

Disinformation as Influencer Marketing Instrument on Social Media

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
disinformation, digital marketing, influencer, social media;	The rise of influencer marketing on social media has been accompanied by the strategic use of disinformation as influencer marketing instrument on social media as a marketing tool. In Indonesia, this practice has led to significant public harm, including financial fraud and the erosion of consumer trust. This research examines how disinformation is used as a marketing tool by influencers on social media. The study employed a qualitative approach with a desk study method, analyzing academic literature, regulatory reports, and viral online news. The results show that disinformation comes in various forms, including exaggerated claims, false testimonials, visual manipulation, and the promotion of illegal investments. These practices have proven effective in attracting audience attention and encouraging interaction, but they cause long-term harm in the form of lost consumer trust, damaged brand reputation, and potential lawsuits. Case studies from 2022 to 2024 demonstrate the increasing involvement of influencers in investment fraud, illegal sales, and smear campaigns against competing brands. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of regulation, digital literacy, and ethical integrity among industry players to maintain the sustainability of digital marketing.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has significantly transformed the paradigm of digital marketing. Influencers occupy a strategic position due to their emotional proximity and personal credibility, which enable them to influence consumer behavior effectively (Li, Owusu, Wang, & Lu, 2025; Rachmad, 2025). However, this strategic role can also give rise to manipulative practices, particularly disinformation—the deliberate spread of false or misleading information to achieve specific objectives (Bharti & Agarwal, 2025; Harris, 2025). In Indonesia, the phenomenon of social media disinformation cannot be separated from the broader context of digital communication development (Nasution, 2025; Ramadhan, 2025). As Nasrullah (2015) observes, social media serves not only as a platform for interaction but also as an arena for economic, political, and cultural meaning-making. Lim (2017) further notes that Indonesia's rapid digitalization has fostered cyber activism while simultaneously creating fertile ground for misinformation and hoaxes due to insufficient digital literacy. Sudibyo (2019) adds that Indonesia's digital landscape is paradoxical—it opens opportunities for creative industries but also heightens vulnerability to information manipulation.

This phenomenon has been evident in several viral cases in Indonesia in recent years (Kharisma, 2025). For instance, in 2022, YouTube and Instagram influencers such as Indra Kenz, Doni Salmanan, and TikTok personality Putra Wibowo were involved in promoting fraudulent trading platforms such as Binomo, Binary Option, and Viral Blast, leading to significant financial losses for thousands of victims. In 2023, another case emerged involving an influencer from Batam named Rijki, who was implicated in a Coldplay concert ticket scam after reportedly losing IDR 500 million while attempting to give away tickets to followers (Poskota, 2023; Detik News, 2024). In 2024, PT Deka Reset promoted illegal car sales through Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube ads, collaborating with several influencers who were later investigated by the police. That same year, influencer Ahmad Rafif Raya was accused of running a fraudulent investment scheme through Instagram and Telegram, causing losses amounting to IDR 71 billion (Kumparan, 2024). Additionally, a viral hoax about bromate content in Le Minerale bottled water spread through TikTok and WhatsApp—an act later identified as a form of unfair competition involving influencer Gerald Vincent (Rajendran, 2024; Singha, 2024).

These cases illustrate that disinformation is not merely a miscommunication issue but a deliberate and harmful practice with severe consequences (Hayward, 2025; Khan, 2025). According to the Financial Services Authority (OJK, 2023), losses from illegal investments reached IDR 8.8 trillion, while the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association reported post-pandemic internet penetration exceeding 78% of the population, amplifying public exposure to manipulative content (Liu, Meng-Lewis, & Liu, 2025; Tkáčová, 2025). Suryani (2019) emphasizes that digital hoaxes erode social trust, cause financial damage, and tarnish brand reputations. Consequently, disinformation in digital marketing leads to financial losses, loss of consumer confidence, and reputational risks for brands operating within the digital ecosystem (Gündüzyeli, 2025; Kwebe-Kimpele, 2024).

While much of the international literature focuses on political disinformation studies specifically addressing disinformation as a marketing tool among influencers in Indonesia remain limited (Febri Sonni, 2025). Previous research has largely centered on influencer marketing effectiveness or general marketing ethics, with little attention to how disinformation intersects with influencer practices in the local digital space (Muhammad, 2025; Theodorakopoulos, Theodoropoulou, & Klavdianos, 2025). This study fills this gap by examining the role of disinformation as a strategic instrument in influencer marketing in Indonesia, analyzing its specific forms, communication strategies, and socio-economic impacts within the unique context of the Indonesian digital landscape (Lestari & Prawiraharjo, 2025; Nabila, 2024).

The urgency of this research is underscored by the escalating frequency and severity of disinformation cases in Indonesia's digital economy. The high internet penetration rate (APJII, 2023), coupled with low levels of digital literacy, has created an environment where malicious marketing practices can thrive. With recorded financial losses reaching trillions of rupiah (OJK, 2023) and a clear pattern of eroding public trust, immediate scholarly attention is required. This study is critical for providing timely insights that can inform regulatory responses, educational initiatives, and ethical guidelines to mitigate the harmful effects of influencer-driven disinformation.

This study aims to fill that gap by examining the role of disinformation as a strategic instrument in influencer marketing in Indonesia, as well as its socio-economic implications and the urgency of digital literacy and regulation. The findings of this study are expected to have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it contributes to the body of knowledge on digital communication and marketing ethics by integrating Framing Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model to explain the mechanisms of disinformation in influencer

marketing. Practically, the results can serve as a reference for policymakers in formulating stricter regulations for influencer marketing, for educational institutions in developing digital literacy curricula, and for the public in enhancing critical awareness of manipulative online content. Therefore, the research seeks to: (1) analyze the role of influencers in spreading marketing disinformation and the driving factors behind such practices, and (2) explain the social and economic impacts of influencer-driven disinformation during 2022–2024 while underscoring the need for stronger digital literacy and regulatory frameworks to mitigate its effects.

METHOD

This study adopted a library research or literature review approach within a qualitative framework. This method was chosen because the research focused on analyzing the phenomenon of disinformation in digital marketing through theoretical examination, prior studies, official reports, and online news. Library research enabled the interpretation of social phenomena using secondary data collected from existing literature, reports, and digital archives. Through this approach, the study synthesized existing knowledge and interpreted how disinformation operated within digital marketing ecosystems.

The study utilized secondary data from three main categories. First, academic literature, including books and journal articles discussing communication theory, digital marketing, and disinformation—such as Freberg (2011), Wardle & Derakhshan (2017), and Kotler & Keller (2016)—served as the conceptual foundation for analyzing influencer roles and marketing narratives. Second, official institutional reports, such as those from the Financial Services Authority (OJK, 2023), which reported losses of IDR 8.8 trillion due to illegal investments, and the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2023), which recorded over 78% internet penetration in Indonesia. These data provided empirical insight into public vulnerability to digital disinformation. Third, online media archives documented viral cases of influencer-related disinformation between 2022 and 2024, including scams promoted by Indra Kenz and Doni Salmanan, fake Coldplay ticket sales by influencer Rijki from Batam, illegal car sales via PT Deka Reset's Facebook and Instagram ads, fraudulent investments promoted by Ahmad Rafif, and hoaxes about bromate content in bottled water spread through WhatsApp and TikTok.

Data collection involved systematic searches of scholarly literature, academic articles, and credible online news sources using Google Scholar and reputable media outlets. Only reliable and relevant sources were selected following document analysis criteria outlined by Bowen (2009). The data were then organized and classified for thematic analysis. Data analysis employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), including data reduction to identify key information, categorization into themes such as types of disinformation, communication strategies, and their impacts, followed by interpretation through Framing Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). These frameworks helped explain how persuasive communication and message framing influenced audience perception and decision-making in digital marketing contexts.

To ensure data validity and reliability, the study applied triangulation by cross-verifying information from academic literature, regulatory reports, and online media coverage (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This enhanced the credibility of findings by confirming data consistency across sources. However, the study was limited to secondary data analysis; therefore, the findings were descriptive-analytical and did not include empirical evidence from field observations or interviews. Despite this limitation, the study provided a comprehensive conceptual understanding of how disinformation spread within digital marketing ecosystems and highlighted the interplay between influencers, media platforms, and public perception in shaping information credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Forms of Disinformation

Disinformation in influencer marketing does not appear in a single, uniform pattern; rather, it manifests in multiple interconnected forms. The first and most common type is exaggerated claims, where influencers overstate product benefits or financial opportunities to attract audiences. This pattern was evident in the promotion of Binomo and Viral Blast trading platforms in 2022, where influencers promised high, risk-free profits within a short time. Psychologically, these instant-success narratives appealed strongly to individuals seeking quick income recovery in the post-pandemic era. The case of Indra Kenz exemplifies this form of disinformation: through YouTube and Instagram, he promoted Binomo as a “get-rich-quick” scheme, reinforced by visuals of luxury cars, mansions, and glamorous lifestyles—creating the illusion that such wealth was earned through the platform. In reality, Binomo was an unlicensed binary options app in Indonesia, leading to massive public losses amounting to billions of rupiah. Indra Kenz was later sentenced to 10 years in prison and fined IDR 5 billion for fraud and money laundering (Republika, 2022). Similarly, Viral Blast promised a 10% monthly return through a multi-level marketing model supported by fake testimonials and fabricated claims. Investigations revealed total losses of IDR 1.2 trillion, and its founder, Putra Wibowo, was later arrested in Bangkok in 2024 (Kompas.id, 2024).

Another prominent form of disinformation is fake testimonials, which aim to create a false sense of trust. These fabricated reviews or endorsements are designed to appear authentic, exploiting social psychology in which audiences trust the experiences of others—especially public figures. The Coldplay concert ticket scam in 2023 illustrates this pattern. An influencer named Rijki from Batam claimed to have purchased IDR 500 million worth of tickets for a giveaway, sharing positive reviews and trust narratives across TikTok and Instagram to strengthen credibility (Poskota, 2023). Later, the tickets were revealed to be counterfeit, causing not only financial loss but also a deep breach of audience trust. Although Rijki initially appeared to be a victim, his public figure status amplified the case’s impact, prompting police involvement (Detik News, 2024). As Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) emphasize, such manipulative storytelling constructs credibility through emotional and persuasive narratives, transforming misinformation into a systematic form of social and economic deception. Beyond these examples, illegal promotions—such as PT Deka Reset’s unlicensed car sales or Ahmad Rafif’s fraudulent investment schemes in 2024—and black campaigns, like the 2024 Le Minerale bromate hoax, show that disinformation also operates as an unethical business weapon.

Communication Strategies

The success of disinformation depends heavily on the communication techniques used by influencers. They employ personal storytelling, aspirational lifestyles, and high-frequency engagement to create a sense of intimacy and authenticity. According to Freberg (2011), influencers’ personal credibility blurs the line between genuine opinions and sponsored promotions, making audiences more susceptible to persuasion. From a Framing Theory perspective (Entman, 1993), influencers selectively highlight positive aspects—such as profit or desirability—while concealing potential risks or downsides. Likewise, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) explains that audiences are often influenced through the peripheral route, relying on emotions, attractiveness, and popularity rather than rational analysis. This mechanism explains why visually persuasive content, even with weak factual evidence, can remain effective in shaping perceptions. Consequently, the

combination of emotional appeal, repetition, and visual credibility allows disinformation to spread widely and convincingly across digital platforms.

Impact on the Digital Ecosystem

Disinformation in marketing produces paradoxical outcomes. In the short term, it often appears successful—driving engagement, boosting sales, and generating massive public attention. Cases such as Binomo, Viral Blast, and the Coldplay ticket scam demonstrate how manipulative narratives can temporarily stimulate economic activity through deceptive attraction. However, this success is fragile, as it relies on misleading information. Once the truth emerges, public trust collapses, resulting in reputational damage and consumer backlash. In the long term, the effects are more severe: consumer confidence erodes, brand loyalty weakens, and both influencers and companies face legal and ethical consequences. Beyond individual cases, the socio-economic impact is substantial. Illegal promotions like PT Deka Reset's car sales, Ahmad Rafif's investment fraud, and the Le Minerale hoax not only caused financial harm to consumers but also undermined fair market competition. The Financial Services Authority (OJK, 2023) reported trillions of rupiah in losses from illegal investments—most of which were triggered by deceptive social media promotions. These incidents highlight disinformation as a systemic threat that damages trust, disrupts markets, and destabilizes Indonesia's digital economy.

Regulatory and Digital Literacy Implications

This phenomenon underscores the urgency of strengthening both regulatory frameworks and digital literacy. Without critical filtering skills, the public remains vulnerable to manipulative narratives packaged by influencers under the guise of authenticity. Regulatory measures act as a legal safeguard to prevent illegal marketing practices and protect consumers, while digital literacy empowers individuals to recognize, question, and verify information. As Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) suggest, addressing disinformation requires collective responsibility among policymakers, digital platforms, and society at large. By combining enforcement with education, Indonesia can mitigate the long-term effects of influencer-based disinformation and foster a healthier, fairer, and more sustainable digital ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, influencers played a significant role in spreading marketing disinformation on Indonesian social media from 2022 to 2024, exploiting public trust to legitimize misleading messages for economic gain. Cases such as fraudulent trading promotions, ticket scams, illegal sales, and product hoaxes demonstrate how influencer communication strategies framed messages with personal and emotional narratives, effectively influencing audiences through peripheral routes as explained by Framing Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model. The consequences included financial losses, diminished public trust, damaged brand reputations, and greater vulnerability within the digital ecosystem, indicating that disinformation is a systemic threat to the digital market foundation. Addressing this issue requires stricter regulations coupled with enhanced digital literacy to foster a more critical and informed society supporting a sustainable digital environment. Future research should empirically investigate the effectiveness of specific regulatory measures and educational programs in curbing influencer-driven disinformation, as well as explore the psychological mechanisms behind audience susceptibility to such manipulative communications in Indonesia's evolving digital landscape.

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