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An Ethical Investigation of Influencer Marketing: The Case of Private Label (Maklon) Cosmetics in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has become an effective strategy in the cosmetics industry, particularly in promoting maklon (private label) cosmetic products—those manufactured specifically for private labels. However, this practice often presents complex ethical dilemmas, especially concerning transparency, honesty, and social responsibility in marketing communication. This study aims to investigate ethical marketing practices in the use of influencers to promote maklon cosmetics, focusing on potential violations of business ethics principles. This qualitative research adopts a case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with marketing experts, content analysis of influencer promotions on social media, and reviews of relevant regulations, including those from the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority (BPOM) and the Indonesian Digital Advertising Guidelines. The findings reveal that many influencers fail to clearly disclose their commercial relationships with cosmetic brands. Testimonials are often exaggerated without scientific evidence, and in some cases, influencers do not use the products they endorse. These practices conflict with core ethical principles such as transparency, honesty, and fairness. Nevertheless, the study also highlights the positive potential of influencer marketing in reaching broader audiences and building credibility—provided that the partnerships are conducted ethically and transparently. Awareness of social responsibility, such as promoting safe and regulation-compliant products, still needs significant improvement. This research recommends stricter regulations and ethical education for influencers and brands to foster a more responsible and consumer-oriented digital marketing ecosystem.

Keywords: Marketing ethics; influencers; private label cosmetics; maklon; transparency; social responsibility; digital communication.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital media has radically transformed marketing landscapes, reshaping how brands communicate with consumers and how consumer trust is constructed and negotiated in the marketplace (Mushtaq et al., 2025). Over the past decade, influencer marketing has emerged as one of the most prominent and lucrative strategies in digital communication (Vrontis et al., 2021). The global influencer marketing industry was valued at approximately USD 21.1 billion in 2023, reflecting not only the financial magnitude of the practice but also its centrality in shaping consumer decisions across multiple industries (Leung et al., 2022). This exponential growth is primarily anchored in the perception of authenticity, intimacy, and trust cultivated between influencers and their followers, who often regard these online figures as relatable peers rather than distant celebrities (Ortová et al., 2023). Unlike traditional advertisements, which are perceived as overtly persuasive, influencer endorsements thrive on subtlety and the blurred boundaries between personal opinion and commercial promotion (Joshi et al., 2025).

The cosmetics industry exemplifies the sector most profoundly affected by the rise of influencer marketing. Cosmetics consumption is inherently tied to visual representation, personal identity, and cultural notions of beauty (Alipour et al., 2025). Accordingly, social media platforms—particularly Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube—have become dominant arenas for product discovery, trial, and endorsement (Abraham et al., 2022). Consumers are significantly influenced by personal recommendations, makeup tutorials, and testimonial-style content that foreground perceived product effectiveness (Dao, 2022). In this digital ecosystem, influencers occupy a unique and powerful role as intermediaries between cosmetic brands and consumers, translating technical product attributes into aspirational lifestyle narratives (Räsänen, 2022).

Within this broader marketing transformation, a distinctive development in the Indonesian context is the proliferation of maklon—a practice of private-label or contract manufacturing that enables individuals or emerging brands to launch cosmetic products without establishing their own production facilities. This business model lowers the barriers to entry into the cosmetics industry, fostering rapid product proliferation and brand diversity. Maklon allows influencers, entrepreneurs, and even small businesses to leverage contract manufacturers for product formulation, packaging, and compliance processes, while focusing their resources on branding and promotion. The rise of maklon is particularly significant in Indonesia, where beauty consumption intersects with a growing middle-class market, high digital engagement, and cultural enthusiasm for entrepreneurship.

However, the convergence of influencer marketing and maklon production introduces a complex and challenging ethical landscape. Unlike well-established multinational cosmetic corporations that possess extensive research and development facilities, maklon-produced products often lack robust brand heritage and long-standing reputational capital. Influencers promoting these products thus become pivotal in shaping consumer perceptions of quality and safety, even though they may have limited knowledge of the manufacturing process, product ingredients, or quality assurance mechanisms. This asymmetry generates pressing ethical concerns regarding transparency, honesty, and social responsibility in marketing communication. In practice, many influencers promote maklon products without adequately disclosing their commercial relationships, thereby creating the illusion of organic endorsement. This lack of disclosure risks misleading consumers, who may interpret these recommendations as genuine personal preferences rather than paid marketing collaborations.

The ethical dilemmas posed by influencer marketing are not unique to Indonesia; rather, they are part of a global conversation on digital advertising ethics (Ye et al., 2021). Studies in Western contexts have highlighted recurring challenges, including the opacity of sponsored content, manipulation of authenticity, and the exploitation of parasocial relationships (Kauffmann & Vaiciunaite, 2024). Regulators in several countries, such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the United Kingdom, have introduced disclosure guidelines to ensure transparency in sponsored posts. Nonetheless, compliance remains uneven, with many influencers either ignoring regulations or using ambiguous markers (e.g., “#sp” or “thanks to”) that fail to clearly signal the commercial nature of endorsements (Muhammad, 2025).

In Indonesia, these challenges are compounded by the dynamics of the maklon industry. While the Indonesian Food and Drug Authority (BPOM) enforces product registration and safety regulations, monitoring in the rapidly evolving digital marketplace remains difficult (Indonesia, 2008). Moreover, consumer protection laws mandate truthful marketing, but enforcement mechanisms often lag behind the pace of innovation in influencer-driven commerce. As a result, consumers are left vulnerable to misleading claims, incomplete disclosures, and potentially unsafe products (Indonesia, 1999). The risks are particularly acute in cosmetics, where product quality directly impacts consumer health and safety, and where brand trust is a crucial determinant of purchase decisions.

The intersection between influencer marketing and the maklon industry in Indonesia is unique in several ways. First, the low barriers to entry in maklon enable influencers themselves to become brand owners, thereby blurring the lines between endorsers and entrepreneurs. An influencer might simultaneously promote their own maklon-produced product and endorse unrelated cosmetic lines, creating potential conflicts of interest and confusing consumer perceptions of authenticity. Second, the proliferation of small brands increases competition, incentivizing aggressive marketing practices that may prioritize visibility over ethical considerations. Third, the asymmetry of information between influencers and consumers intensifies in this context, as influencers may not fully disclose the origins of products, the specific role of contract manufacturers, or the nature of their financial relationships with the brand.

From a communication ethics perspective, these dynamics raise fundamental questions about transparency (to what extent should influencers disclose their roles and affiliations?), honesty (are influencers genuinely endorsing products they believe in, or merely monetizing their follower base?), and responsibility (what obligations do influencers and maklon companies hold in ensuring consumer protection?). These issues cannot be dismissed as marginal; rather, they sit at the core of debates about the future of digital marketing, where consumer trust serves as the ultimate currency.

A growing body of research has explored the ethical dimensions of influencer marketing, emphasizing the importance of disclosure, consumer skepticism, and regulatory oversight (Ashrafi et al., 2025). Scholars have also examined how trust is constructed in digital environments, with authenticity and relational intimacy identified as key drivers of consumer receptivity (Moghimi, 2024). Similarly, research on cosmetics marketing highlights the role of visual culture, identity formation, and consumer vulnerability to aspirational narratives.

However, several notable research gaps remain. First, while studies often address influencer ethics in general, very few focus on the intersection between influencer marketing and contract manufacturing—a nexus particularly relevant to emerging markets such as Indonesia. Maklon products present a unique set of ethical dynamics because the brand owner may not be directly responsible for product development, leading to ambiguity in accountability for safety and quality. Second, existing research has largely been situated in Western contexts, leaving a dearth of empirical insights into how these dynamics manifest in Southeast Asia, where cultural, regulatory, and market conditions differ significantly (Borchers & Enke, 2022; Fedeli & Cheng, 2023). Third, most scholarship on influencer marketing ethics centers on disclosure practices, while less attention has been given to the broader ecosystem of responsibility, including the role of manufacturers, regulators, and brands in ensuring ethical conduct (Grafström et al., 2018; Ahuja & Loura, 2020).

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to fill the research gap by providing acritical and contextually grounded examination of the ethical dynamics at the intersection of influencer marketing and the maklon industry in Indonesia. This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it extends the literature on influencer marketing ethics by situating the analysis within the unique context of maklon production in Indonesia, thereby broadening the geographic and industrial scope of scholarship. It also integrates insights from communication ethics and brand trust frameworks to provide a more holistic understanding of the issue. Practically, the findings are expected to inform regulators, brands, and influencers by offering actionable recommendations for fostering greater transparency, accountability, and consumer protection in the digital marketing ecosystem. In doing so, the study contributes to the development of a more sustainable and ethical foundation for influencer-driven commerce in emerging markets.

Theoretical Framework and Ethical Principles

This review establishes the theoretical foundation for investigating the ethical dimensions of influencer marketing within the specific context of Indonesia's private-label (maklon) cosmetics industry. It synthesizes key theories of persuasion and trust with established frameworks in business ethics to create a comprehensive lens for analyzing the practices of influencers and brands. By integrating insights from communication theory, marketing ethics, and consumer behavior, this study situates itself at the intersection of digital persuasion and moral responsibility in commerce.

Theories of Persuasion and Trust in Influencer Marketing

The effectiveness of influencer marketing rests on the unique relational dynamics between influencers and their followers. Unlike traditional advertising, where persuasion flows from corporations to anonymous audiences, influencer marketing capitalizes on the perception of peer-to-peer interaction, intimacy, and authenticity. Several foundational theories are relevant to understanding how persuasion operates in this context.

Source Credibility Theory

One of the earliest and most influential frameworks for persuasion is Source Credibility Theory (Umeogu, 2012). This theory posits that the persuasiveness of a message is directly linked to the perceived credibility of its source, which consists of three dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

a. Expertise refers to the extent to which the audience perceives the source as knowledgeable about the topic. In cosmetics marketing, influencers who are makeup artists, dermatologists, or long-time beauty enthusiasts are considered more persuasive because their expertise signals reliability.
b. Trustworthiness relates to the perceived honesty and integrity of the source. Followers may trust an influencer's recommendation if they believe the influencer is not motivated solely by financial gain but by genuine appreciation for the product.
c. Attractiveness, while originally framed in terms of physical appeal, has expanded to include likability and relatability. In digital media, followers are drawn to influencers they perceive as "authentic," "real," and "similar to themselves."

Applied to influencer marketing, Source Credibility Theory explains why influencers—often ordinary individuals rather than celebrities—can wield significant persuasive power. However, credibility is fragile. Once consumers perceive hidden commercial motives, credibility deteriorates, and persuasion may backfire. In the maklon context, this fragility is heightened because influencers often endorse products they have limited expertise in, thereby risking the erosion of trust.

The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)

The Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), developed by Friestad and Wright (1994), provides further insight into how consumers process marketing attempts. PKM argues that consumers develop "persuasion knowledge"—that is, the ability to recognize, interpret, and evaluate persuasion tactics—through repeated exposure. When consumers detect that a communication is a marketing attempt, they activate coping mechanisms such as skepticism, resistance, or selective avoidance (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

In the context of influencer marketing, PKM becomes particularly relevant. Audiences initially treat influencer recommendations as authentic, personal experiences (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022). However, once consumers become aware of the commercial nature of endorsements, the persuasive impact diminishes. Failure to disclose sponsorships transparently can trigger consumer backlash when hidden motives are revealed. For example, if an influencer is later discovered to have received payment for a "personal review," the violation of expectations can permanently damage credibility (Ham et al., 2015).

Within the Indonesian maklon industry, this model helps explain the ethical risks of opaque endorsements. Many influencers-turned-entrepreneurs promote their own cosmetic lines without sufficiently clarifying the commercial interest. Consumers, lacking clear disclosure cues, may interpret these endorsements as unbiased, leading to misplaced trust and subsequent disillusionment when persuasion knowledge is activated (Rahmani, 2023).

Trust-Based Marketing Theory

The Trust-Based Marketing Theory emphasizes that long-term customer relationships hinge not merely on persuasive tactics but on the establishment and maintenance of trust (Urban et al., 1998). Trust functions as a mediating mechanism in consumer-brand relationships: when trust is present, consumers are more likely to forgive minor transgressions, remain loyal, and engage in positive word-of-mouth. Conversely, once trust is broken, the cost of rebuilding it is high (Rachmad, 2023).

In influencer marketing, trust is both the foundation and the currency. Influencers derive their market value from the trust of their followers, who believe that recommendations are sincere. Yet this trust is precarious, as any practice perceived as deceptive—such as undisclosed sponsorships, exaggerated claims, or promotion of unsafe products—undermines credibility (Zsigmondová et al., 2021). In the maklon ecosystem, where product quality assurance may be opaque, influencers who prioritize short-term financial gains over honesty jeopardize not only their personal brand but also consumer confidence in the wider influencer economy.

Framework for Marketing Ethics

While persuasion theories explain how influencer marketing works, they do not address the moral obligations that should govern these practices. For this, business ethics provides a normative foundation.

Business Ethics Theories

Business ethics offers two dominant philosophical approaches for evaluating conduct (Derry & Green, 1989; Melé, 2024):

a. **Deontological Ethics**: Rooted in Kantian philosophy, this perspective emphasizes moral duties and principles. Actions are judged based on adherence to universal moral rules, such as honesty, fairness, and respect. In influencer marketing, a deontological lens would demand that influencers disclose sponsorships simply because it is their duty to be truthful, regardless of the outcomes.
b. **Utilitarian Ethics**: Rooted in the philosophy of Bentham and Mill, this perspective evaluates actions based on their consequences for overall well-being. An influencer promoting an unsafe cosmetic product, even if financially rewarding, would be unethical because the potential harm to consumers outweighs the short-term benefits.

Both perspectives illuminate the ethical stakes in influencer marketing. While deontology emphasizes the intrinsic wrongness of deception, utilitarianism highlights the societal harms of misleading promotions. The maklon context complicates these evaluations, as accountability is often fragmented between manufacturer, brand owner, and influencer.

Operationalizing Ethical Principles

From these broader ethical frameworks, this study adopts five guiding principles to evaluate influencer practices: transparency, honesty, social responsibility, accountability, and integrity (Skiba, 2024; Wellman et al., 2020).

a. **Transparency:** Transparency goes beyond superficial disclosure; it entails clarity of intent. Influencers have an ethical obligation to explicitly label promotional content with terms such as "sponsored" or "advertisement." Transparent communication empowers consumers to activate persuasion knowledge and evaluate messages critically. In the maklon context, transparency also involves clarifying the origins of the product and the influencer's role as brand owner.
b. **Honesty:** Honesty requires more than refraining from lies; it demands truthfulness and authenticity. Influencers should only endorse products they have genuinely tested and believe in. Misleading claims, exaggerated results, or scripted testimonials for products never personally used violate this principle. In cosmetics marketing, where efficacy is subjective but health implications are real, honesty becomes a moral imperative.
c. **Social Responsibility:** Social responsibility expands the ethical horizon from individual transactions to societal welfare. Influencers and brands must ensure that products are safe, compliant with health regulations, and appropriately marketed. Endorsing products with untested ingredients or exaggerated claims undermines consumer protection. In Indonesia, where regulatory enforcement is uneven, influencers carry heightened responsibility to safeguard their audiences.
d. **Accountability:** Accountability requires influencers to take ownership of their persuasive impact. This includes engaging with consumer feedback, addressing complaints, and being responsive when negative outcomes occur. Accountability extends to maklon companies, who must not outsource responsibility for quality assurance to influencers but share the burden of ensuring ethical marketing practices.
e. **Integrity:** Integrity is the moral compass that sustains long-term credibility. For influencers, integrity means refusing collaborations that compromise ethical values or exploit vulnerable audiences. It demands prioritizing trust and authenticity over short-term financial gain. In the competitive cosmetics industry, integrity distinguishes sustainable influencer practices from opportunistic exploitation.

The Maklon Context and Ethical Complexity

While influencer ethics has been studied in various global contexts, the Indonesian maklon industry introduces distinctive ethical challenges. The structural separation between manufacturer, brand owner, and promoter creates ambiguity in accountability. Who is responsible for ensuring product safety—the contract manufacturer, the influencer-brand owner, or the regulatory authority?

This ambiguity is compounded by three factors:

a. **Low entry barriers**: Maklon enables rapid brand proliferation, often by influencers with little expertise in cosmetics formulation.
b. **Blurred roles**: Influencers may act as both endorsers and entrepreneurs, raising conflicts of interest.
c. **Regulatory gaps**: Despite BPOM's oversight, enforcement in the digital sphere remains inconsistent, allowing unethical practices to proliferate.

These complexities underscore the importance of applying ethical theories not merely in abstract, but in practical, context-specific ways. The maklon ecosystem illustrates how fragmented responsibility can obscure ethical obligations, leaving consumers vulnerable to harm.

Research Gap and Theoretical Contribution

Despite the growing body of literature on influencer marketing ethics, several gaps remain. First, most studies focus on disclosure practices in Western markets, neglecting emerging economies where regulatory structures differ. Second, little attention has been paid to how manufacturing structures, such as maklon, complicate accountability in marketing ethics. Third, existing models rarely integrate persuasion theories with business ethics, leaving a fragmented understanding of how trust, persuasion, and morality intersect in digital marketing. This study contributes by bridging these gaps. By applying persuasion theories alongside ethical principles, it provides a comprehensive framework to analyze influencer practices in Indonesia's maklon cosmetics industry. This integrated approach allows for a deeper understanding of how trust is negotiated, how ethical obligations are framed, and how responsibility is distributed in complex marketing ecosystems.

The convergence of persuasion theories and business ethics offers a robust theoretical foundation for examining influencer marketing in the maklon cosmetics industry. Source Credibility Theory, the Persuasion

Knowledge Model, and Trust-Based Marketing Theory explain the mechanisms of influence and the fragility of trust. Business ethics frameworks, operationalized through principles of transparency, honesty, social responsibility, accountability, and integrity, provide normative guidance for evaluating ethical conduct. In the Indonesian maklon context, these theories illuminate the unique ethical challenges arising from fragmented accountability, blurred roles of influencers, and weak regulatory enforcement. By synthesizing these perspectives, this study establishes a theoretical lens that not only informs empirical analysis but also contributes to broader debates on digital marketing ethics in emerging economies.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative, explorative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the ethical complexities in the *maklon* cosmetics industry. This approach is ideal for exploring nuanced social phenomena within their real-world context (Sugiyono, 2019). The subjects of this research included a diverse group of stakeholders: influencers who actively promote *maklon* cosmetics, brand owners who use *maklon* services, consumers exposed to these promotions, and marketing ethics experts for validation. Data was collected through multiple techniques to ensure richness and validity:

a. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with all participant groups to capture their perspectives and experiences (Amane et al., 2023).
b. Digital content analysis of influencer posts on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok to observe promotional tactics in practice.
c. Document analysis of relevant regulations, including BPOM guidelines, the Indonesian Digital Advertising Code of Ethics, and consumer protection laws.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. This involved systematically coding the data from interviews and observations to identify recurring themes related to ethical violations, such as undisclosed sponsorships, exaggerated claims, and lack of product knowledge (Ahyar et al., 2020). The identified themes were then interpreted through the lens of the established theoretical framework. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was employed by comparing information from different sources (e.g., influencers, consumers, and experts).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings: Violations of Marketing Ethics

The analysis of interview data, social media content, and regulatory documents reveals systemic ethical violations in the marketing of maklon cosmetics by influencers in Indonesia. The findings are structured around the five core ethical principles outlined in the theoretical framework—transparency, honesty, social responsibility, accountability, and integrity—though the violations often overlap across categories.

1. Prevalent Lack of Transparency

A dominant finding is the pervasive failure of influencers to disclose their commercial relationships with cosmetic brands, particularly those operating under maklon arrangements. This lack of transparency manifests in two primary ways:

a. Undisclosed Sponsorships.
Influencers frequently present paid promotions as authentic personal endorsements. Analysis of Instagram posts and TikTok videos revealed that hashtags such as #ad or #sponsored were rarely used, and when present, were often buried among numerous other hashtags, minimizing their visibility. This creates the false impression that product recommendations are spontaneous expressions of personal preference.

b. Promotion without Personal Use
Interviews confirmed that many influencers promote cosmetic products they have never personally used. Instead, they rely on marketing briefs provided by brands or contract manufacturers, which include pre-scripted claims and testimonials. The influencer then delivers these narratives in the first person, giving the impression of personal experience.

This dual failure conceals the commercial intent of the promotion and misleads consumers into believing that they are receiving unbiased, experiential advice.

2. Widespread Dishonesty and Inauthentic Testimonials

Beyond nondisclosure, dishonesty permeates influencer marketing of maklon products.

a. **Exaggerated and Unsubstantiated Claims.**
Influencers frequently make sensational promises about product performance, such as “clear skin in seven days” or “permanent acne removal.” None of these claims were supported by clinical trials, published research, or regulatory approval. In some cases, the claims directly contradicted BPOM guidelines, which prohibit unverified medical assertions in cosmetic marketing.

b. **Fabricated User Experiences**
Several influencers admitted in interviews that they were paid to produce staged before-and-after content, despite never undergoing such results themselves. Brands often provide influencers with photo-editing templates or scripted scenarios. For example, one influencer described being instructed to apply makeup to simulate acne scars, take a “before” photo, and then remove it for the “after” shot.

These practices deliberately manipulate consumer perception, exploiting the trust placed in influencers as relatable peers.

3. Disregard for Social Responsibility

The findings also point to a structural neglect of social responsibility by both influencers and maklon companies.

a. **Unvetted “Open Maklon” Services.**
Many contract manufacturers operate on an “open maklon” model, producing cosmetics for any client who can afford their services, regardless of the client’s marketing practices or knowledge of product safety. There are minimal checks on whether the client intends to promote the product ethically, or even whether the influencer has any expertise in skincare.

b. **Promotion Based on Unrealistic Ideals.**
Marketing narratives often focus on associating products with the influencer’s beauty, wealth, or social status, rather than on factual attributes such as ingredients or dermatological safety. This approach reinforces unrealistic beauty standards and neglects the ethical responsibility to educate consumers about proper product use and potential risks.

4. Creation of Unfair Market Conditions

Taken together, these practices create a marketplace characterized by profound information asymmetry. Consumers are systematically deprived of accurate, balanced information needed to make rational purchasing decisions. They are persuaded by undisclosed ads, inauthentic testimonials, and exaggerated claims, while being denied clarity about product origins or safety assurances. This structural imbalance favors brands and influencers at the expense of consumers, creating an inherently unjust market environment.

Discussion: Interpreting the Findings

The findings illustrate a significant ethical deficit in the marketing of maklon cosmetics in Indonesia. In what follows, the results are interpreted through the theoretical and ethical frameworks introduced earlier, linking them to broader debates on communication ethics, consumer trust, and digital responsibility.

The widespread failure to disclose sponsorships directly violates the ethical principle of transparency. From a deontological perspective, disclosure is a moral duty; withholding it constitutes deception, regardless of outcome (Weiss, 2021). Consumers have the right to know whether a message is a personal opinion or a commercial advertisement.

The findings also illustrate deliberate subversion of the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM). PKM suggests that consumers become more skeptical once they recognize persuasion tactics. By disguising paid endorsements as personal testimonials, influencers prevent consumers from activating persuasion knowledge, thereby undermining their autonomy. This manipulation of consumer cognition represents not just a regulatory violation but a profound ethical breach.

The erosion of transparency also destabilizes Trust-Based Marketing Theory. Trust thrives on openness and honesty; when followers discover hidden sponsorships, their trust collapses. Interviews revealed that once consumers realized endorsements were scripted, they unfollowed influencers or expressed anger in comment sections. Trust, once broken, proved difficult to repair, corroborating the fragile nature of credibility identified in persuasion theory.

Dishonesty in the form of fabricated testimonials and exaggerated claims undermines Source Credibility Theory at its core. The dimensions of credibility—expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness—are distorted when influencers pretend to have personal experience or scientific authority. What followers perceive as authentic expertise is, in fact, constructed deception.

From a utilitarian perspective, these practices cause net harm. While brands and influencers may enjoy temporary sales boosts, consumers are misled into purchasing ineffective or unsafe products, sometimes at the expense of their health. The collective harm—including financial waste, health risks, and erosion of trust in digital commerce—far outweighs any temporary gain.

Deontologically, dishonesty is inherently wrong because it treats consumers as mere means to commercial ends rather than as autonomous agents. This echoes Kant's imperative: individuals should never be used solely as tools for others' goals. Influencers who fabricate experiences reduce their followers to passive consumers of deception.

The neglect of social responsibility reflects systemic weaknesses in the maklon ecosystem. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) theory argues that businesses have obligations that extend beyond profit-making to include consumer welfare and societal well-being. Yet both contract manufacturers and influencers prioritize financial gain over ethical duty.

"Open maklon" services epitomize this irresponsibility. By enabling anyone with capital to launch a cosmetic line, manufacturers abdicate responsibility for ensuring that clients can market products safely and ethically. While BPOM provides regulatory oversight, enforcement capacity is limited, creating gaps where irresponsible practices flourish.

The focus on unrealistic beauty ideals further reflects a disregard for social responsibility. Instead of educating consumers about product quality and safe usage, influencers exploit insecurities and perpetuate unattainable standards. This aligns with critiques of advertising that commodifies beauty while ignoring social harm.

Accountability requires influencers to accept responsibility for the consequences of their persuasion. Yet findings indicate widespread avoidance of accountability. Influencers who promoted ineffective or harmful products often distanced themselves from consumer complaints, claiming they were "just endorsers" or that product quality was the responsibility of the brand.

This reveals a structural fragmentation of accountability in the maklon system:

a. Manufacturers claim they only produce according to specifications.
b. Influencers claim they only promote what brands provide.
c. Brands claim responsibility lies with BPOM approval.

This diffusion of responsibility creates a moral vacuum in which no actor fully accepts liability for consumer harm. Ethical theory, however, insists that accountability cannot be outsourced. The persuasive power of influencers carries corresponding obligations to engage with feedback, provide clarifications, and accept consequences for endorsements.

Finally, the findings demonstrate a failure of integrity across actors. Integrity requires adherence to ethical principles even when financially costly. Yet influencers often accept partnerships with brands that contradict their professed values, prioritizing immediate compensation over long-term credibility.

This short-termism corrodes trust not only in individual influencers but in the influencer economy as a whole. Followers become cynical, assuming that all endorsements are paid and manipulative. From the perspective of Trust-Based Marketing Theory, this erosion of integrity undermines the sustainability of influencer commerce. Without integrity, the influencer's role as a trusted intermediary collapses into that of a traditional advertiser, stripping away the authenticity that constitutes their unique advantage.

The culmination of these practices produces structurally unfair market conditions. Drawing on Rawls' theory of justice as fairness, the marketplace must provide consumers with equal access to information necessary for rational decision-making. By depriving consumers of accurate disclosures and authentic testimonials, influencer marketing in the maklon sector violates this principle.

Consumers are not simply disadvantaged; they are actively exploited. Information asymmetry ensures that decision-making is based on manipulated narratives rather than balanced knowledge. This systemic unfairness transforms the market into one where the rules favor producers and influencers at the expense of consumer welfare, contravening both ethical and justice-based standards.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the ethical practices in the marketing of *maklon* cosmetic products using influencers in Indonesia. The findings consistently revealed serious violations of fundamental ethical principles. Practices such as a lack of transparency in commercial relationships, the delivery of dishonest and exaggerated testimonials, and the disregard for social responsibility towards consumer safety are not isolated incidents. Rather, they are symptoms of a systemic issue where commercial interests frequently override ethical obligations. Consequently, consumer trust is eroded, and the integrity of the digital marketing ecosystem is threatened. A fundamental shift towards a more responsible business culture is required to ensure the industry's sustainability and consumer protection in the digital age.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are directed at academics and practitioners.

1. *Academic Recommendations*
   a. Further research is recommended with a broader scope and a multi-stakeholder approach, involving regulators (such as BPOM), industry associations, influencer organizations, and consumer non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to gain a more holistic understanding.
   b. There is a need for the development of digital marketing communication ethics theories that are more specific to the local Indonesian context, considering the unique cultural, social, and economic dynamics that shape consumer perception and behavior.
   c. Future research could explore the feasibility and implementation design of an "influencer audit system"—a third-party certification or verification mechanism to assess an influencer's adherence to ethical standards before they can promote health and beauty products.
2. *Practical Recommendations*
   a. **For Regulators (Government and BPOM):**
   Stricter regulations and more rigorous enforcement regarding disclosure obligations for influencers are necessary. Furthermore, proactive collaboration between BPOM and social media platforms is urgently needed to monitor and act against promotional content that violates legal and ethical standards.
   b. **For Companies (Brands and Maklon Manufacturers):**
   Companies must develop and implement binding internal codes of marketing ethics, which include clear guidelines for influencer partnerships. Mandating digital ethics training for all influencer partners is a crucial step to ensure that messages conveyed are accurate and not misleading.
   c. **For Influencers and Professional Associations:**
   Influencers need to proactively enhance their ethical literacy and commit to standards of transparency and honesty to build long-term credibility. Professional associations can play a vital role in setting standards of practice, providing certification, and creating accountability mechanisms for their members.

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