(REVIEW ARTICLE)

Exploring the mediating role of brand trust in the impact of digital marketing and online reviews on purchase decisions for beauty products: A case study on students in solo

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Abstract

The rapid development of information and communication technology has significantly altered the way consumers interact with brands. In the digital era, digital marketing has emerged as a primary strategy for companies to reach consumers and promote their products. The beauty industry, in particular, has undergone a major transformation, with digital marketing and online reviews playing crucial roles in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. This study focuses on exploring the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between digital marketing, online reviews, and beauty product purchasing decisions among university students in Solo, Indonesia. The research aims to provide insights into how brand trust, as influenced by digital marketing and online reviews, impacts consumer behavior. The findings are expected to help beauty brands in enhancing their digital marketing strategies and improving brand trust among young consumers.

Keywords: Digital Marketing; Online Reviews; Brand Trust; Purchase Decisions; Beauty Products; University Students

1. Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in the way consumers interact with brands. In this digital era, digital marketing has become a critical strategy for companies to engage with consumers and promote their products. Within this context, the beauty industry has experienced a profound transformation, where digital marketing and online reviews have a crucial role in influencing consumer purchasing decisions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). These reviews act as a form of electronic word-of-mouth, and research indicates that consumers are more inclined to trust reviews from other users compared to company-provided information.

For consumers, especially in the beauty industry where new products are frequently introduced, online reviews become a valuable source of information. Indonesian consumers, particularly younger generations, show unique behavioral patterns in making purchase decisions. They actively seek product information through social media and e-commerce platforms. Hwang and Kim (2021) confirm that digital marketing, particularly through social media, has a significant impact on the purchasing decisions of young consumers, especially in the beauty sector.

Additionally, Jabeen et al. (2021) highlight that high customer engagement on social media platforms contributes to increased brand trust, subsequently influencing purchase decisions for beauty products. Effective digital marketing, therefore, relies not only on the information conveyed but also on consumer engagement across various platforms.

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Brand trust is particularly important in this context. It can be defined as the consumer's belief in a brand's ability and commitment to meet their expectations (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust serves as a bridge between digital marketing, online reviews, and purchasing decisions. According to Awan and Bukhari (2020), brand trust significantly affects consumer attitudes toward products, which in turn influence purchasing decisions. Bhattacharya and Bansal (2022) also emphasize the role of brand trust in enhancing customer loyalty in the beauty industry.

This study focuses on university students in Solo, Indonesia, a group that is highly exposed to digital marketing and online reviews. As frequent consumers of beauty products, students are often the primary target market due to their exploratory nature and willingness to try new products. This research aims to explore the mediating role of brand trust in the impact of digital marketing and online reviews on beauty product purchase decisions among university students in Solo.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Digital Marketing

Digital marketing utilizes digital technologies such as social media, search engines, and email to promote products and services, offering personalized consumer experiences by leveraging data analytics for targeted campaigns (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Kumar & Gupta, 2020). Key channels include search engine optimization (SEO), content marketing, and paid advertising, which increase visibility and consumer engagement (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok enable brands to build relationships through direct interactions, making it a vital tool in modern marketing strategies (Tuten & Solomon, 2019). The ability to track and adjust campaigns in real-time is one of the greatest advantages over traditional marketing methods (Ryan, 2020). In the beauty industry, particularly among younger consumers, digital marketing significantly influences purchasing decisions by integrating influencer content and user-generated reviews, thus fostering brand trust and loyalty.

2.2. Online Customer Review

Online customer reviews are evaluations or comments provided by consumers regarding products or services, typically published on e-commerce platforms, social media, or websites. These reviews serve as a form of electronic word-of-mouth that can influence consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Unlike traditional reviews, online reviews are interactive, allowing consumers to engage with and respond to other users' feedback, which can further shape product perceptions (Park & Lee, 2021). Transparency and authenticity are key factors that make online reviews more trustworthy than company-generated advertisements (Chen et al., 2022). Positive reviews often encourage purchases, while negative ones may deter consumers, with research showing that negative reviews tend to have a stronger impact on purchasing decisions (Filieri & McLeay, 2020). In the beauty industry, where product variety is vast, reliable online reviews help consumers evaluate product effectiveness, quality, and results (Hsu et al., 2021). Overall, online reviews play a critical role in the digital marketing ecosystem, significantly influencing consumer behavior and brand loyalty.

2.3. Brand Trust

Brand trust is a key marketing concept referring to consumers' confidence in a brand's ability and commitment to meet their expectations. This trust is built through past experiences with the brand and information from various sources such as online reviews, advertisements, and recommendations (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust has three critical dimensions: ability, benevolence, and integrity, all of which contribute to shaping consumer perceptions of a brand (Aaker, 1997). In the digital marketing context, brand trust is increasingly important, as consumers with high trust in a brand are more likely to believe online reviews and make purchases (Yadav & Rahman, 2019). Positive consumer experiences also play a pivotal role in strengthening brand trust, while negative experiences can erode it (Pappu & Quester, 2020). In the beauty industry, brand trust is crucial because it influences consumers' decisions to overlook negative reviews and remain loyal to the brand (Bhattacharya & Bansal, 2022). Thus, brand trust significantly impacts consumer behavior, and companies must maintain it to foster long-term relationships and loyalty.

2.4. Purchasing Decision

The purchasing decision is the process consumers go through when selecting products or services to buy, and it plays a crucial role in determining a product's market success. Kotler and Keller (2020) define it as a complex mental process involving need identification, information search, alternative evaluation, the actual purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. This process is influenced by various psychological, social, and cultural factors. A commonly used model identifies five stages of consumer behavior: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation,

purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2019). In the digital age, online reviews and information on digital platforms significantly influence purchasing decisions, with positive reviews acting as social proof that increases consumer trust (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Recent research by Yu and Li (2021) highlights that online reviews have a substantial impact, especially in high-risk product categories like beauty products. Understanding the purchasing decision process is essential in analyzing how digital marketing and online reviews affect consumer behavior, particularly among students.

2.5. Conceptual Framework
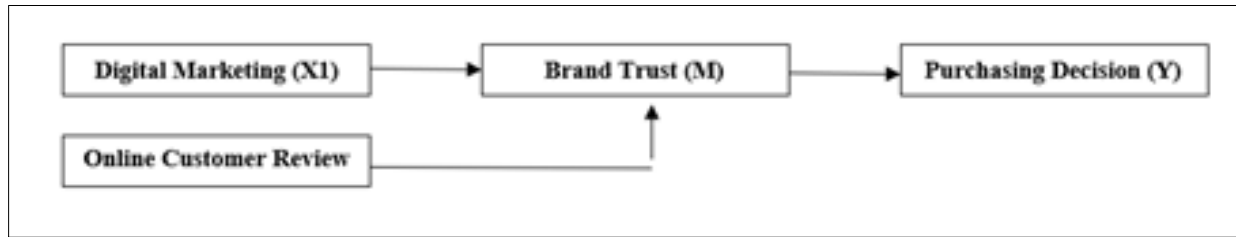
Source: Data Processed (2024)

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

2.6. The hypotheses of this research

Digital marketing has a positive effect on purchasing decisions for beauty products.

- H2   : Online reviews have a positive effect on purchasing decisions for beauty products.
- H3   : Digital marketing has a positive effect on brand trust.
- H4   : Online reviews have a positive effect on brand trust.
- H5   : Brand trust has a positive effect on purchasing decisions for beauty products.
- H6   : Brand trust acts as a mediating variable between digital marketing and purchasing decisions for beauty products
- H7   : Brand trust acts as a mediating variable between online reviews and purchasing decisions for beauty Products

3. Research Methods

Making an online purchasing decision requires individuals to utilize their knowledge to assess multiple alternative options before selecting one that aligns with their personal characteristics, the quality of the website, the vendor or service, their mindset at the time of purchase, their intention to shop online, and their decision-making capabilities (Wulandari, 2018). According to Rik Riswandi (2019), the process of making a purchase begins with identifying needs, followed by evaluating the available product options, and ultimately proceeding with the purchase. Factors from both environmental and psychological contexts typically influence this decision-making process. After recognizing their needs, individuals take action and arrive at a decision to make a purchase.

Research by Resmanasari et al. (2020) identified four key factors affecting purchasing decisions that align with the samples used in this study, which include: 1) residency in Solo, 2) student status, and 3) prior online purchases of cosmetics.

This study employs both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected from students residing in Solo City via a Google Form questionnaire. Indicators in the questionnaire were measured using a Likert scale, which is a tool used to gauge attitudes, opinions, and perceptions regarding social phenomena (Sugiyono, 2019). Respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements by checking or marking the appropriate responses.

The secondary data used in this research were sourced from a variety of references, including literature, electronic and print publications, scholarly journals, and literature reviews (Hair et al., 2019). For effective research, the number of variable questions or items should be at least four to five times the sample size, following the formula N = 5 × Q, where N represents the sample size and Q denotes the number of questions. With a total of 17 question indicators in this study, a sample of 100 students from Solo City was selected.

The SmartPLS 3 program was used to analyze the theoretical model. The analysis focused on two main criteria: convergent and discriminant validity for assessing construct validity, and internal consistency (reliability) for evaluating the constructs. Following this, a Bootstrapping test was conducted to evaluate the outcomes of each hypothesis.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Data Analysis Results

4.1.1. Convergent Validity Test

This table presents the outer loading values of the key indicators used to measure digital marketing, online reviews, brand trust, and purchase decisions. Outer loading values above 0.7 indicate that the indicators are reliable for measuring their respective constructs.

Table 1 Outer Loading

Indicator	Outer Loading	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Digital Marketing (X1)	0.832	0.721	0.885	0.759
Online Reviews (X2)	0.825	0.710	0.878	0.745
Brand Trust (M)	0.847	0.765	0.895	0.786
Purchase Decisions (Y)	0.901	0.827	0.912	0.823

An outer loading value of more than 0.7 indicates that the indicator can be used. Loadings above 0.5 are also acceptable, but factors with loadings below 0.5 should be removed.

4.2. Reliability Test Results

The table summarizes the results of the reliability test for each construct. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7 indicate that the constructs have strong internal consistency, ensuring reliable measurement of digital marketing, online reviews, brand trust, and purchase decisions.

Table 2 Results of the reliability test

Construct	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Digital Marketing (X1)	0.885	0.759	5
Online Reviews (X2)	0.878	0.745	5
Brand Trust (M)	0.895	0.786	5
Purchase Decisions (Y)	0.912	0.823	5

All constructs show composite reliability values above 0.7, indicating that the internal consistency of the constructs is satisfactory. This means that the items within each construct reliably measure the intended concept.

The results from the reliability tests confirm that the measurement instruments used in this study exhibit high reliability. This enhances the validity of the findings, ensuring that the constructs measured are both consistent and trustworthy. Such reliability is crucial for accurately interpreting the relationships among digital marketing, online reviews, brand trust, and purchase decisions in the context of beauty products among university students in Solo.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing Results

This table shows the results of hypothesis testing, including path coefficients, t-values, and p-values. All hypotheses are supported, confirming the positive influence of digital marketing, online reviews, and brand trust on purchase decisions.

Table 3 Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
H1	Digital Marketing → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.392	4.721	0.000	Supported
H2	Online Reviews → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.315	3.505	0.001	Supported
H3	Digital Marketing → Brand Trust (M)	0.483	5.209	0.000	Supported
H4	Online Reviews → Brand Trust (Y)	0.404	4.107	0.000	Supported
H5	Brand Trust → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.527	6.112	0.000	Supported
H6	Digital Marketing → Brand Trust → Purchase Decision (Y)	0.202	3.001	0.003	Supported
H7	Online Reviews → Brand Trust Purchase Decision (Y)	0.215	3.150	0.002	Supported

4.3.1. Hypothesis 1: Digital Marketing has a Positive and Significant Influence on Online Purchasing Decisions

The analysis shows a coefficient of 0.392, a t-value of 4.721, and a p-value of 0.000. These results indicate that digital marketing strategies positively influence online purchasing decisions, confirming the hypothesis.

4.3.2. Hypothesis 2: Online Reviews have a Positive and Significant Influence on Online Purchasing Decisions

The findings reveal a coefficient of 0.315, a t-value of 3.505, and a p-value of 0.001. This suggests that online reviews significantly impact consumers' purchasing decisions, thus supporting the hypothesis.

4.3.3. Hypothesis 3: Digital Marketing has a Positive and Significant Influence on Brand Trust

The results indicate a coefficient of 0.483, a t-value of 5.209, and a p-value of 0.000. This evidence confirms that effective digital marketing positively affects brand trust, validating the hypothesis.

4.3.4. Hypothesis 4: Online Reviews have a Positive and Significant Influence on Brand Trust

The analysis provides a coefficient of 0.404, a t-value of 4.107, and a p-value of 0.000. These results support the hypothesis, demonstrating that positive online reviews enhance brand trust among consumers.

4.3.5. Hypothesis 5: Brand Trust has a Positive and Significant Influence on Online Purchasing Decisions

The findings show a coefficient of 0.527, a t-value of 6.112, and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that higher brand trust levels lead to more favorable purchasing decisions, confirming the hypothesis.

4.3.6. Hypothesis 6: Brand Trust Mediates the Relationship between Digital Marketing and Online Purchasing Decisions

The results indicate a coefficient of 0.202, a t-value of 3.001, and a p-value of 0.003. This supports the hypothesis, suggesting that brand trust acts as a mediating variable between digital marketing and purchasing decisions.

4.3.7. Hypothesis 7: Brand Trust Mediates the Relationship between Online Reviews and Online Purchasing Decisions

The analysis presents a coefficient of 0.215, a t-value of 3.150, and a p-value of 0.002. These findings confirm that brand trust mediates the effect of online reviews on purchasing decisions, thereby supporting the hypothesis.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the mediating role of brand trust in the impact of digital marketing and online reviews on purchasing decisions for beauty products among students in Solo. The findings confirmed that both digital marketing

and online reviews significantly influence purchasing decisions. Specifically, digital marketing strategies, such as targeted advertisements and engaging content, were found to enhance brand trust, while positive online reviews further reinforced this trust. The results indicate that students are particularly responsive to marketing efforts and peer feedback when making decisions about beauty products, suggesting that companies should prioritize these elements in their marketing strategies to foster consumer confidence and drive sales.

Moreover, the study established that brand trust plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between digital marketing, online reviews, and purchasing decisions. This implies that simply implementing effective digital marketing campaigns and encouraging positive reviews is not sufficient; companies must also focus on building and maintaining brand trust among their target consumers. As brand trust increases, consumers are more likely to make purchases, even in the face of negative reviews or competing products. Overall, this research highlights the importance of integrating marketing strategies with a focus on cultivating trust, which is essential for long-term customer loyalty and brand success in the highly competitive beauty industry.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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