

The Influence of Digital Marketing and Social Media Engagement on Purchase Intention Through Brand Trust Among MSME Consumers

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ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed the marketing landscape, particularly for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Digital marketing and social media engagement have become essential strategic tools for businesses seeking to increase consumer awareness, strengthen brand relationships, and stimulate purchasing behavior. Despite the widespread adoption of digital marketing practices, many MSMEs continue to face challenges in converting online engagement into actual purchase intentions. Previous studies have identified brand trust as a critical factor influencing consumer purchasing decisions; however, limited empirical evidence exists regarding its mediating role in the relationship between digital marketing, social media engagement, and purchase intention within the MSME context.

This study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing and social media engagement on purchase intention through brand trust among MSME consumers. A quantitative explanatory research design was employed. Data were collected from 250 consumers who had purchased products from MSMEs through digital platforms. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) was used to test the proposed hypotheses.

The findings reveal that digital marketing significantly influences brand trust ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$), social media engagement significantly affects brand trust ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$), and brand trust significantly influences purchase intention ($\beta = 0.551$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, brand trust partially mediates the relationship between digital marketing and purchase intention, as well as between social media engagement and purchase intention. The model explains 71.2% of the variance in purchase intention.

This study contributes to marketing literature by demonstrating the strategic importance of brand trust as a mechanism through which

digital marketing activities influence consumer purchase intentions. The findings provide practical guidance for MSMEs seeking to improve marketing effectiveness in increasingly competitive digital environments.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information technology has fundamentally transformed business activities worldwide. Organizations are increasingly required to adopt digital technologies to remain competitive in dynamic and highly competitive markets. One of the most significant transformations has occurred in marketing practices, where traditional marketing methods have gradually shifted toward digital-based approaches. Digital marketing enables businesses to communicate with consumers more efficiently, reach broader audiences, and create personalized customer experiences. Consequently, digital marketing has become an essential strategic tool for organizations seeking sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) represent one of the most important sectors in many economies, including Indonesia. MSMEs contribute significantly to employment creation, economic growth, and poverty reduction. However, despite their economic importance, many MSMEs face considerable challenges in marketing their products and services. Limited financial resources, restricted market access, and inadequate technological capabilities often hinder their ability to compete with larger organizations. The emergence of digital marketing presents opportunities for MSMEs to overcome these limitations by providing cost-effective channels for customer communication and market expansion.

Digital marketing encompasses various online promotional activities, including social media marketing, content marketing, email marketing, search engine optimization, and online advertising. Through these channels, businesses can establish direct interactions with consumers, gather valuable customer insights, and build stronger relationships with target audiences. Compared to traditional marketing methods, digital marketing offers greater flexibility, measurability, and scalability. As a result, an increasing number of MSMEs have integrated digital marketing into their business strategies.

Among the various digital marketing platforms available, social media has emerged as one of the most influential tools for consumer engagement. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube enable businesses to communicate with consumers in real time. These platforms facilitate interactions through likes, comments, shares, and user-generated content, creating opportunities for deeper consumer engagement. Social media engagement reflects the level of consumer

involvement and interaction with a brand's online content. High levels of engagement are generally associated with stronger customer relationships, increased brand awareness, and improved consumer perceptions.

Despite the growing popularity of digital marketing and social media engagement, the effectiveness of these activities in generating purchase intention remains a topic of considerable interest. Purchase intention refers to a consumer's willingness or likelihood to purchase a product or service in the future. It is considered one of the most important predictors of actual purchasing behavior. Although digital marketing efforts may successfully attract consumer attention and generate online engagement, these outcomes do not necessarily translate into purchase intentions. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms that connect digital marketing activities with consumer purchase decisions is critical for businesses seeking to maximize marketing effectiveness.

One factor that has received substantial attention in marketing literature is brand trust. Brand trust refers to consumers' confidence in a brand's ability to deliver promised value consistently and reliably. In digital environments, where consumers often face information asymmetry and perceived risks, trust becomes particularly important. Consumers are more likely to engage with and purchase from brands they perceive as trustworthy. Therefore, brand trust may serve as an important intermediary mechanism explaining how digital marketing and social media engagement influence consumer purchase intentions.

Several studies have examined the relationships among digital marketing, social media engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention. However, previous findings remain inconclusive. Some studies suggest that digital marketing directly influences purchase intention, while others argue that trust-related factors play a more significant mediating role. Furthermore, most prior research has focused on large organizations or specific industries, leaving a gap in understanding how these relationships operate within the MSME context.

The growing importance of MSMEs in the digital economy highlights the need for empirical research examining the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies among smaller businesses. Understanding how digital marketing and social media engagement contribute to purchase intention through brand trust can provide valuable insights for MSME owners, marketing practitioners, and policymakers. Such knowledge may help MSMEs develop more effective marketing strategies and improve their competitiveness in increasingly digital markets.

This study seeks to address this research gap by investigating the influence of digital marketing and social media engagement on purchase intention through brand trust among MSME consumers. Specifically, the study aims to examine the direct effects of digital marketing and social media engagement on brand trust, the influence of brand trust

on purchase intention, and the mediating role of brand trust in explaining consumer purchasing behavior.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital marketing and social media engagement, several gaps remain unresolved. First, most previous studies have primarily focused on the direct influence of digital marketing activities on consumer behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Limited attention has been devoted to understanding the psychological mechanisms through which digital marketing influences consumer decision-making processes.

Second, although brand trust has been widely recognized as a critical determinant of consumer behavior, previous studies have often examined it as an independent predictor rather than a mediating variable. Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence explaining how digital marketing and social media engagement contribute to purchase intention through trust-building processes.

Third, the majority of prior studies have been conducted in large corporations and multinational brands, while empirical investigations focusing on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) remain scarce. MSMEs operate under different resource constraints, technological capabilities, and market conditions, which may influence the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by developing and testing a comprehensive model that integrates digital marketing, social media engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention within the MSME context. The findings are expected to contribute to both marketing theory and managerial practice by providing a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in digital environments.

Research on digital marketing and social media engagement has expanded significantly over the past decade. Kim and Ko (2012) demonstrated that social media marketing activities positively affect customer equity through enhanced customer relationships. Yadav and Rahman (2018) found that social media marketing activities significantly influence customer loyalty and value perceptions. More recently, Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasized the strategic role of digital technologies in transforming consumer engagement and marketing effectiveness.

However, these studies primarily focused on direct effects and often neglected the mediating role of trust. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence exists regarding MSMEs, particularly in emerging economies. As a result, there remains a need for a more comprehensive framework that explains how digital marketing and social media engagement influence purchase intention through brand trust.

This study advances the current state of knowledge by integrating these variables into a unified model and empirically testing their relationships within the MSME sector.

This study offers three significant contributions to the existing literature.

First, it introduces brand trust as a strategic mediating mechanism that explains how digital marketing and social media engagement are translated into consumer purchase intentions.

Second, it develops an integrated digital marketing framework that combines communication effectiveness, consumer engagement, and trust-building processes within a single conceptual model.

Third, it provides empirical evidence from MSMEs, a sector that remains underrepresented in digital marketing research despite its substantial economic importance. By focusing on MSME consumers, the study contributes context-specific insights that enrich the understanding of digital marketing effectiveness in emerging markets.

This study aims to: 1) Analyze the effect of digital marketing on brand trust, 2) Examine the effect of social media engagement on brand trust, 3) Investigate the effect of brand trust on purchase intention, 4) Analyze the direct effect of digital marketing on purchase intention, 5) Examine the direct effect of social media engagement on purchase intention, 6) Investigate the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between digital marketing and purchase intention, 7) Investigate the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media engagement and purchase intention.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of digital marketing, social media engagement, brand trust, and purchase intention within a single comprehensive framework focusing specifically on MSME consumers. Unlike previous studies that primarily examine direct relationships, this research highlights the mediating role of brand trust as a strategic mechanism linking digital marketing activities and consumer purchasing intentions. Additionally, the study contributes empirical evidence from the MSME sector, which remains relatively underexplored in digital marketing research.

Digital marketing refers to the utilization of digital technologies and internet-based platforms to promote products, services, and brands to consumers. The emergence of digital technologies has transformed traditional marketing approaches by enabling businesses to communicate directly with consumers through various online channels, including websites, social media, email, search engines, and mobile applications. Digital marketing provides organizations with opportunities to reach broader audiences, improve customer engagement, and enhance marketing efficiency.

According to Kotler et al. (2022), digital marketing is a marketing approach that utilizes digital technologies to create, communicate, and deliver value to consumers. Digital marketing allows organizations to personalize marketing messages, monitor consumer behavior in real time, and evaluate campaign effectiveness more accurately

than traditional marketing methods.

For MSMEs, digital marketing offers significant advantages because it reduces promotional costs while increasing market accessibility. Through digital platforms, MSMEs can compete more effectively with larger companies by leveraging creativity, customer interaction, and targeted communication strategies.

The indicators of digital marketing in this study include: 1) Content Quality, 2) Information Accessibility, 3) Interactivity, 4) Personalization, 5) Online Promotional Activities

Social media engagement refers to the level of interaction, participation, and involvement that consumers demonstrate toward a brand on social media platforms. Engagement is considered one of the most important outcomes of social media marketing because it reflects the strength of the relationship between consumers and brands.

Consumers engage with brands through activities such as liking, commenting, sharing content, creating user-generated content, and participating in online discussions. Higher engagement levels indicate stronger emotional connections and greater consumer involvement.

According to Tuten and Solomon (2023), social media engagement represents a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral interactions between consumers and brands in digital environments.

The indicators of social media engagement include: 1) Likes and Reactions, 2) Comments and Feedback, 3) Content Sharing, 4) Participation in Online Activities, 5) Consumer Interaction Frequency

Brand trust is defined as the willingness of consumers to rely on a brand based on confidence in its reliability, credibility, and ability to fulfill promises. Trust becomes particularly important in digital environments because consumers often face uncertainty regarding product quality, security, and transaction reliability.

According to Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2005), brand trust reflects consumers' beliefs that a brand will consistently deliver expected value and act in their best interests.

Trust serves as a critical mechanism through which marketing activities influence consumer behavior. Consumers who trust a brand are more likely to develop favorable attitudes, remain loyal, and exhibit stronger purchase intentions.

The indicators of brand trust include: 1) Reliability, 2) Credibility, 3) Consistency, 4) Security, 5) Consumer Confidence.

Purchase intention refers to a consumer's conscious plan or willingness to purchase a product or service in the future. It represents an important predictor of actual buying

behavior and is frequently used as an outcome variable in marketing research.

According to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019), purchase intention reflects consumers' readiness to engage in purchasing behavior after evaluating available information and alternatives.

Purchase intention may be influenced by various factors, including marketing communication, brand image, customer satisfaction, and trust.

The indicators of purchase intention include: 1) Transactional Intention, 2) Referential Intention, 3) Preferential Intention, 4) Exploratory Intention

Based on the literature review, the conceptual framework proposes that Digital Marketing and Social Media Engagement Influence Brand Trust, which subsequently influences Purchase Intention. Digital Marketing and Social Media Engagement are also expected to directly influence Purchase Intention.

Conceptual Model:

Digital Marketing → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention

Social Media Engagement → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention

Digital Marketing → Purchase Intention

Social Media Engagement → Purchase Intention

Hipotesis: (i) **H1**: Digital Marketing positively influences Brand Trust; (ii) **H2**: Social Media Engagement positively influences Brand Trust; (iii) **H3**: Brand Trust positively influences Purchase Intention; (iv) **H4**: Digital Marketing positively influences Purchase Intention; (v) **H5**: Social Media Engagement positively influences Purchase Intention; (vi) **H6**: Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Digital Marketing and Purchase Intention; (vii) **H7**: Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Social Media Engagement and Purchase Intention

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative explanatory research design aimed at examining causal relationships among variables. Quantitative methods are appropriate because they allow the researcher to test hypotheses statistically and measure relationships among constructs objectively.

Population and Sample

The population consists of consumers who have purchased products from MSMEs through digital platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok Shop, Shopee, and Tokopedia.

A purposive sampling technique was used with the following criteria:

1. Respondents have purchased MSME products online at least twice during the past six months.
2. Respondents actively use social media.
3. Respondents are at least 17 years old.

The study involved **250 respondents**.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed online through Google Forms.

A five-point Likert scale was used:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

Variable Measurement

Table 1. Variable Measurement

Variable	Indicators
Digital Marketing	Content Quality, Accessibility, Interactivity, Personalization, Promotion
Social Media Engagement	Likes, Comments, Shares, Participation, Interaction
Brand Trust	Reliability, Credibility, Consistency, Security, Confidence
Purchase Intention	Transactional, Referential, Preferential, Exploratory

Data Analysis Technique

The study utilizes Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS 4.

The analysis includes:

1. Outer Model Evaluation

2. Convergent Validity
3. Discriminant Validity
4. Reliability Testing
5. Inner Model Evaluation
6. Hypothesis Testing
7. Mediation Testing

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSION

Respondent Profile

Table 2. Respondent Profile

Characteristics	Percentage
Male	42%
Female	58%
Age 17–25	38%
Age 26–35	34%
Age 36–45	20%
Above 45	8%

Additional Results

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

The convergent validity assessment was conducted using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results indicate that all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity.

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	AVE
Digital Marketing	0.691
Social Media Engagement	0.706
Brand Trust	0.742

Purchase Intention

0.718

These results demonstrate that the indicators adequately explain the variance of their respective constructs.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. The square roots of AVE for each construct were greater than the correlations among constructs, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

Variable	DM	SME	BT	PI
Digital Marketing	0.831			
Social Media Engagement	0.612	0.840		
Brand Trust	0.687	0.653	0.861	
Purchase Intention	0.648	0.602	0.844	0.847

Predictive Relevance (Q²)

Predictive relevance was assessed using the blindfolding procedure. The Q² values exceeded zero, indicating strong predictive capability.

Table 5. Predictive Relevance (Q²)

Variable	Q ²
Brand Trust	0.452
Purchase Intention	0.517

Model Fit Assessment

The goodness-of-fit indices suggest that the proposed model adequately fits the data.

Table 6. Model Fit Assessment

Indicator	Value
SRMR	0.056

Indicator	Value
NFI	0.914

The SRMR value is below the recommended threshold of 0.08, while the NFI value exceeds 0.90, indicating acceptable model fit.

Convergent Validity

All indicators show loading factors above 0.70.

Table 7. Convergent Validity

Variable	Loading Factor Range
Digital Marketing	0.723–0.891
Social Media Engagement	0.741–0.903
Brand Trust	0.766–0.921
Purchase Intention	0.734–0.899

All indicators are valid.

Reliability Test

Table 8. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Digital Marketing	0.891	0.918
Social Media Engagement	0.876	0.911
Brand Trust	0.903	0.928
Purchase Intention	0.887	0.915

All variables are reliable.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 9. Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	β	T-value	P-value
DM $\rightarrow$ BT	0.421	7.124	0.000

Relationship	β	T-value	P-value
SME $\rightarrow$ BT	0.387	6.885	0.000
BT $\rightarrow$ PI	0.551	9.245	0.000
DM $\rightarrow$ PI	0.294	4.821	0.000
SME $\rightarrow$ PI	0.261	4.276	0.000

All hypotheses are supported.

Coefficient of Determination

Table 10. Coefficient of Determination

Variable	R ²
Brand Trust	0.627
Purchase Intention	0.712

This indicates that Digital Marketing and Social Media Engagement explain 62.7% of the variance in Brand Trust, while all independent variables explain 71.2% of Purchase Intention.

Mediation Test

Table 11. Mediation Test

Relationship	Indirect Effect	T-value	P-value
DM $\rightarrow$ BT $\rightarrow$ PI	0.232	5.621	0.000
SME $\rightarrow$ BT $\rightarrow$ PI	0.213	5.102	0.000

Brand Trust partially mediates both relationships.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Digital Marketing significantly enhances Brand Trust. Consumers perceive MSMEs that provide informative, interactive, and personalized digital content as more trustworthy. This finding supports Relationship Marketing Theory, which emphasizes the importance of communication in developing trust-based relationships.

Social Media Engagement also demonstrates a significant positive influence on Brand Trust. Active consumer participation through comments, shares, and interactions

creates stronger emotional bonds with brands. These interactions contribute to greater confidence in the brand and improve perceptions of reliability.

Brand Trust exhibits the strongest influence on Purchase Intention. Consumers who trust a brand are more likely to purchase products because trust reduces perceived risk and uncertainty associated with online transactions.

The mediation analysis reveals that Brand Trust acts as a strategic mechanism connecting Digital Marketing and Social Media Engagement with Purchase Intention. Therefore, MSMEs should focus not only on increasing online visibility but also on building trust through consistent communication and customer engagement.

The Effect of Digital Marketing on Brand Trust

The findings reveal that digital marketing has a significant positive effect on brand trust. This result indicates that high-quality digital content, interactive communication, and personalized promotional strategies contribute to consumers' confidence in MSME brands. Consumers tend to perceive businesses that actively provide useful information and respond promptly to customer inquiries as more credible and reliable.

This finding supports Relationship Marketing Theory, which emphasizes the importance of continuous communication in building long-term customer relationships. It is also consistent with the findings of Kim and Ko (2012), who reported that social media marketing activities enhance consumer perceptions and brand relationships.

The Effect of Social Media Engagement on Brand Trust

Social media engagement significantly influences brand trust. Consumers who actively interact with brand content through likes, comments, shares, and online discussions develop stronger emotional and cognitive connections with the brand.

These interactions create opportunities for consumers to gain firsthand experiences and observe the experiences of others, thereby reducing uncertainty and increasing trust. The result supports previous studies suggesting that engagement plays a crucial role in strengthening customer-brand relationships.

The Effect of Brand Trust on Purchase Intention

Brand trust emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention. This finding indicates that consumers are more likely to purchase products from brands they perceive as trustworthy. Trust reduces perceived risk, enhances confidence in product quality, and increases consumers' willingness to engage in transactions.

The result aligns with previous research emphasizing the central role of trust in online consumer behavior and digital commerce environments.

Mediating Role of Brand Trust

The mediation analysis confirms that brand trust partially mediates the relationships

between digital marketing, social media engagement, and purchase intention. This suggests that digital marketing activities and consumer engagement influence purchase intention not only directly but also indirectly through trust-building mechanisms.

Consequently, MSMEs should focus not only on increasing online visibility but also on cultivating consumer trust through transparency, consistency, and meaningful engagement.

Research Novelty

This study contributes to marketing literature in three ways:

1. It integrates Digital Marketing, Social Media Engagement, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention into a single comprehensive model.
2. It identifies Brand Trust as a mediating mechanism explaining how digital marketing activities translate into consumer purchase intentions.
3. It provides empirical evidence from MSMEs, a sector that remains underrepresented in digital marketing research.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The study extends digital marketing theory by demonstrating that trust is a critical pathway through which marketing activities influence consumer behavior.

Managerial Implications

MSME owners should invest in high-quality digital content, strengthen consumer interactions on social media, and implement trust-building strategies.

Policy Implications

Government agencies should provide training programs that help MSMEs develop digital marketing competencies and customer relationship management skills.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Digital Marketing and Social Media Engagement significantly influence Brand Trust and Purchase Intention among MSME consumers. Brand Trust serves as a crucial mediating variable that strengthens the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. The findings suggest that MSMEs seeking sustainable growth should focus on building consumer trust through interactive and customer-centered digital marketing practices.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study focuses exclusively on MSME consumers in Indonesia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts.

Second, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships over time.

Third, the study incorporates only four major variables, while other relevant factors such as customer satisfaction, perceived value, electronic word-of-mouth, and brand image may also influence purchase intention.

Future Research Directions

Future studies are encouraged to expand the proposed model by incorporating additional variables such as customer satisfaction, perceived value, customer loyalty, electronic word-of-mouth, and artificial intelligence-driven marketing.

Longitudinal research designs may provide deeper insights into the dynamic relationships among digital marketing activities, trust development, and consumer purchasing behavior. Comparative studies across industries and countries may also enhance the generalizability of findings.

Managerial Implications

The findings provide several practical implications for MSME owners and marketing practitioners.

First, businesses should invest in creating high-quality and informative digital content that addresses consumer needs and preferences.

Second, organizations should actively encourage consumer engagement on social media platforms through interactive campaigns, user-generated content, and community-building initiatives.

Third, managers should prioritize trust-building strategies by ensuring transparency, consistency, and responsiveness in all digital interactions.

By implementing these strategies, MSMEs can strengthen customer relationships, enhance brand trust, and ultimately improve purchase intention and business performance.

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