The Influence of Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness on Electronic Word of Mouth with Trust as an Intervening Variable Among PLN Mobile Users in East Java

Pengaruh Perceived Ease Of Use Dan Perceived Usefulness Terhadap Electronic Word Of Mouth Dengan Kepercayaan Sebagai Variabel Intervening Pada Pengguna PLN Mobile Di Jawa Timur

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***Abstract*—**This study investigates the impact of perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) on electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) among users of the PLN Mobile application in East Java, with trust serving as an intervening variable. The research employs the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to analyze how these perceptions influence user behavior and trust, ultimately affecting e-WOM. The findings indicate that both PEOU and PU significantly influence e-WOM, with trust acting as a mediator in these relationships. The findings indicate that both PEOU and PU significantly influence e-WOM, with trust acting as a mediator. Users who find the app easy to use and beneficial are more likely to share positive experiences. The study confirms that enhancing the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of the PLN Mobile app can significantly improve user trust and encourage positive e-WOM.

***Index Terms*—**Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Electronic Word of Mouth, Trust.

I. INTRODUCTION (HEADING 1)

The rapidly advancing digital era has significantly influenced how organizations operate, compelling them to adopt mobile technology for enhanced service delivery. PT PLN (Persero), Indonesia's national electricity provider, is no exception. To improve customer experience and streamline service access, PLN developed *PLN Mobile*, a mobile application that offers features such as electricity bill payments, service complaints, and other relevant information. The application seeks to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in delivering electricity services to customers. With over 10 million downloads and a high user rating on Google Playstore, *PLN Mobile* has demonstrated its popularity and utility among users.

This study focuses on users of *PLN Mobile* in East Java, which has the second-largest number of users in Indonesia after West Java. Despite the large user base, the diverse socio-economic conditions in East Java ranging from developed urban areas to less developed rural regions may influence the adoption and usage patterns of the application. Understanding these variations is essential to ensure the application's effectiveness across all user demographics. Utilizing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), this research explores how two critical factors—*perceived ease of use* (PEOU) and *perceived usefulness* (PU)—affect user trust and how trust subsequently impacts electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) (Davis, 1989; Dwivedi et al., 2017). PEOU reflects users' perception of the application's simplicity and low effort required for usage, while PU indicates the extent to which users believe the application enhances their performance (Fandiyanto et al., 2020). Trust, as an intervening variable, strengthens the relationship between these factors and e-WOM (Trivedi & Yadav, 2020).

e-WOM, characterized as user-generated digital communication about products or services, has become one of the most influential forms of marketing in the digital age. Unlike traditional advertisements, e-WOM is perceived as more authentic and unbiased, which greatly affects potential users' decision-making processes (Seo et al., 2020). Positive e-WOM occurs when satisfied customers recommend the application to others, building trust and encouraging broader adoption. In this context, trust emerges as a crucial factor that mediates the effects of PEOU and PU on e-WOM, enhancing users' willingness to share positive experiences (Moslehpour et al., 2018; Alalwan et al., 2017).

This research aims to investigate how PEOU and PU influence trust and how trust subsequently impacts e-WOM, specifically in the context of *PLN Mobile*. By focusing on these dynamics, the study seeks to address gaps in existing literature, particularly regarding the role of trust as a mediating variable. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for PLN to further optimize its application and develop targeted strategies to improve customer satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement across diverse user groups in East Java. Moreover, this research underscores the importance of leveraging trust to drive positive e-WOM, which can serve as a powerful tool for attracting new users and reinforcing the company's commitment to innovation and customer-centric solutions.

II. RESEARCH LITERATURE

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**,** developed by Davis (1989), is a theoretical framework used to understand technology adoption by users, focusing on Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU)**.** PEOU refers to the extent to which a user believes a system is easy to use, while PU represents the belief that a system enhances performance. These factors interact, with PEOU influencing PU, which in turn shapes attitudes, intentions, and actual usage behavior. While TAM is widely used, critics argue it oversimplifies the adoption process by neglecting factors such as social norms and cultural context. PEOU is associated with the

belief that technology is intuitive and requires minimal effort (Alalawan et al., 2017). Indicators of PEOU include clarity, ease of navigation, and accessibility of features (Shomad, 2013). PU**,** on the other hand, measures the extent to which technology improves productivity and effectiveness (Wallace et al., 2014). Key indicators include increased speed, job performance, and usability in achieving desired outcomes (Davis, 1989).

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) is defined as online communication involving the exchange of opinions, whether positive or negative, based on consumer experiences (Liu et al., 2017). e-WOM is influenced by factors such as consumer participation, relevant topics, and company engagement in the dialogue (Trivedi & Yadav, 2020). Trust plays a critical role in influencing consumer behavior and long-term loyalty. Trust is established through reliability, transparency, and customer-centric approaches (Green, 2006). Companies can enhance trust by ensuring data security, maintaining credibility, and fulfilling promises consistently (Pizzutti et al., 2022).

The conceptual framework for this study examines the influence of PEOU and PU on e-WOM**,** with trust as a mediating variable. The research hypothesizes direct relationships between PEOU, PU, trust, and e-WOM (Seo et al., 2020; Chen & Aklikokou, 2020). Additionally, trust mediates the effects of PEOU and PU on e-WOM, indicating that users' confidence in an application strengthens their willingness to share positive experiences online (Naufaldi & Tjokrosaputro, 2020). These hypotheses align with TAM principles and emphasize the interplay of ease of use, perceived benefits, and trust in fostering e-WOM behavior among users of PLN Mobile in East Java.

III. METHOD

This research uses an explanatory design to examine relationships and influences among variables, as suggested by Sugiyono (2018). The study targets PLN Mobile users in East Java to analyze the effects of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness on electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), with trust as an intervening variable. The population includes all PLN Mobile users in East Java, while the sample uses purposive sampling. Respondents must be at least 18 years old, ensuring emotional stability (Hartono, 2004), and must have used PLN Mobile. Sample size determination follows Hair et al. (2014), requiring 5–10 times the number of indicators. With 18 indicators, a minimum of 180 respondents were surveyed via Google Form.

Quantitative data from primary sources was collected through an online closed questionnaire (Sudaryono, 2017), measuring respondent characteristics and variables of perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, e-WOM, and trust. The independent variables, perceived ease of use (X1) and perceived usefulness (X2), influence the dependent variable, e-WOM (Y2), with trust (Y1) as the mediating variable (Sugiyono, 2018). A Likert scale measures responses on a five-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Data collection instruments were tested for validity and reliability using SmartPLS 4.0. Convergent validity is assessed through loading factors and average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity relies on cross-loading and AVE comparisons (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). Reliability is measured via Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability, with a threshold of 0.70 (Ghozali & Latan, 2015). Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis evaluates the research model using SmartPLS 4.0, suitable for small sample sizes and non-normal data. The structural (inner) model assesses R-squared and Q-squared values to determine relationships among latent variables. The measurement (outer) model evaluates convergent and discriminant validity through factor loadings, AVE, and composite reliability. Goodness of Fit (GoF) assesses model adequacy, with values interpreted as small (0.10), moderate (0.25), or large (0.38) (Edalmen & Ngadiman, 2020). Hypotheses are tested using the path coefficient in the inner model. Hypotheses are accepted if the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 at a 5% significance level, indicating statistical support for the proposed relationships.

IV. RESULT

This study distributed questionnaires to 287 respondents who use the PLN Mobile application in East Java. The respondents' characteristics include gender, age, last education, occupation, length of PLN Mobile usage, type of usage, and electricity capacity used.

The characteristics of respondents in this study show that the majority of PLN Mobile users are male. Based on the data presented in Appendix V Table 4.1, out of the total respondents involved, 209 people or 72.8% were male. Meanwhile, the number of female respondents was recorded at 78 people or 27.2% of the total respondents. This indicates that male users are more dominant in utilizing PLN Mobile's digital services compared to female users. This finding may reflect differences in preferences or levels of technological adoption between genders, suggesting that men tend to adopt new technologies faster than women, particularly in using technology-based applications for daily needs (Venkatesh et al., 2016).

Based on Appendix V Table 4.2, the age characteristics of respondents in this study indicate that the majority are in the age range of over 32 to 40 years, totaling 121 people or 42.2%. This age group dominates as it falls within the productive age range and is generally more familiar with technology and digital services such as PLN Mobile. Additionally, respondents over the age of 40 accounted for 105 people or 36.6%, representing a group of users who are more economically established and tend to use applications to simplify household management, including electricity services. Respondents aged 25–32 years were recorded at 51 people or 17.8%, representing users who are beginning to actively utilize technology in daily activities. Meanwhile, the youngest respondents, aged 18–25 years, totaled only 10 people or 3.5%, indicating that this age group still constitutes a small proportion, possibly due to their reliance on parents for household needs. These data provide an overview that PLN Mobile users are spread across various age groups, dominated by adults who tend to require practical and efficient services.

Based on Appendix V Table 4.3, the respondents' characteristics in terms of the highest education level show that the majority of respondents have a bachelor's degree (S1), totaling 143 people or 49.8%. This indicates that most PLN Mobile users have an educational background that enables them to understand and utilize digital technology effectively. Furthermore, respondents with a senior high school (SMA/SLTA) education totaled 99 people or 34.4%, indicating that PLN Mobile services have also reached users with a middle-level education. Respondents with a diploma education level totaled 27 people or 9.4%, while postgraduate degree holders (S2) totaled 18 people or 6.2%. These data demonstrate that PLN Mobile users come from various educational backgrounds, with a dominant group of higher education levels more easily adopting technology to support daily needs, including electricity services.

Based on the respondents' characteristics by occupation as shown in Appendix V Table 4.4, the majority of respondents work as private employees, totaling 145 people or 50.5%. This indicates that private sector workers have a high adoption rate for using PLN Mobile, likely due to professional needs that support time efficiency in accessing PLN services. Respondents working as civil

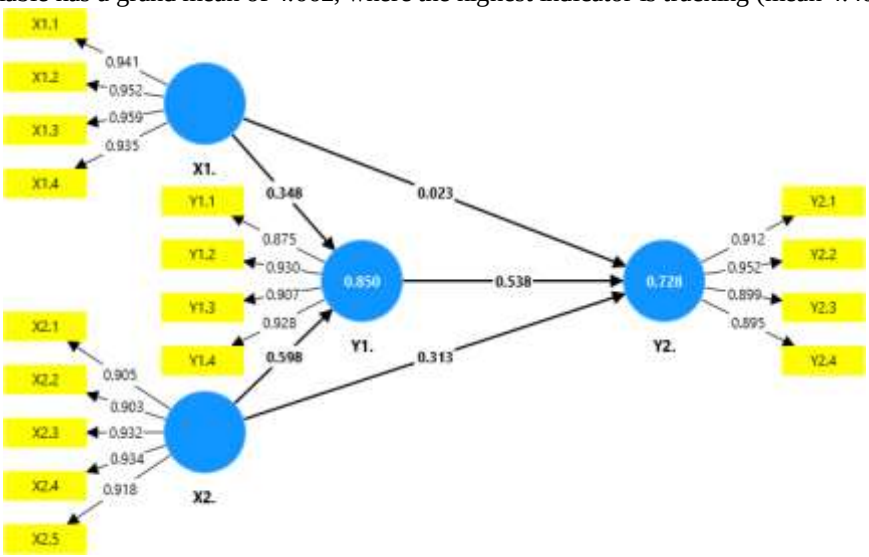
servants/state employees/PLN employees accounted for 70 people or 24.4%, followed by entrepreneurs totaling 37 people or 12.9%. Meanwhile, students were recorded at 17 people or 5.9%, housewives at 14 people or 4.9%, and other categories at 4 people or 1.4%. These data suggest that PLN Mobile usage has penetrated various occupational groups, although most users come from the formal sector. This indicates the potential for PLN Mobile to continue developing features that meet the needs of a broader range of occupational groups.

Based on respondents' characteristics related to the duration of PLN Mobile usage shown in Appendix V Table 4.5, the majority of respondents have used this application for 1–3 years, totaling 91 people or 37.7%. This indicates that PLN Mobile has become a primary choice for users within that period. Respondents who have used the application for more than 5 years totaled 75 people or 26.1%, showing a group of loyal users who adopted this technology long ago. Furthermore, 62 people or 21.6% have used PLN Mobile for 3–5 years, while users with less than 1 year of usage were recorded at 59 people or 20.6%. These data reflect that PLN Mobile continues to attract new users, although most of its users have significant usage experience, which may contribute to the spread of electronic word-of-mouth about the application.

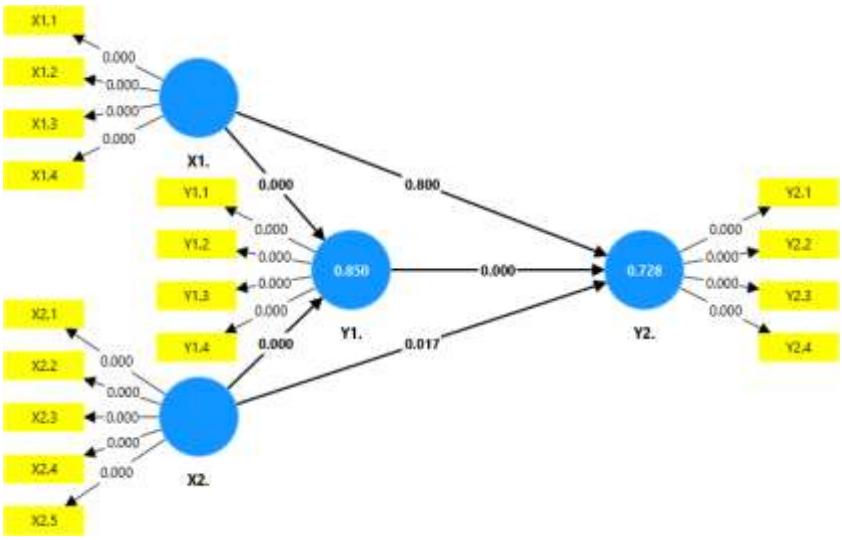
Based on respondent characteristics related to usage type shown in Appendix V Table 4.6, the majority of respondents use the PLN Mobile application for personal purposes, totaling 273 people or 95.1%. Meanwhile, the application's use for company purposes was recorded at only 14 people or 4.9%. These data indicate that PLN Mobile is predominantly used by individuals for daily needs, such as bill payments, complaint handling, or other personal services. On the other hand, although the number of corporate users is relatively small, it suggests potential for PLN to develop more specific features tailored to business needs, attracting more corporate segment users.

Based on respondent characteristics related to electricity capacity shown in Appendix V Table 4.7, the majority of respondents use 900 VA, totaling 117 people or 40.8%. This is followed by users with 450 VA capacity at 68 people or 23.7%, and 1300 VA capacity at 53 people or 18.5%. Furthermore, 36 people or 12.5% use 2200 VA capacity, while users with larger capacities such as 3500 VA and 5500 VA each account for 3 people or 1%. Users of 4400 VA were recorded at 5 people or 1.7%, and users with capacities above 6600 VA were recorded at 2 people or 0.7%. These data show that most respondents are household customers with low to medium electricity capacities, indicating that PLN Mobile is widely used to meet the electricity needs of individual customers who tend to be cost-conscious.

In the description of research variables, the variable perceived ease of use (X1) has a grand mean of 4.522, indicating a very high level of agreement. The indicator with the highest value is the ease of finding information (mean 4.537). The variable perceived usefulness (X2) has a grand mean of 4.394, with the highest indicator being "faster work" (mean 4.509). The trust variable (Y1) has a grand mean of 4.429, with self-orientation (mean 4.470) as the highest indicator. Meanwhile, the electronic word of mouth (Y2) variable has a grand mean of 4.662, where the highest indicator is tracking (mean 4.404).



Instrument testing results show that all indicators meet the criteria for convergent validity, with loading factor values above 0.7 and AVE values above 0.5. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability also indicates results exceeding 0.7, signifying that the research instruments are reliable. Through Partial Least Square (PLS) analysis, the structural diagram confirms valid relationships among latent variables, with loading factor values above 0.6. In the structural model, the R-square value for the trust variable (Y1) is 0.850 (strong), and for E-WOM (Y2) it is 0.728 (moderate). The Q-square analysis yields a value of 0.578, indicating that the research model is relevant.



Hypothesis testing using the bootstrap method shows that most relationships between variables are significant, with P-values ≤ 0.05. Analysis of direct and indirect effects reveals that perceived ease of use (X1) and perceived usefulness (X2) significantly influence trust (Y1) and E-WOM (Y2). The trust variable also has a substantial impact on E-WOM, emphasizing the role of trust in driving electronic recommendations among PLN Mobile users.

V. DISCUSSION

This study, utilizing SmartPLS software, explores the relationships between perceived ease of use (PEOU), perceived usefulness (PU), trust, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in the context of the PLN Mobile app. The research uncovers that PEOU has a significant and positive impact on e-WOM. The findings suggest that as the ease of use of an application increases, users are more likely to share positive experiences through digital channels such as social media, online reviews, and discussion forums. This indicates that when users find an app easy to navigate, they can access information, complete tasks, and utilize app features without difficulty. Consequently, they experience higher satisfaction and are more inclined to recommend the app to others. This outcome is in line with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that ease of use influences users' attitudes and behaviors toward technology, including their intentions to share information. In the context of PLN Mobile, a user-friendly interface leads to higher user engagement, positive reviews, and the development of a better product reputation, consistent with previous studies (Davis, 1989; Alalwan et al., 2017).

Additionally, the study demonstrates that perceived usefulness (PU) significantly influences e-WOM. Users who perceive tangible benefits from using PLN Mobile—such as ease in making transactions, resolving disruptions, and accessing relevant information—are more inclined to share their positive experiences with others. This finding affirms previous research showing that the perceived usefulness of a technology drives users to share their experiences via e-WOM (Hussain et al., 2022; Abou-Shouk & Soliman, 2021). As users recognize the app's value, their trust in the app also increases. The research shows that when users feel that an app is beneficial, their confidence in its performance and security strengthens. This finding supports earlier studies, which suggest that perceived usefulness directly enhances user trust in digital applications, making users more willing to recommend them to others (Alalwan et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2020).

Moreover, the study reveals that PEOU has a significant positive effect on user trust. When users perceive an app as easy to use, they develop a higher level of trust in it. This is because a simple, intuitive, and reliable app builds user confidence in its reliability and security. The findings are consistent with previous research, which indicates that the perceived ease of use of an application is crucial in building trust in the technology (Dwivedi et al., 2017). Furthermore, the study shows that PU is positively related to trust, suggesting that users who find an app useful are more likely to trust it. This increased trust, in turn, makes users more likely to recommend the app to others. This is consistent with research indicating that perceived usefulness is a key factor in establishing trust in digital services, including e-commerce and public service applications (Alalwan et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2020).

Trust plays a central role in encouraging e-WOM behavior. The study demonstrates that trust has a significant and positive influence on e-WOM. When users trust an app, they feel more secure and satisfied, making them more likely to share positive experiences online. This finding supports previous studies, which suggest that trust in digital services plays a vital role in encouraging users to share information through e-WOM (Liang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study reveals that trust acts as a mediator between both PEOU and e-WOM, as well as PU and e-WOM. This means that when users perceive an app as easy to use or useful, it enhances their trust, which motivates them to share positive experiences with others. This mediation effect underscores the importance of trust in the relationship between ease of use, perceived usefulness, and e-WOM, highlighting that improving trust can strengthen the connection between user experience and the likelihood of recommending the app to others.

The study also provides practical implications for PLN Mobile. To enhance e-WOM and user loyalty, PLN Mobile should prioritize improving the user interface to ensure that the app remains easy to use. This involves simplifying the app's navigation, improving accessibility, and offering intuitive features to boost user confidence. Additionally, increasing the perceived usefulness of the app by adding innovative features that address user needs—such as expanded digital services or real-time information—will further enhance user trust and satisfaction. As trust increases, users will be more inclined to share their positive experiences with others, thus expanding the app's user base and reinforcing its brand image.

However, this study does have limitations. The sample was restricted to PLN Mobile users in East Java, meaning the findings may not be generalizable to other regions of Indonesia. Additionally, the research employed a cross-sectional approach, which only captures user perceptions at a single point in time. This design limits the ability to observe changes in user behavior and perceptions over the long term. Future studies should consider expanding the sample to include users from other regions and adopting a longitudinal approach to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how user perceptions and behaviors evolve. Expanding the scope of research would help validate the findings and offer more insights into the factors that influence user trust and e-WOM in different contexts.

VI. CONCLUSION

The conclusions drawn from the analysis and discussion regarding the impact of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness on electronic word of mouth, with trust as an intervening variable among PLN Mobile users in Indonesia, are as follows: perceived ease of use has a positive and significant effect on electronic word of mouth, as does perceived usefulness. Both perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness also positively and significantly influence trust, and trust, in turn, has a positive and significant effect on electronic word of mouth. Furthermore, trust mediates the relationship between both perceived ease of use and electronic word of mouth, as well as between perceived usefulness and electronic word of mouth. These findings underscore the importance of developing applications that are easy to use and provide tangible benefits to users in fostering trust. Trust, in turn, serves as a key factor in encouraging users to actively share positive experiences about the app through e-WOM.

By understanding these factors, PLN can more effectively enhance user adoption and loyalty to the PLN Mobile app, while leveraging e-WOM as a powerful marketing strategy in the digital age. Based on these findings, it is recommended that PLN focus on improving the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of the PLN Mobile app to increase user trust and drive e-WOM. PLN should focus on enhancing the user interface (UI) and features of the app to make it more accessible and beneficial to users, and launch marketing campaigns that educate users about the app's benefits. For future research, expanding the sample scope beyond East Java would help ensure more representative results for all PLN Mobile users in Indonesia, and a longitudinal study could be conducted to monitor changes in user perceptions over time, especially regarding the consistency of user trust in supporting e-WOM.

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