



The Influence of Digital Marketing on Consumer Purchase Decisions through Relationship Marketing

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of digital marketing on consumer purchase decisions, with relationship marketing as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was applied using PLS-SEM analysis, based on data from 100 consumers of poultry-based MSMEs in West Java. The results indicate that digital marketing significantly influences relationship marketing ($\beta = 0,747$) and purchase decisions ($\beta = 0,209$). Relationship marketing also shows a strong effect on purchase decisions ($\beta = 0,589$) and partially mediates the influence of digital marketing (indirect effect $\beta = 0,440$). These findings highlight the importance of integrating digital strategies with long-term relationship-building efforts to strengthen consumer loyalty and purchase behavior

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of information and communication technologies has profoundly altered the global business landscape, ushering in a new era of digital transformation. In Indonesia, this transformation is especially significant for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which constitute more than 99% of all business units and absorb more than 97% of the national workforce (Kementerian Koperasi dan UKM, 2023). As consumer behavior becomes increasingly digital, MSMEs are compelled to shift from traditional marketing strategies to more agile and interactive approaches, notably through the adoption of digital marketing.

Digital marketing is defined as the strategic use of digital technologies such as websites, social media, search engines, mobile apps, and email to communicate with current and prospective customers (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2016). Compared to traditional marketing, digital platforms allow for greater reach, lower costs, and real-time interactions. These attributes are particularly beneficial for MSMEs, which often operate under resource constraints but need to remain competitive in increasingly saturated markets.

The 2021 Digital Report by We Are Social and Hootsuite highlights that Indonesia has over 202 million internet users, with more than 170 million active on social media. This digital penetration presents a vast opportunity for MSMEs to increase brand awareness, engage with consumers, and drive sales through digital channels. However, many MSMEs still lack the capacity or strategy to leverage digital tools effectively, leading to suboptimal outcomes (Setiadi et al., 2022).

While digital marketing can facilitate access to wider markets, its effectiveness is not solely determined by the technology itself. The quality of relationships between businesses and consumers remains a critical success factor. In this regard, relationship marketing—a strategy focused on establishing and maintaining long-term relationships based on trust, commitment, communication, and mutual value—becomes essential (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Relationship marketing offers several strategic benefits, including enhanced customer loyalty, higher customer lifetime value, and positive word-of-mouth referrals. In the digital age, these relationships are nurtured through personalized interactions, responsive communication, and a deep understanding of customer preferences. This is particularly relevant for MSMEs, which often have the flexibility to provide personalized service and build emotional connections with their customers (Ndubisi, 2007; Sivesan, 2012).

In the context of MSMEs in Indonesia, especially those operating in traditional sectors such as poultry production, the combination of digital marketing and relationship marketing holds significant promise. The ability to reach customers online, coupled with the capacity to build trust and loyalty, can lead to more informed and sustainable purchase decisions from consumers. However, current research still lacks comprehensive analysis of how these two strategies interact—particularly whether relationship marketing can mediate the influence of digital marketing on consumer decision-making.

Most prior studies have examined digital marketing and relationship marketing in isolation. There remains a theoretical gap in understanding their integrated impact on consumer purchase decisions, especially within the unique operational context of Indonesian MSMEs. Additionally, empirical evidence exploring the mediating role of relationship marketing is limited, making it difficult for practitioners to formulate data-driven, integrated marketing strategies.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the influence of digital marketing on consumer purchasing decisions, using relationship marketing as a mediating variable, with a case study of poultry-based MSMEs in West Java. This sector was selected due to its relevance to daily consumer needs and its increasing adoption of digital platforms for marketing and transactions. The study employs a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) to assess both direct and indirect effects among variables.

By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to provide theoretical contributions to the fields of digital marketing and relationship marketing, while also offering practical insights for MSME actors seeking to optimize their marketing strategies in the digital era. The results are expected to support more sustainable and consumer-centric business models for MSMEs in Indonesia and similar emerging markets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a marketing strategy that utilizes digital channels and platforms to reach target consumers through the internet and other interactive technologies. It includes a wide range of tools such as social media, email marketing, websites, mobile apps, and search engines. Chaffey and Chadwick (2016) define digital marketing as the application of digital technologies that form channels to market products or services, allowing businesses to monitor and measure engagement with precision.

The core advantage of digital marketing lies in its ability to provide real-time communication, broader market reach, and cost-efficiency, which are especially critical for MSMEs with limited promotional budgets. Wardhana (2015) emphasizes that digital marketing enables companies to personalize content, measure consumer behavior, and adjust strategies dynamically.

In previous studies, digital marketing has been shown to positively influence consumer behavior, particularly in increasing awareness, interest, and intent to purchase (Mewoh, 2019). Furthermore, digital tools help MSMEs maintain visibility in competitive markets and improve their branding through content marketing and direct interaction with consumers.

Relationship Marketing

Relationship marketing refers to strategies designed to foster long-term customer relationships rather than focusing solely on individual transactions. It emphasizes trust, commitment, satisfaction, and emotional bonds as central elements in sustaining customer loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Kotler and Keller (2012) argue that successful relationship marketing requires consistent communication, customer care, and value delivery that goes beyond basic transactions. Ndubisi (2007) extends this framework by identifying four critical components of relationship marketing:

- **Trust** – Belief in the company's reliability and integrity
- **Commitment** – A desire to maintain a valued relationship
- **Communication** – Frequent, open, and honest exchanges of information
- **Conflict handling** – The ability to manage and resolve disputes fairly

For MSMEs, relationship marketing is not only more feasible but also highly strategic due to their inherent proximity to customers. Personalized service, emotional closeness, and quick response to consumer concerns can drive repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth – critical factors in small-scale business sustainability (Sivesan, 2012).

Consumer Purchase Decision

Consumer purchase decision is a complex process involving several stages, from problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, to post-purchase behavior (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Each stage is influenced by psychological, cultural, social, and technological factors. In digital environments, consumer decisions are increasingly shaped by online information, user-generated content, and digital interactions with brands.

Schiffman and Kanuk (2008) identify that purchase decisions are rarely made based only on rational assessments. Emotional, experiential, and trust-based factors often play a significant role. Consequently, effective digital marketing that is integrated with relationship marketing strategies is more likely to influence consumer purchasing behavior, especially in saturated or low-differentiation markets such as the food and livestock industry.

In the context of MSMEs, the decision to purchase is often driven not just by product features or price, but also by the perceived relationship and experience with the seller. Factors such as responsiveness, service quality, personalized communication, and trust have been found to significantly impact consumer loyalty and repeat purchases (Marlina & Rahayu, 2020).

Interrelationship between Variables

Previous studies suggest that digital marketing positively influences relationship marketing (Puspitawati et al., 2021). The implementation of digital tools facilitates stronger and more frequent interaction with consumers, allowing businesses to build relational bonds at scale. In turn, effective relationship marketing reinforces the success of digital strategies by generating trust, consumer retention, and loyalty – all of which are vital to purchasing decisions.

Theoretical frameworks like the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) support the hypothesis that digital engagement enhances relationship quality, which subsequently affects behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention and decision.

- Based on these frameworks, this study assumes that:
- Digital marketing directly influences consumer purchase decisions.
- Relationship marketing directly influences consumer purchase decisions.

Relationship marketing mediates the relationship between digital marketing and consumer purchase decisions.

Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical studies reviewed, this study proposes several hypotheses to examine the direct and indirect relationships between digital marketing, relationship marketing, and consumer purchase decisions. The primary objective is to assess whether relationship marketing serves as a mediating variable in the effect of digital marketing on consumer purchasing behavior in the MSME context.

Direct Hypotheses

H₀₁: Digital marketing has no significant effect on consumer purchase decision.

H₁₁: Digital marketing has a significant effect on consumer purchase decision.

H₀₂: Relationship marketing has no significant effect on consumer purchase decision.

H₁₂: Relationship marketing has a significant effect on consumer purchase decision.

H₀₃: Digital marketing has no significant effect on relationship marketing.

H₁₃: Digital marketing has a significant effect on relationship marketing.

Indirect (Mediating) Hypothesis

H₀₄: Relationship marketing does not mediate the effect of digital marketing on consumer purchase decision.

H₁₄: Relationship marketing mediates the effect of digital marketing on consumer purchase decision.

These hypotheses will be tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which enables the assessment of both direct and indirect paths, as well as the strength and significance of the relationships between variables.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative explanatory approach with a causal design to investigate the influence of digital marketing on consumer purchase decisions through the mediating role of relationship marketing. The research model is tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) due to its suitability for predictive analysis and testing complex path relationships involving latent variables (Hair et al., 2019).

Population and Sample

The population in this study consists of consumers of poultry-based MSMEs operating in West Java, Indonesia, who have made purchases through digital platforms. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who met specific criteria:

1. Have made at least one purchase from the selected MSMEs through digital media (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, Shopee, or Tokopedia).
2. Are at least 17 years old and capable of understanding and responding to structured questionnaires.

A total of 100 respondents were included in the sample, which is considered adequate for PLS analysis (minimum 10 times the number of structural paths in the model).

Research Variables and Measurement

The variables in this study consist of:

1. Digital Marketing (X): Measured through indicators such as social media usage, website functionality, content relevance, ease of digital communication, and promotional effectiveness.
2. Relationship Marketing (Z): Measured using four dimensions adapted from Ndubisi (2007):
 - Trust
 - Commitment
 - Communication
 - Conflict handling

Purchase Decision (Y): Measured using indicators from Kotler & Keller (2012), including product choice, brand selection, timing of purchase, quantity, and payment method.

All indicators were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through online and offline questionnaires, which had been pre-tested for clarity and reliability. Respondents filled in the questionnaires anonymously to encourage honest responses.

The instrument was validated through:

- Convergent validity (using factor loadings > 0.7)
- Discriminant validity (through cross-loading and AVE)
- Reliability (using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability)

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using structured questionnaires distributed both online (via Google Forms, social media links) and offline (directly to MSME customers). The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small group of respondents to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity.

Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, their participation was voluntary, and all responses were anonymous to encourage honesty. This study adhered to research ethics principles, including informed consent and confidentiality of respondent data.

- The research instrument was validated using:
- Convergent validity: Indicator loadings > 0.7 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.5
- Discriminant validity: Cross-loadings and Fornell-Larcker criterion
- Reliability testing: Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.7 and composite reliability ≥ 0.7

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using SmartPLS 3.0 software. The analysis involved two main stages:

1. Measurement Model (Outer Model) Evaluation, which tested:
 - Indicator reliability
 - Construct reliability
 - Convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted - AVE)
 - Discriminant validity
2. Structural Model (Inner Model) Evaluation, which tested:
 - Path coefficients
 - R^2 (coefficient of determination)
 - Effect size (f^2)
 - Predictive relevance (Q^2)
 - Mediation analysis using bootstrapping method with 5000 resamples

This analytical technique enables the testing of both direct and indirect (mediated) relationships among the research variables and provides insights into the strength and significance of each path

RESULT

In this section, you should describe each step taken to complete your research. You should not include too many descriptive statistical results here; on the other hand, it should be summarized in a more readable table or graph. You should never forget the numbers for each table and chart presented in your paper.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Digital Marketing (X)	100	4.12	0.56	2.80	5.00
Relationship Marketing (Z)	100	4.25	0.51	3.00	5.00
Purchase Decision (Y)	100	4.18	0.53	3.10	5.00

All variables show relatively high mean scores, indicating respondents generally agree with the items measuring each construct.

Outer Model Evaluation

Table 2. Convergent Validity (Factor Loadings)

Indicator	Construct	Loading
X1: Social Media Activity	Digital Marketing	0.812
X2: Content Relevance	Digital Marketing	0.837
X3: Promo Attractiveness	Digital Marketing	0.804
Z1: Trust	Relationship Marketing	0.872
Z2: Commitment	Relationship Marketing	0.844
Z3: Communication	Relationship Marketing	0.816
Z4: Conflict Handling	Relationship Marketing	0.792
Y1: Product Selection	Purchase Decision	0.821
Y2: Brand Choice	Purchase Decision	0.789
Y3: Purchase Timing	Purchase Decision	0.775

All factor loadings exceed 0.7, indicating good convergent validity.

Table 3. Construct Reliability

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Digital Marketing	0.78	0.87	0.69
Relationship Marketing	0.81	0.89	0.71
Purchase Decision	0.76	0.85	0.66

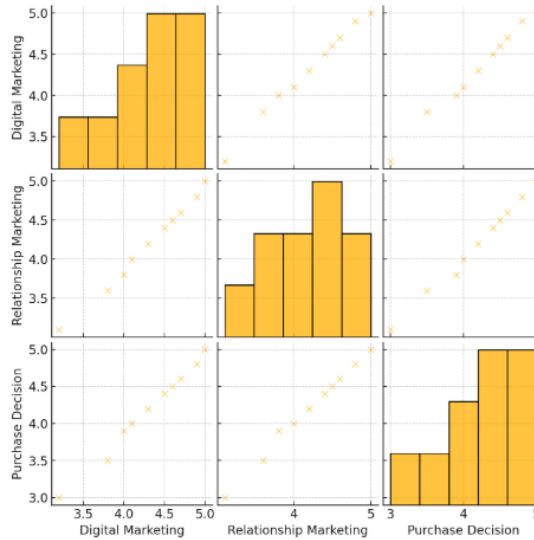


Figure 1. Pair plot Outer Model Evaluation
 Inner Model Evaluation

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination (R²)

Dependent Variable	R ²	Interpretation
Relationship Marketing	0.557	Moderate
Purchase Decision	0.638	Moderate to Substantial

Table 5. Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Path	Coefficient (β)	t-Value	p-Value	Significance
Digital Marketing → Purchase Decision	0.209	2.24	0.026	Significant
Relationship Marketing → Purchase Decision	0.589	5.96	0.000	Significant
Digital Marketing → Relationship Marketing	0.747	9.11	0.000	Significant

Table 6. Indirect Effect (Mediation)

Path	Indirect Effect	t-Value	p-Value	Conclusion
Digital Marketing → RM → Purchase Decision	0.440	5.34	0.000	Partial Mediation

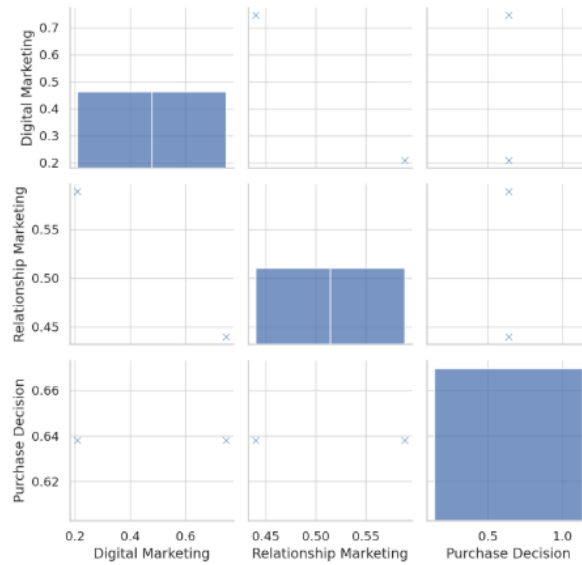


Figure 2. Pair Plot Inner Model Evaluation

Effect Size (f^2)

Table 7. Effect Size

Path	f^2	Effect Size
Digital Marketing → Purchase Decision	0.064	Small
Relationship Marketing → Purchase Decision	0.545	Large
Digital Marketing → Relationship Marketing	0.788	Large

Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Table 8. Predictive Relevance

Construct	Q^2	Predictive Relevance
Relationship Marketing	0.394	High
Purchase Decision	0.422	High

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal several important insights into how digital marketing and relationship marketing influence consumer purchasing behavior within the MSME sector.

Digital marketing shows a significant direct influence on purchase decisions. This supports previous studies that found digital content, social media engagement, and online promotions are effective in stimulating consumer interest and conversions (Mewoh, 2019). However, the path coefficient indicates that the direct effect is modest ($\beta = 0.209$), suggesting that digital tools alone may not fully drive purchasing behavior.

Relationship marketing emerges as a dominant predictor of consumer purchase decisions, with a strong path coefficient ($\beta = 0.589$) and large effect size ($f^2 = 0.545$). This supports Morgan and Hunt's (1994) commitment-trust theory, affirming that consumer trust, ongoing communication, and emotional connections significantly impact behavior in small business contexts.

Digital marketing strongly influences relationship marketing ($\beta = 0.747$), indicating that digital platforms play a crucial role in building and sustaining consumer relationships. This confirms that content and communication via digital channels must be oriented not only toward information dissemination but also toward relationship reinforcement.

Importantly, the indirect effect of digital marketing on purchase decisions through relationship marketing ($\beta = 0.440$) exceeds its direct effect, indicating partial mediation. This suggests that while digital marketing can directly affect purchase behavior, its greatest impact is realized when it facilitates the building of trust and loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that digital marketing has a significant positive effect on consumer purchase decisions, although the magnitude of its direct impact is relatively modest. In contrast, relationship marketing demonstrates a stronger influence, indicating that consumer trust, emotional connection, and ongoing communication play a more decisive role in shaping purchasing behavior, especially in the MSME sector. The study also confirms that digital marketing significantly influences relationship marketing. This shows that the use of digital tools such as social media, personalized messages, and interactive content does not only serve as a promotional vehicle but also as a means to strengthen relational bonds with consumers. Furthermore, the mediation analysis reveals that relationship marketing partially mediates the effect of digital marketing on purchase decisions. This means that the effectiveness of digital strategies can be significantly enhanced when they are accompanied by efforts to build trust, commitment, and long-term engagement with consumers.

In light of these conclusions, several recommendations can be proposed. First, MSME actors should not rely solely on digital promotion, but must integrate relationship marketing strategies into their digital practices to ensure long-term consumer loyalty. Second, the creation of content that fosters emotional connection—such as customer testimonials, storytelling, and appreciation posts—should be prioritized alongside informational content. Third, MSMEs are encouraged to use customer feedback tools and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems to better understand and serve their target markets. Fourth, business owners and marketing staff need to be trained in customer-centric communication, especially through digital channels, where tone, speed of response, and clarity have a strong impact on perceived professionalism and care. Fifth, MSMEs should adopt a long-term relational mindset rather than focusing on short-term transactional goals, as sustained engagement is more likely to generate loyal customers and positive word-of-mouth. Lastly, it is recommended that relevant stakeholders, including local

governments and training institutions, provide support through workshops and policies that enable MSMEs to strengthen their capabilities in merging digital marketing with relationship marketing strategies effectively

This study is limited to MSMEs in the poultry sector within West Java, thus the findings may not be generalizable to other regions or industries. Future research may consider comparative studies across sectors or longitudinal designs to assess long-term relational strategies in digital marketing.

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