificiality, noting not only the lack of human-like realism but also raising concerns about the ethical appropriateness of Virtual Influencers (Sands et al., 2022; Mouritzen et al., 2024).

If business operators and product owners whether offering goods or services can identify a strategic reference model for effectively utilizing Virtual Influencers in ways that align with consumer values and foster trust, such investments are likely to yield positive and worthwhile outcomes in the Thai market. Accordingly, this study seeks to develop a structural equation model of trust factors toward Virtual Influencers that influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in Thailand. The findings aim to provide practical guidelines for Thai entrepreneurs seeking to adopt Virtual Influencer-based marketing, thereby enhancing competitiveness in the digital commerce landscape and contributing to national economic development on a broader scale.

2. Research Objectives

1. To examine the levels of trust toward Virtual Influencers, consumer attitudes, and purchase intentions among consumers in Thailand.
2. To investigate the influence of trust in Virtual Influencers on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions among Thai consumers.
3. To develop a structural equation model of the factors influencing Thai consumers' purchase intentions in the context of product presentation via Virtual Influencers.

3. Literature Review

Trust is widely recognized as a critical factor in shaping consumer attitudes toward brands or services in the digital business environment. The study by Chetioui, Lebdaoui, and Chetioui (2021) highlights that trust functions as a mediating variable that significantly influences consumers' attitudes when making online purchasing decisions. When consumers perceive that a transaction is secure and the seller is honest, this trust fosters a positive attitude toward online shopping. Similarly, Shahbandi, Farrokhshad, and Shahbandi (2021) found that trust directly impacts both customer satisfaction and attitudes. Consumers who trust an organization are more likely to develop favorable attitudes, which, in turn, strengthen long-term brand loyalty. Della Corte et al. (2023) further explained that trust is a foundational component in forming consumer attitudes toward automated service technologies, such as service robots in the hospitality industry. Consumers who trust such technologies tend to adopt them more readily and have more favorable attitudes. Jun et al. (2021) demonstrated that trust in online food delivery systems during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly shaped consumer attitudes. In essence, the more reliable the system, the more positively consumers viewed the service. This aligns with the findings of Guerra-Tamez et al. (2024), who asserted that trust is particularly vital for younger consumers, especially Generation Z. Their trust in AI-driven brands directly affects both their positive perceptions and buying behaviors. Based on this body of research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Trust in Virtual Influencers has a direct influence on consumer attitudes in Thailand.

Trust is also a key psychological component influencing purchase decision-making and purchase intention across various marketing contexts. Jun, Yoon, Lee, and Lee (2021) showed that consumer trust in food delivery platforms during the COVID-19 crisis had a direct impact on their purchase intentions. Perceived safety and system reliability led to repeat purchases, emphasizing the crucial role of trust in digital purchasing environments.

Garg and Bakshi (2024) found that in influencer marketing, trust in beauty vloggers—based on perceived sincerity and expertise—positively influenced followers' purchase intentions. Likewise, Otopah et al. (2024) observed that trust in digital marketing channels of financial institutions led to greater confidence and an increased likelihood of using such services.

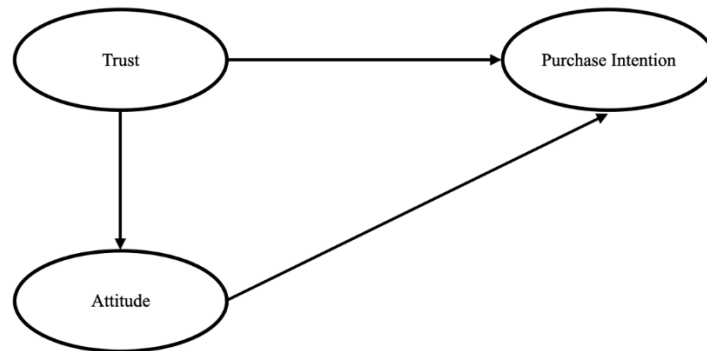
Isac et al. (2024) demonstrated that trust in green brands plays a major role in encouraging the purchase of environmentally friendly products. Consumers who believe that a brand operates transparently and honestly are more likely to develop strong purchase intentions. Moreover, Sukma, Kristiadi, and Nugroho (2024) confirmed that brand trust serves as a mediating factor between brand image and purchase intention, highlighting trust as a key link between positive perception and consumer behavior. From these findings, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Trust in Virtual Influencers has a direct influence on consumers' purchase intentions in Thailand.

Consumer attitude is another vital psychological factor that significantly determines purchase intention. It reflects the consumer's positive or negative evaluation of a brand, product, or service. Zhao, Xu, Ding, and Li (2024) found that positive attitudes toward influencers directly affected consumer purchase intentions. When consumers perceived influencers as having favorable attributes, they were more likely to purchase the promoted products. Similarly, Duarte et al. (2024) showed that environmentally aware consumers who had positive attitudes toward sustainability were more inclined to purchase products with sustainable packaging. Ilieva et al. (2024) found that consumer attitudes toward social media influencers had a direct impact on buying behavior, as favorable attitudes increased engagement and the likelihood of purchase. Furthermore, a systematic review by Pandey, Bajpai, and Tiwari (2024) confirmed that positive consumer attitudes toward socially responsible marketing efforts significantly enhanced purchase intentions. Tran and Nguyen (2022) also revealed that consumer attitudes toward online shopping especially perceptions of security and convenience directly influenced their purchasing decisions. Collectively, these findings affirm that attitude is a major determinant of purchase behavior, leading to the final hypothesis:

H3: Consumer attitudes in Thailand have a direct influence on their purchase intentions.

Figure 1: Reserch Framework



Based on the above literature review, the researcher constructed the research conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 1

4. Methodology

The target population in this study comprised potential consumers who expressed interest in purchasing products promoted through Virtual Influencers. Data were collected from representative individuals across different regions of Thailand. All participants were required to be Thai nationals residing within the country. A quota sampling method was employed to ensure proportional representation from each geographic region, followed by convenience sampling to select participants within each region. The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire. A total of 300 valid responses were collected and used for statistical analysis. To account for potential incomplete or unusable responses and to conduct instrument validation, an additional 70 responses were collected, resulting in a total of 400 participants.

The sample size was determined using a commonly accepted ratio of 20 cases per observed variable. Prior to the final structural model refinement, the study included 15 observed variables, leading to a minimum sample size requirement of 300 participants, which was fulfilled accordingly.

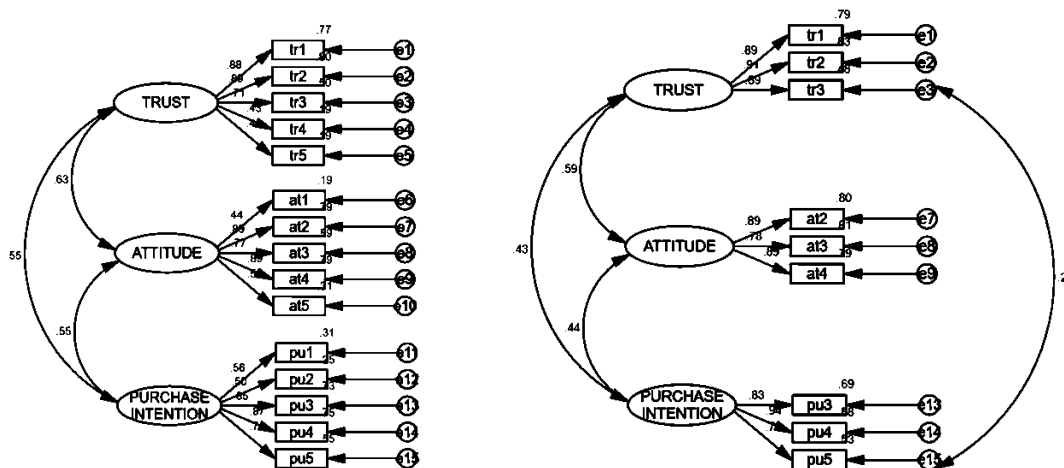
This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing both secondary and primary data sources. Secondary data were gathered through a review of relevant literature, theoretical frameworks, academic documents, and prior research. Primary data were collected using a questionnaire, which served as the main research instrument. The questionnaire was developed based on theoretical concepts and previous literature. It consisted of closed-ended questions designed to measure the levels of each research variable. Prior to full implementation, the instrument underwent validation to ensure content validity and reliability. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and the results indicated that all observed variables had alpha coefficients exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for data collection and statistical analysis. Data were analyzed using a statistical software package for social sciences. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic and variable characteristics. In addition, inferential statistical techniques were employed, including Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Specifically, Confirmatory Factor

Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the measurement model, and Path Analysis was performed to test the research hypotheses and examine both direct and indirect effects among variables within the conceptual framework.

5. Result

The measurement model was tested using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement constructs. The analysis began with examining the relationships among variables and reviewing the factor loadings of each observed variable within the initial measurement models (as illustrated in Figure 2). Upon reviewing the factor loadings, it was found that some observed variables had factor loading values below the acceptable threshold, indicating that they did not sufficiently explain the variance of their respective latent constructs. Consequently, these underperforming indicators were removed from the model. Following the removal of these variables, the CFA was reperformed, and the revised measurement model demonstrated improved relationships among the variables, as depicted in the updated model structure in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Measurement Model Analysis: Pre-Modification (Left) and Post-Modification (Right)



After reanalyzing the revised measurement model, it was found that all observed variables exhibited factor loading values exceeding 0.70, indicating strong indicator reliability. The model demonstrated a good fit with the empirical data and achieved what is considered a perfect fit, without the need to refer to the Modification Index (MI) for adding additional paths between variables. The goodness-of-fit indices confirmed this alignment, with values as follows: $\chi^2 = 65.074$, degrees of freedom (df) = 23, p-value = 0.000, $\chi^2/df = 2.829$, GFI = 0.956, NFI = 0.963, RFI = 0.942, IFI = 0.976, TLI = 0.962, CFI = 0.976, and RMSEA = 0.078. These values met or exceeded the thresholds proposed by Hair et al. (2010), affirming the model's compatibility with the empirical data. Following this, the researcher proceeded to evaluate the construct's internal consistency, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and alignment with the theoretical framework. Construct reliability was assessed through Composite Reliability (CR), following the guidelines of Fornell and Larcker (1981), and based on the remaining 15 observed variables retained after the CFA process. The results, which are presented in Table 1, confirm that the constructs demonstrate acceptable levels of reliability and validity for further structural modeling.

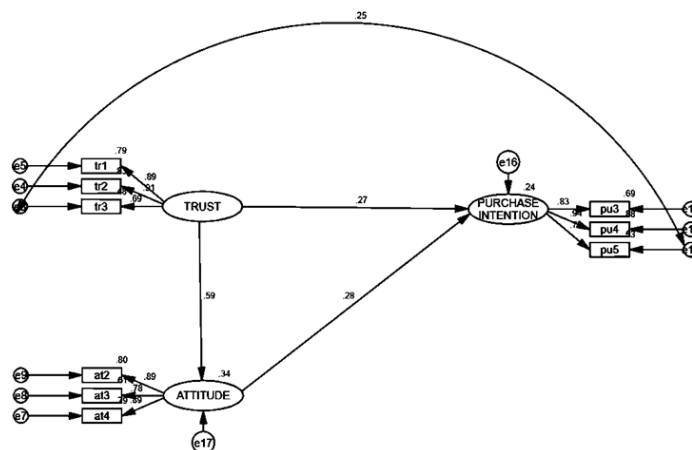
Table 1 presents the results of the construct reliability assessment, including the Composite Reliability (CR) and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Latent Variables	Number of Observe Variable	Construct Reliability	AVE
TRUSE	3	0.875	0.703
ATTITUDE	3	0.890	0.731
PURCHASE INTENTION	3	0.875	0.702

As shown in Table 1, all latent variables exhibit Composite Reliability (CR) values greater than 0.60, indicating that each construct demonstrates an acceptable level of internal consistency. This suggests that the latent variables adequately represent their respective sets of observed variables as defined in the measurement model constructed by the researcher (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000; Saarani and Shahadan, 2012). To assess convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated. The table shows that all AVE values for the latent constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, which demonstrates sufficient measurement accuracy and indicates that the observed indicators converge well in representing their corresponding constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Regarding discriminant validity, the assessment followed the criteria established by Fornell and Larcker (1981), whereby the square root of the AVE for each latent variable was compared to the inter-construct correlation coefficients. The results revealed that the square roots of the AVE values were greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations for all variables in the model, thus confirming satisfactory discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014).

The researcher proceeded to analyze the Structural Equation Model (SEM) by conducting a second round of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the structural model. The model was subsequently revised and refined to enhance its overall fit. The evaluation of the Goodness of Fit Indices yielded the following results: $\chi^2 = 65.074$, degrees of freedom (df) = 23, p-value = 0.000, $\chi^2/df = 2.829$, GFI = 0.956, NFI = 0.963, RFI = 0.942, IFI = 0.976, TLI = 0.962, CFI = 0.976, and RMSEA = 0.078. These values meet or exceed the acceptable thresholds commonly cited in structural modeling literature, indicating that the model demonstrates an acceptable level of fit. As a result, the researcher finalized the revised structural model, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model (SEM) of the Research Study



The results of the hypothesis testing revealed the following findings. For Hypothesis 1, the analysis indicated that trust in Virtual Influencers has a direct and statistically significant influence on consumer attitude in Thailand, with a significance level of $p < 0.001$ and a standardized path coefficient of 0.59. Regarding Hypothesis 2, trust in Virtual Influencers was also found to have a direct and statistically significant influence on purchase intention, with a path coefficient of 0.27 and a significance level of $p < 0.001$. For Hypothesis 3, consumer attitude was shown to directly and significantly influence purchase intention, with a path coefficient of 0.28, also at a significance level of $p < 0.001$. Together, the constructs of trust and attitude were able to jointly explain approximately 24% of the variance in purchase intention among Thai consumers, indicating a meaningful and practical level of predictive power within the structural model.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study, which aimed to examine the influence of trust in Virtual Influencers on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in Thailand, revealed that trust significantly and directly affected both consumer attitude ($\beta = 0.59$) and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.27$), with both relationships reaching a high level of statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, consumer attitude was found to have a direct influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). Together, trust and attitude accounted for 24% of the variance in purchase intention, indicating a moderate but meaningful predictive power within the structural model. These findings align with those of Chetioui et al. (2021) and Shahbandi et al. (2021), who emphasized that trust plays a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes—particularly in digital environments where consumers must rely on perceived trustworthiness to evaluate content delivered through online personalities. In the context of Thailand, although Virtual Influencers are a relatively new concept, the findings suggest that consumers are increasingly open to and capable of trusting these entities, especially when they exhibit realistic and credible communicative behaviors. Moreover, the study highlights that using trustworthy Virtual Influencers can lead to the development of positive consumer attitudes toward products, thereby enhancing purchase decisions. These insights are particularly relevant for digital marketers and entrepreneurs in Thailand, where the e-commerce sector continues to expand rapidly. The discussion further suggests that building trust in Virtual Influencers not only enhances brand perception but also fosters long-term consumer relationships, which may contribute to future brand loyalty. This can be strategically extended by designing influencer personas that align closely with the target audience, using sincere and knowledgeable language, and maintaining consistent brand identity across all communication channels. Furthermore, marketing strategies should be tailored to the cultural and psychological profiles of different consumer segments to strengthen trust and foster enduring brand-consumer relationships. Overall, this study underscores trust as a powerful starting point in influencing consumer behavior in modern marketing contexts and positions the use of credible Virtual Influencers as a worthwhile investment strategy for businesses operating in Thailand's increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

References

- Chetioui, Y., Lebdaoui, H., & Chetioui, H. (2021). Factors influencing consumer attitudes toward online shopping: The mediating effect of trust. *EuroMed Journal of Business*, 16(4), 544–563.
- Della Corte, V., Sepe, F., Gursoy, D., & Prisco, A. (2023). Role of trust in customer attitude and behaviour formation towards social service robots. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 114, 103587.
- Duarte, P., Silva, S. C., Roza, A. S., & Dias, J. C. (2024). Enhancing consumer purchase intentions for sustainable packaging products: An in-depth analysis of key determinants and strategic insights. *Sustainable Futures*, 7, 100193.
- Electronic Transactions Development Agency. (2024). Report on the survey of e-commerce value in Thailand, 2023. Electronic Transactions Development Agency (Public Organization).
- Garg, M., & Bakshi, A. (2024). Exploring the impact of beauty vloggers' credible attributes, parasocial interaction, and trust on consumer purchase intention in influencer marketing. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11(1), 1–14.
- Guerra-Tamez, C. R., Kraul Flores, K., Serna-Mendiburu, G. M., Chavelas Robles, D., & Ibarra Cortés, J. (2024). Decoding Gen Z: AI's influence on brand trust and purchasing behavior. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, 7, 1323512.
- Ilieva, G., Yankova, T., Ruseva, M., Dzhabarova, Y., Klisarova-Belcheva, S., & Bratkov, M. (2024). Social media influencers: Customer attitudes and impact on purchase behaviour. *Information*, 15(6), 359.
- Isac, N., Javed, A., Radulescu, M., Cismasu, I. D. L., Yousaf, Z., & Serbu, R. S. (2024). Is greenwashing impacting on green brand trust and purchase intentions? Mediating role of environmental knowledge. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 1–18.
- Jun, K., Yoon, B., Lee, S., & Lee, D. S. (2021). Factors influencing customer decisions to use online food delivery service during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Foods*, 11(1), 64.
- Khemthong, C. (2023). Factors influencing the acceptance of Virtual Influencers in presenting fashion lifestyle products on Instagram (Master's thesis, Thammasat University). College of Innovation, Thammasat University.
- Laszkiewicz, A., & Kalinska-Kula, M. (2023). Virtual influencers as an emerging marketing theory: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(6), 2479–2494.
- Ninaroon, P., Sitthiwarongchai, C., Rodjam, C., Khammadee, P., & Charoenboon, P. (2023). Enhancing the distribution of community enterprise entrepreneurs through product and packaging development of Klong Kone shrimp paste (*Mesopodopsis*) in the post-pandemic era of Samut Songkhram Province. *Journal of Distribution Science*, 21(10), 21–29.
- Mouritzen, S. L. T., Penttinen, V., & Pedersen, S. (2024). Virtual influencer marketing: The good, the bad and the unreal. *European Journal of Marketing*, 58(2), 410–440.
- Otopah, A. A., Dogbe, C. S. K., Amofah, O., & Ahlijah, B. (2024). Digital marketing and purchase intention of bank services: The role of trust and engagement. *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 42(7), 1920–1945.
- Pandey, P. K., Bajpai, N., & Tiwari, A. V. (2024). Factors affecting attitude and purchase intention towards cause-related marketing: A systematic literature review using TCCM approach. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 21(2), 479–509.

- Phornsiri, V. (2024). Developing digital marketing strategies to create competitive advantage. *Humanities and Social Sciences Journal*, 22(1), 161–178.
- Saichana, S., & Phumpan, P. (2023). Influence of virtual celebrity marketing on consumers' intention to use AIS and True mobile phone network services in Bangkok area. *Social Science Journal of Prachachuen Research Network*, 5(2), 1–14.
- Sands, S., Ferraro, C., Demsar, V., & Chandler, G. (2022). False idols: Unpacking the opportunities and challenges of falsity in the context of virtual influencers. *Business Horizons*, 65(6), 777–788.
- Shahbandi, M., Farrokhshad, H., & Shahbandi, M. (2021). Relationship between customer satisfaction and customer attitude and loyalty according to the mediating variable of customer trust (Case study: Matin Abad Eco Camp). *International Business and Economics Studies*, 3(2), 1–18.
- Sukma, R. P., Kristiadi, A. A., & Nugroho, S. D. (2024). The impact of brand image, perceived price and social media on purchase intention: The role of brand trust as a mediator. *JDM: Jurnal Dinamika Manajemen*, 15(2).
- Suthip, P. (2022). Acceptance of information technology in the era of new normal lifestyle. *Lawasri Journal, Thepsatri Rajabhat University*, 42(2), 27–41.
- Tran, V. D., & Nguyen, T. D. (2022). The impact of security, individuality, reputation, and consumer attitudes on purchase intention of online shopping: The evidence in Vietnam. *Cogent Psychology*, 9(1), 2035530.