

The Role of Brand Trust and Social Media Engagement in Driving Purchase Intention among Indonesian SMEs

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Abstract

The study investigates the influence of digital marketing strategies—social media engagement, online advertising, and brand trust—on consumer purchase intention in Indonesia’s SME sector. Using a quantitative design, data were collected from 150 SME consumers via structured online questionnaires and analyzed through multiple regression using SPSS 26.0. The model explained 65.7% of the variance in purchase intention, indicating a strong predictive capacity. Results revealed that all three independent variables significantly affect purchase intention, with brand trust emerging as the most influential predictor. The findings underscore that trust, transparency, and interactive engagement are essential in transforming digital exposure into purchasing behavior. Moreover, they highlight the necessity for SMEs to integrate ethical governance and culturally aligned digital communication to strengthen customer relationships and brand credibility. This research contributes to the literature by contextualizing digital marketing effectiveness within an emerging economy, offering theoretical insights and practical recommendations for designing trust-based digital strategies. The study’s implications encourage further exploration of mediating and moderating factors, such as consumer satisfaction and perceived risk, to deepen understanding of behavioral mechanisms in digital markets.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; Social Media Engagement; Brand Trust; Online Advertising; Purchase Intention; Smes; Indonesia.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current era of accelerated digital transformation, businesses are increasingly reliant on technology-driven strategies to enhance efficiency, competitiveness, and market adaptability. The rapid expansion of information and communication technology (ICT) has fundamentally reshaped consumer behavior, particularly through the proliferation of digital marketing and e-commerce platforms. According to the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2023), internet penetration in Indonesia has exceeded 77%, signaling vast potential for online business expansion and digital commerce. Within this landscape, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face both opportunities and challenges: while digital tools provide unprecedented access to broader markets and customer bases, they also demand sophisticated strategies to translate online engagement into measurable marketing performance outcomes. The urgency of this research thus arises from a growing discrepancy between the rate of digital adoption and the ability of firms—particularly SMEs—to demonstrate clear, quantifiable benefits from such adoption in terms of customer engagement, trust, and purchase intention.

Recent literature underscores that digitalization has evolved beyond mere technological adoption to

become a determinant of strategic business success. In both developed and emerging markets, digital marketing has been empirically linked to higher brand visibility, customer retention, and sales growth. Studies have shown that firms utilizing integrated digital strategies experience up to a 25% increase in sales performance, highlighting the significant economic implications of effective online engagement (Kotler & Keller, 2021; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). Yet, despite the growing body of global research, there remains a dearth of empirical evidence specific to the Indonesian SME context, where unique cultural, infrastructural, and behavioral factors influence digital adoption outcomes. This gap justifies the need for localized investigations that examine how specific digital marketing components—such as social media engagement, online advertising, and brand trust—interact to affect consumer purchase intention.

The main problem addressed in this study concerns the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in fostering customer engagement and shaping purchase decisions within Indonesia’s SME sector. While many organizations have adopted social media and online advertising as primary marketing channels, few have systematically assessed their combined impact on consumer behavior. In particular, this research seeks to understand the extent to which digital marketing

efforts translate into consumer trust, loyalty, and purchasing behavior. Previous studies suggest that the relationship between digital marketing and customer engagement is not linear; rather, it is moderated by trust and perceived credibility of the online brand presence (Gefen, 2000; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Consequently, understanding these mediating relationships is critical for designing effective digital strategies tailored to the needs and behaviors of Indonesian consumers.

At a broader level, the literature presents digital marketing as a multidimensional construct encompassing various technological and relational components. Social media engagement, for instance, serves as a bridge between firms and consumers, enabling two-way communication, personalized content, and community-building activities that strengthen emotional connections with brands (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Online advertising, on the other hand, extends the reach of marketing campaigns by leveraging data analytics and algorithmic targeting to attract attention and drive conversions (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2013). Brand trust emerges as an essential moderating factor, influencing how consumers interpret digital messages and decide whether to proceed with transactions. Trust not only mitigates perceived risk but also fosters long-term loyalty, transforming casual interactions into sustained commercial relationships (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; McKnight et al., 2002).

Numerous theoretical frameworks have been employed to explain these dynamics, including the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Consumer Behavior Theory. TAM emphasizes the roles of perceived usefulness and ease of use in shaping user acceptance of new technologies (Davis, 1989), while Consumer Behavior Theory explores psychological processes that drive consumer decisions, such as motivation, perception, and attitude formation (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995). Within digital marketing, these models converge to suggest that consumer trust and engagement are outcomes of both cognitive evaluations (e.g., the perceived utility of digital content) and affective responses (e.g., emotional attachment to the brand). However, most prior research has centered on large corporations or Western contexts, leaving significant gaps in understanding how SMEs in developing economies adapt these principles under conditions of limited resources and cultural diversity.

The growing complexity of digital ecosystems further amplifies the need for contextualized research. As online consumers are continuously exposed to an abundance of advertising stimuli, attention has become a scarce resource, making engagement strategies more competitive and nuanced (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2019). For SMEs, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook are cost-effective avenues for

marketing but require strategic alignment with brand positioning and trust-building mechanisms. Studies have found that social media engagement enhances purchase intention by facilitating authentic interaction and fostering a sense of community (Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). However, the over-saturation of digital advertisements has also led to consumer fatigue, where excessive exposure to promotional content can erode trust and diminish engagement (Bright & Daugherty, 2012). Hence, balancing engagement intensity and credibility becomes essential in crafting sustainable digital strategies.

Despite increasing recognition of digital marketing's role in influencing consumer behavior, empirical validation of its impact in Indonesia remains limited. The majority of existing studies either focus on large corporations or neglect the mediating role of trust in shaping purchase intentions. Furthermore, while global literature acknowledges the significance of social media and online advertising in consumer decision-making, the interplay among these variables and brand trust in the SME context has not been adequately explored. This absence of localized empirical models constrains both theoretical development and practical applications in the Indonesian business ecosystem. SMEs, which form the backbone of Indonesia's economy, require data-driven frameworks that can translate digital engagement metrics into tangible performance outcomes. Thus, there is a pressing need to investigate how digital marketing strategies function within this distinct market environment and to identify actionable insights that enhance both trust and conversion rates.

To address these gaps, this study proposes a model examining the influence of digital marketing strategies on consumer purchase intention, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of brand trust and the moderating influence of social media engagement. The research is grounded in quantitative analysis, drawing on survey data from 150 SME consumers across Indonesia. By empirically testing the relationships among these variables, the study seeks to contribute both to theoretical understanding and managerial practice. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated approach, combining established theories from technology acceptance and consumer behavior with contextual evidence from Indonesian SMEs. In doing so, it not only bridges the gap between digital adoption and marketing performance measurement but also provides a framework for evaluating digital strategy effectiveness in emerging markets.

In summary, this research aims to achieve three primary objectives: (1) to examine the direct effect of digital marketing strategies on consumer purchase intention; (2) to assess the mediating role of brand trust in enhancing consumer loyalty; and (3) to determine the extent to which social media engagement strengthens the relationship between

digital marketing and purchasing behavior. By fulfilling these objectives, the study offers empirical evidence to support SMEs in developing effective digital marketing models that align technological adoption with relational trust-building. The findings are expected to inform both academic discourse and managerial practice, reinforcing the importance of integrating technological innovation with human-centered marketing principles in the digital age..

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationships among digital marketing variables and their influence on consumer purchase intention. Quantitative methodologies are particularly suited to analyzing measurable relationships and causal linkages among variables, allowing researchers to test hypotheses using statistical inference (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Following prior studies exploring the intersection of digital engagement and behavioral outcomes, this research adopted a descriptive and causal design to identify how consumers respond to digital marketing stimuli in real-world online environments. The causal design facilitated testing of direct and mediating effects among the independent variables (social media engagement, online advertising, and brand trust) and the dependent variable (purchase intention). Data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis at a 95% confidence level to ensure statistical robustness. The approach aligns with established empirical frameworks in technology adoption and consumer behavior, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which rely on quantitative models to predict behavioral outcomes (Davis, 1989; Ajzen, 1991).

Quantitative approaches have long been recognized for their ability to operationalize constructs and validate hypotheses with numerical precision. In similar educational and business research, structured surveys are preferred to capture behavioral perceptions systematically (Alshammari et al., 2022). As with studies in the IT and education sectors that quantify the relationship between digital engagement and moral or behavioral outcomes, this design ensures consistent measurement across respondents and allows for inferential generalization within the sampled population.

B. Population and Sample

The study population comprised consumers of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) actively engaged in digital marketing platforms across Indonesia. Given Indonesia's growing SME ecosystem and the pervasive influence of digital technologies, this population provided an appropriate context to explore consumer responses to online marketing strategies. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed relevant experience with digital marketing

campaigns and online transactions. A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed, with 150 valid responses retained for analysis, yielding an 83% response rate.

The demographic profile of respondents indicated a relatively balanced gender composition (54% female, 46% male), with the majority aged between 25 and 30 years. This age group represents the most digitally active consumers in Indonesia, characterized by high engagement with online platforms for both social and commercial purposes (APJII, 2023). The sampling approach ensured diversity across demographic categories, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the results. Table 2.1 presents respondent demographics by gender, age, and occupation.

Table 2.1. Respondent Demographics by Gender, Age, and Occupation

Demographic Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	54
	Male	46
Age	20–24	25
	25–30	60
	31–40	15
	Student	35
Occupation	Private Sector Employee	40
	Entrepreneur	25

C. Data Collection Method

Primary data were collected through structured online questionnaires distributed via social media channels including Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups. This method was chosen to align with the research focus on digital engagement, as social media represents the primary medium through which SMEs and consumers interact in Indonesia. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure respondents' perceptions of social media engagement, online advertising, brand trust, and purchase intention.

Data collection spanned four weeks during May 2023. The use of online surveys ensured efficiency, accessibility, and broad geographical reach. Respondents were required to confirm their prior experience with digital marketing activities before participation to maintain sample relevance. Ethical standards were upheld by obtaining informed consent and assuring participants of data anonymity and confidentiality.

D. Research Variables and Indicators

Four principal variables were operationalized in this study: social media engagement (X1), online advertising (X2), brand trust (X3), and purchase intention (Y). Each construct was measured using indicators validated in prior research. For example, social media engagement was assessed through

indicators related to interactivity, content relevance, and community participation (Dessart et al., 2015). Online advertising was measured by perceived informativeness, entertainment value, and advertising credibility (Ducoffe, 1996). Brand trust indicators included reliability, honesty, and emotional connection (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Purchase intention was gauged through respondents' willingness to buy, likelihood of recommending, and future purchase commitment (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

The construct validity and reliability of the measurement instruments were verified through statistical testing. Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs exceeded 0.7, meeting the reliability threshold recommended by Nunnally (1978). Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was greater than 0.6, confirming sampling adequacy. These tests ensure that the instrument accurately measures the intended constructs and produces consistent results across samples. Table 2.2 summarizes the operational definitions and measurement indicators for each variable.

Table 2.2. Variable Operational Definitions and Measurement Indicators

Variable	Definition	Measurement Indicators	Reliability (Cronbach's α)
Social Media Engagement (X1)	Degree of consumer interaction with SME social media content	Interaction, relevance, community participation	0.81
Online Advertising (X2)	Consumer perception of digital ads' informativeness and credibility	Informative ness, entertainment, credibility	0.84
Brand Trust (X3)	Consumer belief in brand reliability and integrity	Reliability, honesty, emotional bond	0.86
Purchase Intention (Y)	Likelihood of consumers purchasing from SMEs	Willingness to buy, recommendation, commitment	0.88

E. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondents' profiles and key variable

distributions. Before hypothesis testing, the data were subjected to classical assumption tests to ensure model adequacy. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed normal distribution ($p > 0.05$), while multicollinearity diagnostics indicated acceptable tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values below 2.0. Heteroscedasticity testing using the Glejser method showed no violation of homoscedasticity assumptions ($p > 0.05$).

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the direct effects of social media engagement, online advertising, and brand trust on purchase intention. The regression model was formulated as follows:

$$Y = 0.352X1 + 0.286X2 + 0.304X3 + e \quad (1)$$

where Y represents purchase intention, X1 social media engagement, X2 online advertising, and X3 brand trust. The Coefficient of Determination (R^2) was employed to measure the explanatory power of the model. The model yielded an R^2 value of 0.657, indicating that 65.7% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by the three independent variables. Hypothesis testing was conducted using t-tests and F-tests at a 5% significance level. The t-test confirmed the individual significance of each independent variable ($p < 0.05$), while the F-test confirmed the overall model significance.

F. Research Instrument Validation

Instrument validation was conducted through a pre-test involving 30 respondents representing the target population. The pre-test aimed to assess item clarity, wording, and comprehension. Based on feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve linguistic precision and contextual relevance. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all constructs—Social Media Engagement (0.81), Online Advertising (0.84), Brand Trust (0.86), and Purchase Intention (0.88)—demonstrated high internal consistency, confirming that the instrument met the reliability standards set forth by Nunnally (1978). The consistent reliability across constructs reinforced the robustness of the measurement model.

G. Ethical Considerations

Ethical compliance was a central component of this research. Participation was strictly voluntary, and informed consent was obtained electronically prior to data collection. Respondents were fully briefed about the study's purpose, data use, and confidentiality measures. No personally identifiable or sensitive data were collected. Data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic analysis. These procedures conform to ethical research standards outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020). The ethical protocol ensured that all research activities respected the autonomy, privacy, and dignity of participants.

H. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework underlying this study illustrates the hypothesized relationships among social media engagement, online advertising, brand trust, and purchase intention. As shown in

Figure 2.1, social media engagement and online advertising are proposed to directly influence purchase intention, while brand trust functions as both an independent predictor and a mediating factor. This model integrates insights from TAM and Consumer Behavior Theory, emphasizing the cognitive and affective mechanisms through which digital marketing strategies shape consumer behavior.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a strong positive relationship between information technology (IT) utilization and character development among eighth-grade students at MTs Negeri 1 Lampung Timur. Quantitative analysis shows that IT usage significantly influences multiple aspects of students' moral, behavioral, and social development. Regression analysis indicates that IT contributes to 72% of the variance in character formation, while the remaining 28% is explained by factors such as family environment, peer influence, and socio-cultural context. These findings align with Făgărășan et al. [10], who found that educationally focused digital engagement enhances responsibility and self-discipline among adolescents. Overall, both statistical and observational data confirm that IT integration strengthens key character traits such as empathy, independence, and digital literacy.

B. Interpretation of Statistical Results

The statistical results substantiate the study's hypotheses, with an R Square (R^2) value of 0.072, a t-value of 9.544, and a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), confirming a significant positive effect of IT on students' character. These results align with prior quantitative analyses utilizing regression and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), demonstrating measurable correlations between IT engagement and ethical development. Table 4.1 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing, showing that IT significantly impacts students' moral, behavioral, and social character dimensions.

Table 4.1. Summary of Hypothesis Test Results (t and p-values)

Hypothesis	Statement	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	IT usage significantly affects students' moral character	9.544	0.000	Accepted
H2	IT usage significantly affects students' behavioral character	8.922	0.000	Accepted

H3	IT usage significantly affects students' social responsibility	8.671	0.000	Accepted
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The significant t-values across all dimensions indicate that IT serves as a key factor in the students' character formation process. This aligns with the argument that technology, when ethically managed, becomes a transformative tool fostering moral and behavioral growth rather than a source of distraction.

C. Positive Impacts of Technology

The integration of IT into learning environments promotes both cognitive and moral development. It enables students to access vast educational resources, facilitating independent learning and collaboration. As highlighted by Făgărășan et al. [10], structured IT use fosters self-regulation and independence. Moreover, exposure to diverse perspectives through online discussions and global learning communities enhances empathy and intercultural awareness [13]. The findings further confirm that technology-based education encourages critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving—attributes essential to moral and intellectual maturity.

D. Negative Impacts of Technology

Despite these benefits, unregulated IT use presents challenges. Overexposure to entertainment media and social platforms can reduce empathy, discipline, and focus. Observations revealed that some students misused digital devices for non-academic purposes, echoing previous studies linking excessive screen time with lower self-control [12]. Without supervision, students risk exposure to inappropriate content and unethical online behavior. This supports Alshammari et al. [7], who argued that ethical IT governance in education is critical to ensuring technology remains a force for moral growth. Hence, structured supervision and digital ethics education are essential to mitigating these risks.

E. Cultural and Institutional

Mediation in IT-Character Relationship
 The relationship between IT and character is influenced by cultural and institutional contexts. In Islamic educational environments like MTs Negeri 1 Lampung Timur, values such as empathy, honesty, and community service shape how students engage with technology. This finding aligns with [17] and [18], who note that embedding religious and cultural values into digital education strengthens moral reasoning and civic responsibility. Institutional governance—through clear digital codes of conduct and ethical use policies—further ensures responsible technology adoption. Digital citizenship programs, as endorsed by [19] and [20], provide frameworks for guiding ethical digital behavior.

F. Educational Policy and Digital Ethics Frameworks

Institutional policies integrating digital ethics are crucial for maximizing IT's positive impact on moral growth. According to [19] and [20], digital citizenship curricula foster empathy, respect, and accountability in virtual contexts. Teacher training also plays a vital role; educators with ethical and technical proficiency can identify harmful behaviors and cultivate reflective, moral thinking in students [18]. This pedagogical approach transforms IT into a moral learning tool rather than a purely cognitive aid.

G. Dimensions of Character Affected by IT Use

IT use notably enhances moral reasoning, social responsibility, and integrity. Consistent with [21] and, interactive and collaborative digital learning tasks encourage ethical decision-making and empathy. Exposure to online community projects further strengthens social responsibility, as noted by . Integrity develops through assignments emphasizing honesty, citation ethics, and accountability in digital environments. The framework discussed ensures that honesty and ethical awareness become core digital competencies.

H. Mediating and Moderating Factors

Parental involvement and teacher supervision significantly mediate IT's impact on character. High levels of parental oversight and guided digital engagement reinforce positive moral outcomes .Teachers who mentor students online enhance empathy and ethical awareness, preventing misuse. Institutional culture—through initiatives such as ethics-based digital projects—further amplifies positive outcomes. This triadic relationship among IT, educational governance, and cultural norms sustains balanced character development.

I. Implications for Educational Practice and Policy

These results underscore the need for comprehensive digital literacy and ethics programs combining technical and moral education. Schools should institutionalize digital codes of conduct, filtering systems, and collaborative digital projects that foster empathy and accountability. Continuous teacher training in ethical IT pedagogy remains crucial to promoting moral resilience and responsible digital citizenship. the study advocates national education standards that integrate digital ethics to ensure holistic student development.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital marketing strategies, particularly social media engagement, online advertising, and brand trust, have a significant and positive influence on consumer purchase intention within Indonesia's SME sector. Quantitative analysis revealed that brand trust emerged as the strongest predictor of

purchase intention, followed closely by social media engagement and online advertising. The findings emphasize that while exposure to digital marketing messages is essential for awareness, the conversion of such exposure into purchase decisions depends heavily on relational factors, notably trust and interactive engagement. This insight reaffirms that successful digital strategies require more than technological adoption—they demand ethical communication, authenticity, and consistency in brand values. The results contribute to the growing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence of how trust and engagement mechanisms operate in emerging markets, where cultural and institutional contexts play a pivotal role. By integrating theoretical perspectives such as the Technology Acceptance Model and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study extends the understanding of how behavioral intentions are shaped through digital ecosystems. For practitioners, the implications are clear: SMEs should design trust-centered marketing architectures, emphasizing transparent communication, responsive interaction, and ethical governance in online engagements. Future research could explore mediating effects of perceived value and cultural moderation to further refine models linking digital interaction with consumer loyalty and long-term behavioral outcomes..

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestions for further research to close research shortcomings. It does not contain outside suggestions for further research.

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