



## **THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING AND SHOPEE'S BRAND IMAGE ON PURCHASE DECISIONS MEDIATED BY CUSTOMER TRUST**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The digital transformation in e-commerce has fundamentally reshaped consumer behavior, making social media marketing, brand image, and trust critical drivers of purchasing actions. This study investigates the direct and indirect influences of Social Media Marketing and Brand Image on Purchase Decisions, with Customer Trust acting as a mediating variable, focusing on Shopee users. Utilizing a quantitative approach, empirical data were collected through an online structured questionnaire administered to active Shopee consumers who engage with the platform's social media channels. The analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate both the measurement and structural models. The findings reveal that both Social Media Marketing and Brand Image exert a significant positive direct effect on Customer Trust and Purchase Decisions. Furthermore, Customer Trust was confirmed to significantly mediate the relationship between marketing efforts, brand perception, and final purchasing behavior. These empirical results emphasize that while marketing exposure and strong brand identity draw consumer interest, sustainable transaction completion heavily relies on cultivating trust within the digital ecosystem. Practically, the study provides strategic insights for e-commerce platforms to align interactive marketing with rigorous trust-building mechanisms.*

*Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, Customer Trust, Purchase Decision, E-Commerce, Shopee.*

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology over the past two decades has fundamentally changed the global trade landscape, driving a transition from conventional brick-and-mortar stores to an e-commerce ecosystem (Al-Dmour et al., 2023). In Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, the e-commerce market is experiencing exponential growth driven by increasing internet penetration and massive smartphone usage. Amidst highly competitive digital markets, Shopee has successfully established its position as one of the largest and most dominant marketplaces in the region. However, the dynamics of consumer behavior in the digital era require e-commerce platforms to continuously understand the psychological and strategic factors that influence user purchase decisions in order to maintain their market share (Gautam & Sharma, 2020).

One of the most transformative marketing instruments in today's digital ecosystem is social media marketing. Social media marketing is no longer simply a one-way communication channel, but rather an interactive platform that enables brands to build sustainable, two-way relationships with potential consumers (Cheung et al., 2021). Shopee aggressively leverages various social media channels such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter through creative content, live streaming programs, viral hashtags, and influencer partnerships to capture public attention. Structured and interactive social media marketing activities have been proven to create high engagement, which in turn stimulates consumers' sensory and emotional stimulation, triggering interest and purchasing actions (Bilgin, 2018). In addition to the effectiveness of social media marketing, brand image plays a crucial role as the foundation for product differentiation amidst a sea of similar marketplace options. Brand image reflects a set of associations, perceptions, and beliefs stored in consumers' memories about a particular brand (Keller, 2020). For Shopee, establishing a strong brand image identified by easy access, a wide product variety, competitive pricing, and a striking visual identity is a key determinant in shaping customer perceptions of value. A positive brand image not only acts as a signal of quality and reliability but can also minimize the perceived risk that often looms over online transactions (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020).

Although marketers invest heavily in social media marketing and brand image building, these two variables often do not directly lead consumers to purchase without the presence of belief-building variables. In a digital transaction environment, where consumers cannot touch or inspect goods directly before purchasing, customer trust becomes a vital intermediary factor (Gefen et al., 2003). Trust is defined as the willingness of one party to rely on another party based on the belief that that party has integrity, ability, and benevolence in meeting expectations (Mayer et al., 1995). Without trust in transaction security, personal data protection, and seller reliability, positive responses to social media promotions and brand image will not be realized into actual purchasing decisions (Handarkho, 2020).

Theoretically, the relationship between these variables can be explained through the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). In the context of this study, social media marketing activities and brand image act as external stimuli (S) that are captured by consumers. These stimuli are then processed internally in the consumer's cognitive and affective domains, which form the perception of customer trust as an organismal state (O). The final result of this internal evaluation triggers actual consumer behavior, namely their decision to make a purchase transaction (purchase decision) as a form of response (R) (Peng & Kim, 2020). The use of this SOR framework helps explain the deep psychological mechanisms of how marketing stimuli evolve into

concrete actions. Shopee's social media marketing approach consistently presents product information, user reviews, and livestreams that validate product quality claims. Previous research by Ibrahim and Alajahbawi (2023) showed that transparency and timeliness of information delivered through social media marketing directly increase consumer trust in online platforms. Consumers feel more secure when they can interact consistently and see social proof in the form of recommendations or positive responses from other users on social media. Therefore, well-designed social media marketing activities not only expand market reach but also build a solid foundation of customer trust.

On the other hand, a good brand reputation and image serve as an implicit guarantee that reduces consumer anxiety during the online shopping process. According to research by Chen and Chou (2012), a superior brand image directly strengthens customer trust because consumers associate well-known brands with high service standards and guaranteed problem resolution. Shopee, widely known for its return guarantee and payment protection, has successfully established its brand as a reliable platform. When consumers' perceived brand image aligns with their expectations of safety and convenience, customer trust in the Shopee ecosystem will significantly increase. The direct impact of customer trust on purchase decisions has been consistently demonstrated in various digital consumer behavior literature. According to Kim et al. (2008), trust is a key determinant of success in e-commerce because it reduces perceived risk associated with transaction uncertainty. Consumers with a high level of trust in an e-commerce platform will experience lower emotional and rational barriers when clicking the purchase button. In the case of Shopee, trust that goods will be delivered as described and funds secured in Shopee's escrow are key drivers that transform purchase intentions into actual transactions (Suhaily & Soelasih, 2017).

Although the direct relationship between social media marketing, brand image, and purchase decisions has been extensively researched, understanding the mediating role of customer trust still requires deeper and context-specific empirical exploration. Several studies have shown a research gap, where intensive social media interactions sometimes fail to result in purchase decisions if the social media channel is perceived as too commercial or inauthentic (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). This indicates that social media marketing and brand image may not always have a direct impact on purchasing actions, but rather require a cognitive filtering process in the form of building customer trust first to drive consistent buyer behavior (Wu et al., 2018).

The implications of this dynamic are crucial for e-commerce managers and digital marketing practitioners. Relying heavily on social media promotions or simply relying on brand popularity without nurturing trust can lead to high rates of cart abandonment by consumers. The phenomenon of users actively browsing products on Shopee but hesitating to complete payment underscores the need for intervening variables such as customer trust. Therefore, evaluating the role of customer trust as a mediating variable will provide a holistic picture of the effectiveness of the chain of influence from initial marketing strategies to final transaction conversions (Akyuz, 2018). Based on the problem description and theoretical arguments above, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the influence of Social Media Marketing and Brand Image on Purchase Decision, both directly and indirectly through Customer Trust as a mediating variable on Shopee users. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to enrich the literature on digital marketing management and consumer

behavior, as well as provide practical contributions for e-commerce industry managers in formulating sustainable trust-based marketing strategies in the digital commerce era.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with a causal associative design to test the causal relationships and mediating roles between the variables studied (Hair et al., 2021). The population in this study were all active users of the Shopee e-commerce platform in Indonesia who regularly interact with Shopee's official social media accounts. Due to the infinite population size, the sampling technique used was non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling approach, where the respondent criteria were determined including: consumers aged at least 18 years, having made a transaction on Shopee in the last three months, and actively following Shopee's social media accounts (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The sample size was determined based on SEM analysis rules, which is a minimum of 5 to 10 times the number of research indicators, so the target is 150 to 200 respondents to ensure the stability of the model estimation (Kline, 2023). Primary data collection was conducted online through the distribution of structured questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) which measures indicators of Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, Customer Trust, and Purchase Decision.

Data analysis in this study applied the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique with the help of SmartPLS software, which is very effective for testing complex relationship models and mediating variables without requiring strict data normality assumptions (Ringle et al., 2020). Model evaluation was carried out through two main stages, namely the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and the evaluation of the structural model (inner model) (Hair et al., 2019). Testing the outer model included a convergent validity test (seen from the loading factor value  $> 0.70$  and Average Variance Extracted / AVE  $> 0.50$ ), discriminant validity (using the Fornell-Larcker and HTMT criteria  $< 0.90$ ), and construct reliability (seen from Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha  $> 0.70$ ) (Sarstedt et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the evaluation of the inner model was carried out to assess the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ), and path coefficient values to assess the strength and significance of the relationship between constructs through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples (Hair et al., 2021).

Based on the formulation of the problem, theoretical basis, and framework of thought that has been developed, the hypothesis proposed in this study was tested at a significance level of 5% ( $\alpha = 0,05$ ) with the criteria of t-statistic value  $> 1.96$  and p-value  $< 0.05$  (Hair et al., 2019). Testing the hypothesis of the mediation effect of Customer Trust refers to the indirect effect testing approach developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The research hypotheses tested empirically are as follows: 1). H1: Social Media Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Customer Trust. 2). H2: Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Customer Trust. 3). H3: Social Media Marketing has a positive and significant influence on Purchase Decision. 4). H4: Brand Image has a positive and significant influence on Purchase Decision. 5). H5: Customer Trust has a positive and significant effect on Purchase Decision. 6). H6: Customer Trust mediates the influence of

Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decision. 7). H7: Customer Trust mediates the influence of Brand Image on Purchase Decision.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Research result

Evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) showed that all research indicators met the construct validity and reliability criteria. The outer loading values for each indicator of the variables Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, Customer Trust, and Purchase Decision were above the threshold of 0.70, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for each construct exceeded 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021). Reliability testing produced Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.70 for all variables, confirming the instrument's internal consistency. Furthermore, discriminant validity testing using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criteria showed values below 0.85 for all pairs of constructs, indicating that each variable was empirically proven to be separate from one another (Sarstedt et al., 2020).

**Table 1**  
Structural Model Evaluation Results (Inner Model)

| Relationship of Variables / Hypothesis             | Original Sample (O) | Sample Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (STDEV) | T Statistics ( O/STDEV ) | P Values | Information |
|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|-------------|
| <b>H1:</b><br>SMM→Customer Trust                   | 0.385               | 0.388           | 0.062                      | 6,210                    | 0,000    | Accepted    |
| <b>H2:</b> Brand Image→Customer Trust              | 0.442               | 0.439           | 0.065                      | 6,800                    | 0,000    | Accepted    |
| <b>H3:</b><br>SMM→Purchase Decision                | 0.215               | 0.218           | 0.058                      | 3,707                    | 0,000    | Accepted    |
| <b>H4:</b> Brand Image→Purchase Decision           | 0.268               | 0.265           | 0.061                      | 4,393                    | 0,000    | Accepted    |
| <b>H5:</b> Customer Trust→Purchase Decision        | 0.412               | 0.411           | 0.064                      | 6,438                    | 0,000    | Accepted    |
| <b>H6:</b><br>SMM→Customer Trust→Purchase Decision | 0.159               | 0.160           | 0.032                      | 4,969                    | 0,000    | Accepted    |
| <b>H7:</b> Brand Image→Customer                    | 0.182               | 0.180           | 0.034                      | 5,353                    | 0,000    | Accepted    |

|                            |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Trust→Purchase<br>Decision |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|

Evaluation of the structural model (inner model) produces a coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.612 for the Customer Trust variable, which indicates that 61.2% of the variance of customer trust is determined by the interaction of Social Media Marketing and Brand Image. Meanwhile, the value  $R^2$  for Purchase Decision recorded a figure of 0.689, which means that 68.9% of the variance in purchasing decisions is explained jointly by Social Media Marketing, Brand Image, and Customer Trust. Predictive relevance testing ( $Q^2$ ) using the blindfolding procedure yielded values above zero for both endogenous variables, confirming the adequate predictive capabilities of the model. The results of hypothesis testing through the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples are presented in Table 1. The test results show that all direct hypotheses (H1 to H5) are proven to have a positive and significant effect ( $p < 0,05$  And  $t\text{-statistic} > 1,96$ ). Testing of indirect effects (H6 and H7) which utilizes the specific indirect effects approach also proves that Customer Trust significantly mediates the influence of Social Media Marketing ( $t = 4,969$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) and Brand Image ( $t = 5,353$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) on Purchase Decision.

## Discussion

### The Influence of Social Media Marketing on Customer Trust (H1)

Empirical findings confirm that Social Media Marketing has a positive and significant influence on Customer Trust ( $\beta = 0,385$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ). Shopee's marketing activities through social media platforms—such as interactive content creation, live streaming sessions, and the responsiveness of official accounts—successfully fostered trust among users. This finding aligns with social cognitive theory and research by Ibrahim and Alajahbawi (2023), which states that transparency and active digital communication channels reduce perceived risk in interacting with brands. The transparency of information presented on social media provides consumers with assurance regarding the legitimacy of e-commerce operations and the quality of service.

### The Influence of Brand Image on Customer Trust (H2)

Brand Image has been proven to have the most dominant positive influence on the formation of Customer Trust ( $\beta = 0,442$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ). The association of the Shopee brand as a versatile, secure, and easy-to-use platform creates expectations of consistent performance in the eyes of consumers. These results reinforce Keller's (2020) argument regarding brand equity, where a strong image acts as an implicit guarantee of quality. In the context of the e-commerce market, a solid brand reputation reduces buyer doubts regarding the reliability of digital transactions, in line with the results of a study by Chen and Chou (2012) which confirmed that the perception of a brand's reputation is directly proportional to the level of consumer transaction trust.

### The Influence of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions (H3)

The direct influence of Social Media Marketing on Purchase Decisions was recorded as positive and significant ( $\beta = 0,215$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ). Promotional exposure, interactive quizzes, and twin-date campaigns integrated on social media directly stimulate consumer impulses and rational considerations to make purchases. According to Cheung et al. (2021), social media interactions act as marketing stimuli that shorten the decision-making process by providing direct access to product navigation. Although the direct impact is smaller than the indirect pathway, the role of social media marketing as an initial driver of transaction decisions remains significantly proven.

### Influence of Brand Image on Purchase Decision (H4)

Brand Image has a direct positive and significant impact on Purchase Decision ( $\beta = 0,268$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ). Consumers with a positive perception of the Shopee brand tend to spend less time evaluating alternative platforms when shopping online. This finding supports the synthesis of Dabbous and Barakat (2020), who explained that a good brand image acts as a heuristic shortcut in the consumer decision-making process. The existence of a warranty guarantee and a trusted marketplace association minimizes choice overload and encourages immediate transaction execution.

### **The Influence of Customer Trust on Purchase Decisions (H5)**

Customer Trust has a very strong direct influence on Purchase Decision ( $\beta = 0,412$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ). A sense of trust that the payment system is secure, that personal data is kept confidential, and that the return mechanism functions efficiently are key factors in converting purchase intentions into actual transactions. These findings support the framework of Kim et al. (2008) and research by Suhaily and Soelasih (2017), which positions trust as the most critical determinant in e-commerce. Without sufficient trust, fear of financial risk or product non-conformity will hinder payment completion.

### **The Mediating Role of Customer Trust (H6 & H7)**

The results of the indirect effect analysis prove that Customer Trust plays a significant partial mediation role in the Social Media Marketing relationship path ( $\beta = 0,159$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) and Brand Image ( $\beta = 0,182$ ;  $p < 0,05$ ) on Purchase Decision. Through the lens of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theoretical framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Peng & Kim, 2020), external stimuli in the form of social media marketing and brand image do not directly trigger a purchase response. These stimuli first influence the consumer's internal state (organism), namely the building of trust (Customer Trust), before finally being executed in the form of a purchase decision (Response).

The presence of this mediation effect addresses the research gap identified by Tuten and Solomon (2018) and Wu et al. (2018). Intense social media interactions or a popular brand image will not optimally translate into actual sales without first successfully building a foundation of trust. Consumer trust validates marketing messages and brand reputation, thereby reducing transaction hesitation. Thus, strengthening customer trust is proven to be a key mechanism linking initial marketing investments to the final outcome, namely consumer transaction decisions on the Shopee platform.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study empirically demonstrates that *social media marketing* and *brand image* play a crucial role in shaping *customer trust* and driving consumer *purchase decisions on the Shopee e-commerce platform*. Data analysis confirms that interactive and informative social media marketing activities, combined with a strong and reputable brand image, significantly contribute to increasing user confidence and a sense of security (Ibrahim & Alajahbawi, 2023; Keller, 2020). These findings emphasize that in a dynamic digital commerce market, positive perceptions of communication channels and brand identity are essential foundations for attracting consumer transactions.

Furthermore, structural model testing shows that *Customer Trust* is proven to be the most dominant determinant in directly influencing *Purchase Decisions*. Consumers who have a high level of trust in the reliability of the payment system, personal data security, and transaction protection guarantees on Shopee show a higher tendency to execute purchase actions (Kim et al., 2008; Suhaily & Soelasih, 2017). Customer trust acts as a key driver capable of reducing concerns about perceived risk, so that purchase intentions arising from promotional stimuli can be realized into actual transactions effectively.

Academically, the main contribution of this research lies in proving the partial mediation role of *Customer Trust* in linking *Social Media Marketing* and *Brand Image* to *Purchase Decisions*. Based on the *Stimulus-Organism-Response* (SOR) theoretical framework, social media marketing exposure and brand reputation function as external stimuli that do not immediately result in transaction decisions without going through internal cognitive processing in the form of trust formation (Peng & Kim, 2020; Wu et al., 2018). This mediation effect confirms that the effectiveness of an initial marketing campaign is highly dependent on the extent to which the strategy is able to cultivate consumer trust first.

Practically, these findings provide managerial implications for *e-commerce* platform managers and digital marketing practitioners to allocate resources to sustainable trust-building strategies. Shopee management is advised to not only focus on massive sales promotions on social media, but also strengthen elements of authenticity, responsive customer service, and transparency of product information to maintain *Customer Trust* (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). For future research, it is recommended to expand the sample scope and integrate additional variables such as *Perceived Risk*, *E-WOM*, or *Customer Satisfaction* to enrich the understanding of the dynamics of digital consumer behavior more holistically.

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