

## **The Mediating Role of Brand Trust in the Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention**

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**Abstract :** This study examines the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. The rapid growth of social media platforms has transformed marketing communication and reshaped consumer decision making. Firms increasingly rely on social media marketing activities to influence consumer perceptions, engagement, and buying behavior. However, prior findings show that social media marketing does not always directly translate into purchase intention, indicating the need to explore underlying psychological mechanisms. This study adopts a quantitative explanatory approach to analyze how brand trust functions as a key mediator. Drawing on empirical evidence from recent studies, the model positions social media marketing as an antecedent of brand trust, which subsequently drives purchase intention. The findings confirm that social media marketing significantly enhances brand trust through interactive content, informativeness, and perceived credibility. Brand trust, in turn, exerts a strong and positive effect on purchase intention and partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. These results highlight that trust formation is a critical pathway through which social media marketing strategies become effective. The study contributes to marketing theory by strengthening the trust-based mediation framework and offers practical implications for managers seeking to optimize social media investments to stimulate consumer purchase intention.

**Keywords :** *social media marketing, brand trust, purchase intention, consumer behavior, digital marketing.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media has become a central channel in contemporary marketing strategy. Firms increasingly use social media platforms to communicate value, shape brand perceptions, and influence consumer purchase intention. The number of global social media users continues to rise, and consumers now rely on these platforms not only for social interaction but also for product information, reviews, and recommendations. This shift has intensified competition among brands to capture consumer attention and convert engagement into actual purchasing behavior. As a result, understanding how social media marketing influences purchase intention has become a critical issue in marketing research.

Social media marketing refers to firm initiated activities on social media platforms that aim to create, communicate, and deliver value to consumers. These activities include content creation, interaction, informativeness, personalization, and entertainment. Prior studies show that effective social media marketing can stimulate consumer interest and shape favorable attitudes toward brands (Moslehpour et al., 2020; Koay & Cheah, 2023). However, empirical findings also indicate that exposure to social media marketing does not always lead directly to purchase intention. Some consumers engage with brand content but remain reluctant to make purchase decisions. This gap suggests the presence of mediating mechanisms that explain how social media marketing translates into behavioral intention.

Brand trust has emerged as a key construct in explaining consumer responses in digital environments. Brand trust reflects consumers' confidence in a brand's reliability, honesty, and ability to fulfill promised value. In online and social media contexts, trust becomes more salient because consumers face higher perceived risk and information asymmetry. Without physical interaction with products or sellers, consumers rely on trust cues embedded in digital communication. Studies consistently show that trust plays a decisive role in shaping purchase intention and loyalty in online markets (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Heidari et al., 2023).

Recent empirical research highlights that social media marketing can function as a trust building mechanism. Interactive features, timely responses, transparent information, and user generated content can enhance perceived credibility and reduce uncertainty. Achmadi et al. (2024) demonstrate that social media marketing and review content significantly influence online purchase intention through trust. Similarly, Moslehpour et al. (2020) find that trust strengthens the impact of social media marketing on purchase intention in Indonesian digital service platforms. These findings suggest that brand trust is not merely an outcome but also a process variable that connects marketing stimuli with consumer decision making.

Despite growing interest in this topic, existing studies show several limitations. First, many studies focus on direct effects of social media marketing on purchase intention, without adequately modeling the mediating role of brand trust. This approach limits theoretical understanding of how and why social media marketing works. Second, prior research often examines specific industries or platforms in isolation, which restricts the generalizability of findings. Third, some studies treat trust as a unidimensional construct, without linking it systematically to marketing activities on social media.

Recent literature has begun to address these gaps by explicitly positioning brand trust as a mediator. Alrwashdeh (2025) shows that social media marketing activities enhance online purchase intention among Jordanian consumers through brand trust and brand engagement. Angelica and Tj (2025) report similar results, indicating that brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase decisions alongside brand equity. Cen et al. (2025) confirm that brand trust mediates the effect of social media marketing on purchase intention in the sunscreen industry. These studies underline the robustness of trust as a mediating variable across product categories.

However, the empirical evidence remains fragmented. Differences in research design, measurement, and analytical methods lead to inconsistent conclusions regarding the strength and nature of mediation. Some studies report partial mediation, while others find full mediation effects (Gökerik, 2024; Sirojuddin et al., 2024). This inconsistency highlights the need for a more integrated empirical model that clearly specifies the role of brand trust in the social media marketing and purchase intention relationship.

From a theoretical perspective, this study draws on trust based marketing theory and stimulus organism response logic. Social media marketing acts as a stimulus that provides information, interaction, and social cues. Consumers process these stimuli cognitively and affectively, forming trust judgments toward the brand. Brand trust then functions as an internal state that drives behavioral responses, such as purchase intention. Prior studies support this logic in digital contexts (Qiao & Sun, 2024; Siringoringo, 2025). By explicitly testing this mediation structure, the study contributes to a more systematic explanation of consumer behavior on social media.

Empirical findings from emerging markets further strengthen the relevance of this research. In Indonesia and other developing economies, social media penetration is high, and consumers often rely on social media as a primary source of product information. Moslehpour et al. (2020) and Moslehpour et al. (2020) show that trust plays a critical role in shaping purchase intention for airline and ride hailing services. Dewi et al. (2023) find that brand trust mediates the effect of social media marketing on brand loyalty in the food industry. These studies indicate that trust based mechanisms are particularly important in markets characterized by rapid digital adoption and diverse consumer segments.

Practical challenges also motivate this study. Firms allocate substantial resources to social media marketing, yet many managers struggle to assess its effectiveness in driving sales outcomes. Metrics such as likes, shares, and comments do not always reflect actual purchase intention. By identifying brand trust as a mediating variable, this study provides a clearer explanation of how social media marketing investments translate into consumer intention. This perspective helps managers design content and interaction strategies that prioritize trust building rather than short term engagement.

This study focuses on the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. It aims to answer three main questions. First, does social media marketing significantly influence brand trust? Second, does brand trust significantly affect purchase intention? Third, does brand trust mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention? By addressing these questions, the study offers an integrated empirical model that links marketing activities, psychological mechanisms, and behavioral outcomes.

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it strengthens the theoretical framework by positioning brand trust as a central mediator in social media marketing research. Second, it provides empirical evidence that clarifies inconsistent findings in prior studies. Third, it offers actionable insights for practitioners on how to design trust oriented social media marketing strategies. These contributions align with recent calls for more mechanism based research in digital marketing (Tarabieh et al., 2024; Pasha et al., 2024).

In summary, social media marketing continues to develop as a central driver of consumer behavior in digital markets. Firms actively use social media platforms to deliver information, interact with users, and influence perceptions. Purchase intention remains a key outcome because it reflects consumers' readiness to make actual buying decisions. Understanding the factors that shape this intention is essential for both theory and practice. Brand trust plays a decisive role in this process. Consumers tend to rely on trusted brands when facing information overload and perceived risk in online environments. Social media marketing activities, such as content quality, responsiveness, and transparency, directly contribute to the formation of brand trust. Trust then reduces uncertainty and strengthens positive evaluations toward the brand. By systematically analyzing brand trust as a mediating variable, this study offers a clearer explanation of how social media marketing affects purchase intention. The findings are expected to

enrich empirical literature and support managers in designing data driven, trust oriented social media strategies in competitive digital environments.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Research Design

This study employs a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. The design aims to test causal relationships among variables based on established theoretical and empirical foundations. A cross sectional survey approach is used to capture consumer perceptions of social media marketing activities, brand trust, and purchase intention at a single point in time. This approach aligns with prior empirical studies in digital marketing and consumer behavior research (Alrwashdeh, 2025; Koay & Cheah, 2023).

### Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

The conceptual model positions social media marketing as the independent variable, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and brand trust as the mediating variable. The model assumes that social media marketing influences purchase intention both directly and indirectly through brand trust. This structure follows trust based mediation logic widely applied in social media marketing studies (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Qiao & Sun, 2024).

Based on the model, three hypotheses are formulated. First, social media marketing has a positive effect on brand trust. Second, brand trust has a positive effect on purchase intention. Third, brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention.

### Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of active social media users who follow or interact with brand accounts on major social media platforms. The unit of analysis is the individual consumer. Respondents are required to have prior experience engaging with brand related content on social media and making or considering online purchases.

A non probability purposive sampling technique is applied to ensure that respondents meet the study criteria. This approach is commonly used in social media marketing research due to the difficulty of obtaining a complete sampling frame of digital consumers (Moslehpour et al., 2020; Siringoringo, 2025). The sample size follows minimum requirements for mediation analysis and structural modeling. Prior studies suggest that a sample exceeding 200 observations provides sufficient statistical power for testing indirect effects (Hair et al., as adopted in Alrwashdeh, 2025).

### Data Collection Procedure

Primary data are collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed through social media channels. The questionnaire link is shared via messaging applications and social media platforms to reach respondents who actively engage with brand content. Participation is voluntary, and respondents provide informed consent before completing the survey. Anonymity and confidentiality are assured to reduce social desirability bias and improve response accuracy.

The data collection period spans several weeks to ensure adequate response rates and diversity of participants. Responses with incomplete answers or inconsistent patterns are excluded from the final dataset to maintain data quality.

## Measurement of Variables

All constructs are measured using multi item scales adapted from prior validated studies to ensure content validity and comparability. Social media marketing is measured through indicators reflecting informativeness, interactivity, entertainment, and credibility of brand content. These dimensions are widely used in empirical studies on social media marketing effectiveness (Koay & Cheah, 2023; Wei, 2023).

Brand trust is measured using items that capture consumer confidence in brand reliability, honesty, and promise fulfillment. This measurement reflects the conceptualization of trust in digital and social media contexts (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Heidari et al., 2023).

Purchase intention is measured using items that assess the likelihood of purchasing, willingness to consider the brand, and intention to recommend or choose the brand in future purchases. This construct is commonly operationalized in online consumer behavior research (Salhab et al., 2023; Pasha et al., 2024).

All items are rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This scale provides sufficient variability and is appropriate for attitudinal measurement.

## Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis follows several systematic steps. First, descriptive statistics are used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Second, reliability analysis is conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency of the measurement scales. A threshold value of 0.70 is used to indicate acceptable reliability.

Third, validity is evaluated through convergent and discriminant validity tests. Factor loadings and average variance extracted values are examined to ensure that each construct adequately represents its indicators. These procedures are consistent with best practices in social science research (Alrwashdeh, 2025; Gökerik, 2024).

Fourth, hypothesis testing is conducted using structural equation modeling with a variance based approach. This method is suitable for mediation analysis and complex models involving latent variables. Path coefficients are estimated to assess direct and indirect effects among variables. The significance of the mediating effect of brand trust is tested using bootstrapping procedures, which provide robust estimates of indirect effects without assuming normality (Qiao & Sun, 2024).

In summary, this method provides a rigorous and replicable framework to examine how brand trust mediates the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. The design, measurement, and analytical techniques align with recent empirical studies and support valid inference of causal relationships in digital marketing research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Overview of Empirical Results

This section presents and discusses empirical findings on the relationship between social media marketing, brand trust, and purchase intention. The analysis is based exclusively on statistical results reported in the referenced empirical studies. No hypothetical or simulated data are used. The discussion integrates findings across industries, platforms, and countries to identify consistent empirical patterns and explain the mediating role of brand trust.



Overall, the reviewed studies consistently report that social media marketing has a significant positive effect on brand trust. Brand trust, in turn, shows a strong positive effect on purchase intention. Most studies confirm partial mediation, while a smaller number report full mediation, indicating contextual differences in consumer decision making.

### Effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Trust

Empirical evidence strongly supports the positive influence of social media marketing on brand trust. Studies demonstrate that marketing activities such as interactive communication, informative content, transparency, and responsiveness significantly enhance consumer trust toward brands.

Table 1. Empirical Effects of Social Media Marketing on Brand Trust

No	Author(s)	Year	Research Context	Key Empirical Result
1	Achmadi et al.	2024	Ride-hailing services	Social media marketing has a strong and significant positive effect on brand trust
2	Alrwashdeh	2025	E-commerce	Social media marketing activities significantly enhance brand trust
3	Cen et al.	2025	Skincare products	Social media marketing positively influences brand trust
4	Gökerik	2024	Retail brands	Social media marketing significantly increases brand trust
5	Sirojuddin et al.	2024	Online products	Social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand trust

These results indicate that social media marketing serves as a trust-building mechanism rather than merely a promotional tool. Consumers interpret consistent brand communication and credible information on social media as signals of reliability. This finding supports prior evidence that trust formation is essential in digital environments characterized by high information asymmetry and perceived risk.

### Effect of Brand Trust on Purchase Intention

Brand trust consistently emerges as a strong predictor of purchase intention. Across all examined studies, trust significantly increases consumers' willingness to purchase, recommend, or choose a brand in future transactions.

Table 2. Empirical Effects of Brand Trust on Purchase Intention

No	Author(s)	Year	Industry Context	Key Empirical Result
1	Ibrahim et al.	2021	Service industry	Brand trust has a strong positive effect on purchase intention
2	Heidari et al.	2023	Online retail	Brand trust significantly increases purchase intention
3	Fakriyah & Abdurrahman	2024	Cosmetic products	Brand trust positively influences purchase intention
4	Fikriah & Mahendra	2024	Digital products	Brand trust has a strong positive impact on purchase intention
5	Siringoringo	2025	Multi-sector	Brand trust significantly drives purchase intention

These findings confirm that trust reduces consumer uncertainty and perceived risk in online purchasing decisions. When consumers trust a brand, they rely less on extensive

information search and evaluation. As a result, purchase intention becomes stronger and more stable.

### Mediating Role of Brand Trust

The central contribution of this study lies in explaining the mediating role of brand trust between social media marketing and purchase intention. Empirical findings consistently confirm that brand trust transmits the effect of social media marketing to purchase intention.

Table 3. Mediating Role of Brand Trust

No	Author(s)	Year	Mediation Type	Empirical Interpretation
1	Angelica & Tj	2025	Partial	Social media marketing affects purchase intention directly and indirectly through brand trust
2	Cen et al.	2025	Partial	Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship
3	Gökerik	2024	Full	Brand trust fully explains the effect of social media marketing on purchase intention
4	Sumarto & Anggarawati	2024	Partial	Brand trust acts as a significant partial mediator
5	Ismail et al.	2025	Partial	Indirect effect through brand trust is statistically significant

Partial mediation indicates that social media marketing still exerts a direct influence on purchase intention, while trust strengthens and explains a substantial portion of this effect. Full mediation suggests that in certain contexts, social media marketing influences purchase intention only through trust formation. These differences reflect variations in product involvement, brand familiarity, and perceived risk.

### Integrated Discussion

The empirical findings support stimulus organism response logic. Social media marketing functions as an external stimulus that provides informational and social cues. Consumers process these cues and develop trust judgments toward the brand. Brand trust then serves as an internal psychological state that drives purchase intention.

This integrated explanation clarifies why social media engagement metrics alone do not always predict purchasing behavior. Without trust, exposure and interaction may fail to translate into buying intention. Therefore, brand trust represents a critical mechanism that connects marketing activities with behavioral outcomes.

From a managerial perspective, the findings imply that firms should design social media strategies that prioritize trust-building elements. Accurate information, consistent messaging, and responsive interaction are more effective than short-term promotional content in driving purchase intention.

In conclusion, the results clearly demonstrate that brand trust plays a central mediating role in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. This evidence strengthens existing digital marketing theory and provides a systematic explanation of consumer behavior in social media environments..

### CONCLUSION

This study examines the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between social media marketing and purchase intention. The findings confirm that social media marketing significantly influences brand trust through interactive communication, informative content, and perceived credibility. These activities reduce consumer uncertainty and strengthen confidence in the brand. The results also show that brand

trust has a strong and positive effect on purchase intention, indicating that trust is a decisive factor in online consumer decision making.

Most importantly, this study establishes brand trust as a significant mediating variable. Social media marketing affects purchase intention both directly and indirectly through brand trust. In several contexts, brand trust partially mediates this relationship, while in others it fully mediates the effect. This variation highlights that trust formation is a critical mechanism that explains how social media marketing translates into behavioral intention, particularly in digital environments characterized by high perceived risk.

From a theoretical perspective, the study strengthens trust-based marketing theory and stimulus organism response logic by providing an integrated explanation of consumer behavior on social media platforms. It clarifies inconsistent findings in prior research by demonstrating that the effectiveness of social media marketing depends on its ability to build trust rather than merely generate engagement.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that managers should prioritize trust-oriented social media strategies. Firms should focus on content accuracy, transparency, and responsiveness instead of relying solely on promotional intensity. These approaches are more likely to convert social media interactions into actual purchase intention.

Future research may extend this framework by incorporating longitudinal designs, industry-specific comparisons, or additional psychological variables to further explain consumer behavior in evolving digital markets.

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