

How digital branding enhances digital trust: a case study of three msmes in Medan

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ABSTRAK

Perkembangan teknologi digital telah mengubah cara Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah (UMKM) membangun hubungan dengan konsumen melalui media sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pengaruh *Social Media Marketing* terhadap *Digital Brand Trust* melalui peran mediasi *Content Marketing* dan *Digital Trust* pada tiga UMKM di Kota Medan, yaitu Miricare Oil, Syakir Collection, dan Cemilan Kanaya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode survei terhadap 252 responden yang dipilih menggunakan teknik *purposive sampling*. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM) dengan bantuan perangkat lunak SmartPLS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Social Media Marketing* berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap *Content Marketing*, *Digital Trust*, dan *Digital Brand Trust*. *Digital Trust* merupakan faktor yang paling dominan dalam membentuk *Digital Brand Trust*, sehingga menunjukkan pentingnya aspek keamanan, kredibilitas, dan keandalan dalam interaksi digital. *Content Marketing* berpengaruh signifikan terhadap *Digital Brand Trust*, namun tidak berpengaruh langsung terhadap *Digital Trust*. Selain itu, *Content Marketing* dan *Digital Trust* terbukti berperan sebagai variabel mediasi yang memperkuat hubungan antara *Social Media Marketing* dan *Digital Brand Trust*. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi UMKM dalam merancang strategi pemasaran digital yang berorientasi pada pembangunan kepercayaan guna meningkatkan daya saing merek serta hubungan jangka panjang dengan konsumen di era digital.

Kata Kunci: pemasaran media sosial; kepercayaan digital; kepercayaan merek; pemasaran konten; UMKM

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of digital technology has transformed how Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) build relationships with consumers through social media. This study examines the influence of *Social Media Marketing* on *Digital Brand Trust* through the mediating roles of *Content Marketing* and *Digital Trust* among three MSMEs in Medan: Miricare Oil, Syakir Collection, and Cemilan Kanaya. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey of 252 respondents selected through *purposive sampling*. Data were analyzed using *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The findings reveal that *Social Media Marketing* has a positive and significant effect on *Content Marketing*, *Digital Trust*, and *Digital Brand Trust*. *Digital Trust* emerged as the strongest predictor of *Digital Brand Trust*, highlighting the importance of security, credibility, and reliability in digital interactions. *Content Marketing* significantly enhances *Digital Brand Trust* but does not directly influence *Digital Trust*. Furthermore, both *Content Marketing* and *Digital Trust* serve as significant mediating variables in strengthening the relationship between *Social Media Marketing* and *Digital Brand Trust*. These findings provide practical insights for MSMEs in developing effective digital marketing strategies that prioritize trust-building to improve brand competitiveness and long-term consumer relationships in the digital marketplace.

Keyword: social media marketing; digital trust; brand trust; content marketing; msmes

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a primary digital marketing medium due to its ability to integrate two-way communication, product visualization, personalized messaging, and the formation of sustainable online communities. In the digital era, consumers increasingly rely on digital media to search for information, compare products, and make purchasing decisions (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Research shows that consumer trust in the digital environment is not formed instantly but rather through a process of repeated interactions, message consistency, and the credibility of information conveyed through digital platforms (Alrawad et al., 2023). These platforms enable MSMEs to reach a wide range of consumers at a relatively low cost while requiring professional content management and communication skills to build sustainable digital trust (Appel et al., 2021).

Research confirms that effective social media marketing activities can increase perceived brand credibility and strengthen consumer trust (Sharma et al., 2020). Conversely, inconsistent social media management, minimal interaction, and a lack of transparency can decrease digital trust. In the context of MSMEs, the main challenges of social media marketing include limited human resources, low digital literacy, and the absence of a structured digital branding strategy, which remains common among MSMEs that are still in the early stages of digital transformation.

Digital trust is a crucial issue in today's business environment. It refers to consumers' confidence in the security, reliability, and integrity of a brand within the digital environment. Research indicates that digital trust is a prerequisite for building brand trust, particularly in businesses that rely on online interactions (Soundappan, 2025). In digital marketing, brand trust is a determining factor in sustaining long-term consumer-brand relationships, especially when consumers cannot physically evaluate products before making a purchase (AlMalki & Durugbo, 2023). Empirical studies published after 2021 show that brand trust significantly influences repurchase intention, customer loyalty, and digital word-of-mouth recommendations (Zachlod et al., 2022). For MSMEs, brand trust is not only a marketing asset but also a source of competitive advantage that is difficult for competitors to imitate.

Medan City is one of the economic growth centers in North Sumatra, with a rapidly growing number of MSMEs. Despite its significant market potential, many MSMEs in Medan are still in the early stages of adopting digital marketing and have not yet fully utilized social media as a strategic tool for building their brands. This research focuses on three MSMEs in Medan that have recently adopted social media as a marketing platform: Miricare Oil (hair care), Syakir Collection (fashion), and Cemilan Kanaya (food). Although these MSMEs operate in different business sectors, they face similar challenges in building digital trust and brand credibility. Miricare Oil relies on educational content and customer testimonials to build consumer confidence in its hair care products. Syakir Collection develops its fashion brand identity through product visualization and lifestyle-oriented content on social media. Meanwhile, Cemilan Kanaya utilizes culinary content to attract consumer interest and create emotional connections. However, all three MSMEs continue to face challenges related to content consistency, consumer engagement, and digital credibility.

This research aligns with the research mission of Universitas Negeri Medan, which focuses on developing research based on community needs while strengthening the local economy. Empowering MSMEs through digital technology demonstrates the university's academic contribution to supporting regional economic transformation and enhancing business competitiveness. Through the study of digital brand marketing and digital trust among MSMEs, this research is expected to produce a conceptual model and practical recommendations that can be implemented by MSMEs while serving as a foundation for research-based mentoring and community service programs.

This research also aligns with ASTACITA, Indonesia's national development agenda, which emphasizes accelerating digital transformation and strengthening innovation-based entrepreneurship. ASTACITA positions MSMEs as key actors in inclusive economic development while encouraging greater adaptability to technological change. Therefore, this research supports ASTACITA by promoting entrepreneurship that is not only technologically innovative but also socially sustainable. From a public policy perspective, this research is relevant to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), particularly in strengthening innovation capacity and promoting the utilization of digital technology among small businesses. As part of the digital infrastructure, social media plays a crucial role in connecting MSMEs with broader markets. However, this infrastructure can only deliver optimal outcomes when utilized strategically. By examining the relationship between social media marketing and digital trust, this research contributes to the development of an inclusive innovation ecosystem in which MSMEs become not only users of technology but also active creators of digital economic value. The findings are expected to provide a foundation for more inclusive policy interventions, ensuring that the benefits of digitalization can be experienced equally by all business actors.



Figure 1. Social Media for Miricare Oil, Syakir Collection, and Kanaya Snacks

By strengthening digital trust among MSMEs, this research ultimately supports inclusive and sustainable economic development. Digital trust functions as social capital within the digital economy by facilitating transactions, collaboration, and sustainable business growth. Without trust, digital technology may become a source of uncertainty and risk for both consumers and businesses. Therefore, this study positions digital trust as the core element of MSME digital transformation, consistent with both national and global development agendas. Although research on social media marketing and brand trust has expanded considerably since 2021, most previous studies have focused on large corporations or digitally mature MSMEs. Research specifically examining MSMEs that have only recently adopted social media, particularly at the local level such as Medan, remains limited. The novelty of this research lies in integrating digital brand marketing, digital trust, and brand trust within the context of MSMEs during the early stages of digital transformation. Furthermore, the cross-sector case study approach provides a comparative perspective that enriches the understanding of digital trust dynamics across different types of MSMEs. This research also integrates national and global research agendas, thereby offering academic, practical, and policy contributions simultaneously. Consequently, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the advancement of digital marketing knowledge while supporting the empowerment of digital MSMEs in Medan. Based on these considerations, the proposed research title is "How Do Digital Brands Increase Digital Trust? A Study of Three MSMEs in Medan."

The novelty of this research also lies in the development of a digital brand marketing model that explicitly positions digital trust as a key variable linking social media marketing activities with brand trust among MSMEs that have recently adopted social media. Unlike previous studies that generally focus on large companies or digitally mature MSMEs, this study investigates local MSMEs in Medan that are in the early phase of digital transformation, thereby providing a more realistic contextual perspective on the challenges and dynamics of consumer trust during the early stages of technology adoption. Furthermore, the comparative approach across three different business sectors (hair care, fashion, and food), which has rarely been examined simultaneously within a single conceptual model, enables the identification of common patterns and strategic differences in digital brand marketing. This approach generates more adaptive and practical recommendations for MSMEs. Additionally, this research integrates digital marketing perspectives with the Indonesian Research Plan, ASTACITA, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), making it relevant not only from a theoretical perspective but also from a strategic standpoint in supporting technology-based MSME policies and empowerment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In terms of research stages, this study is a continuation of previous research examining social media marketing, brand awareness, and brand trust. The current study focuses on the conceptual model development stage by positioning digital trust as a key variable that bridges digital brand marketing activities and brand trust. Using a quantitative approach with the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method, this research is at Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 3, where the research design and conceptual model have been comprehensively developed and empirically tested. Future research is planned to advance toward cross-sectoral and regional validation, resulting in a more applicable model for MSMEs.

The objective of this research extends beyond examining the relationships among variables. It also aims to generate academic and practical outputs, including publications in nationally accredited journals, international conference proceedings, intellectual property rights, research reports, and reference books related to digital brand marketing for MSMEs. Furthermore, this research seeks to improve technological readiness by developing strategic digital marketing guidelines and policy recommendations that can be utilized by local governments, universities, and MSMEs to facilitate the downstream implementation of research findings.

Regarding human resources, the competencies of the research team are well aligned with the research topic and methodology. The principal researcher has expertise in digital business and digital marketing, which supports model development and data analysis. The co-researchers are from the Business and Entrepreneurship Education Department, providing complementary expertise in the MSME marketing context and research output management. In addition, the involvement of students from the Digital Business program supports data collection and processing while strengthening the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education. With these competencies, all research stages and the proposed roadmap can be implemented consistently according to the planned methods, outputs, and work plan.

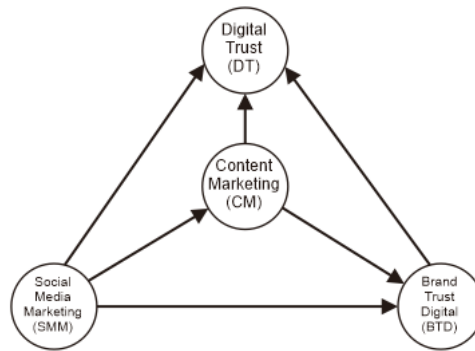


Figure 2. Research Framework

Quantitative research is a systematic research approach that enables researchers to analyze larger samples and produce objective findings through statistical analysis (Sahir, 2022). This research was conducted in Medan City by surveying followers of the social media accounts of Miricare Oil, Syakir Collection, and Cemilan Kanaya. The study was conducted from March to June 2026.

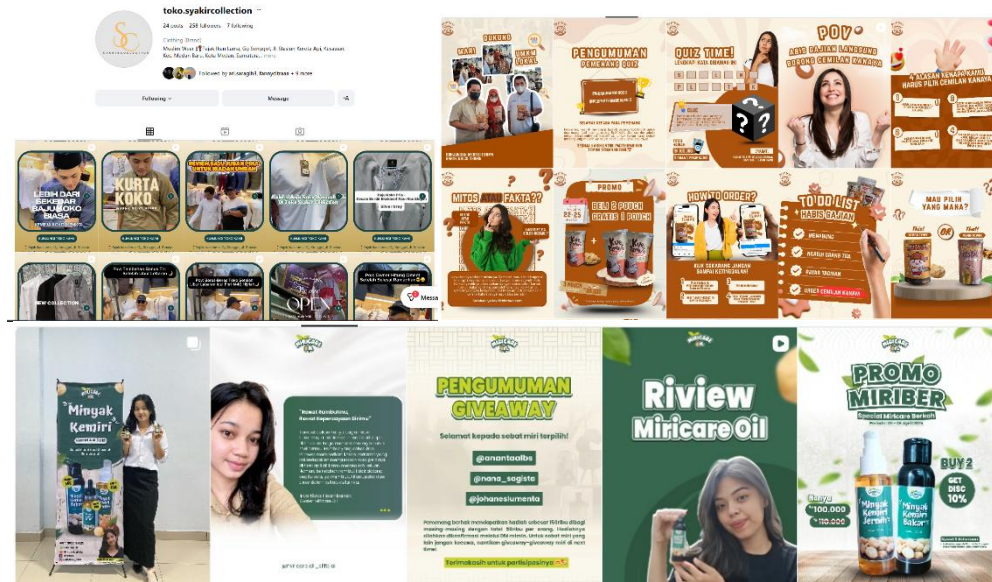


Figure 3. Social Media Content of Miricare Oil, Syakir Collection and Kanaya Snacks

The population represents all research objects or observations, regardless of whether the population size is large, small, or infinite (Fikri, et al., 2020). The population in this study consisted of followers who had purchased products from or visited the physical stores of the selected MSMEs and were between 15 and 55 years old. This age range represents the productive age group and is consistent with the objectives of this study.

The sample size was determined using the following formula (Fikri, et al., 2020):

$$n = \text{Number of indicators} \times \alpha$$

where:

- **n** = sample size
- **α** = number of observations per indicator

The sampling criteria are as follows:

1. If the number of indicators is fewer than 10, α should be greater than 10 observations per indicator (minimum sample size = 30).
2. If the number of indicators exceeds 10, α should be less than 10 observations per indicator (minimum sample size = 30).

This study employed 28 indicators with α = 9, resulting in a sample size of 252 respondents (28 × 9 = 252). The value of α = 9 was selected because data collection involved structured interviews, making interaction with social media followers relatively time-consuming. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- Followers who had purchased products from or visited the physical MSME stores.
- Aged between 15 and 55 years.

- Owned a personal smartphone.
- Were familiar with digital marketing.
- Understood MSME products and information disseminated through social media.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and field observations. Operational definitions were developed to define each research variable clearly. Each variable was measured using multiple indicators on a six-point ordinal scale. These operational definitions are presented in Table 1 to facilitate readers' understanding of the constructs and measurement items used in this study.

Table 1. Operational Definitions

No	Variable	Code	Indicator
1	SMM (Social Media Marketing)	SMM1	Interactivity
		SMM2	Posting Consistency
		SMM3	Information Quality
		SMM4	Visual Appeal
		SMM5	Responsiveness
2	CM (Content Marketing)	CM1	Content Relevance
		CM2	Informative Value
		CM3	Message Consistency
		CM4	Content Creativity
		CM5	Persuasiveness
3	BT (Brand Trust Digital)	BT1	Expectation
		BT2	Believe
		BT3	Satisfaction
		BT4	Safe
		BT5	Reliable
		BT6	Honest
		BT7	Integrity
		BT8	Care
4	ET (E-Trust)	ET1	Security
		ET2	Comfort
		ET3	Satisfaction
		ET4	Responsibility
		ET5	Privacy
		ET6	Experience
		ET7	Information
		ET8	Site Display
		ET9	Process Accelerate
		ET10	Review Product

The initial stage of data analysis employed cross-tabulation as a descriptive statistical technique to examine the distribution of respondent characteristics across categories. Cross-tabulation was used to analyze respondents' demographic profiles. Before conducting the structural analysis, the data underwent feasibility testing. Subsequently, frequency analysis was performed to determine the average responses of respondents to each questionnaire item. Cross-tabulation and frequency analyses were conducted using SPSS version 16.

The main data analysis was performed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach with SmartPLS version 3.0. Before testing the structural model, the measurement model was evaluated through data fit and validity assessments to ensure the suitability of the data for SEM analysis. Finally, hypothesis testing was conducted using SmartPLS to evaluate both the direct and indirect effects among the research variables and to assess the effectiveness of the proposed research model (Sugiyono, 2019).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis in this study was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach with the assistance of SmartPLS software. This method was selected because it enables the simultaneous examination of relationships among latent constructs and is well suited for predictive research. The analysis consisted of evaluating both the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) to assess the validity, reliability, and structural relationships among the research variables. The outer loading results showed that almost all indicators exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Only one indicator (ET4 = 0.659) exhibited an outer loading between 0.40 and 0.70, which is still considered acceptable according to Hair et al. (2017).

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Trust Digital	0.981	0.981	0.982	0.774
Content Marketing	0.944	0.945	0.957	0.816
Digital Trust	0.983	0.984	0.984	0.757

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Social Media Marketing	0.951	0.952	0.962	0.837

Based on the Construct Reliability and Validity results presented in Table 2, all constructs satisfied the reliability and convergent validity requirements for PLS-SEM analysis. This is evidenced by the Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability values, all of which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. These findings indicate that the measurement items consistently represent their respective constructs.

The Digital Brand Trust construct achieved a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.981, a rho_A value of 0.981, and a Composite Reliability value of 0.982, indicating excellent internal consistency. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of 0.774 demonstrates that 77.4% of the variance in the indicators is explained by the construct, thereby satisfying the criterion for convergent validity.

Similarly, the Content Marketing construct demonstrated excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.944, a rho_A value of 0.945, and a Composite Reliability value of 0.957. The AVE value of 0.816 indicates that the construct explains 81.6% of the variance in its indicators, confirming strong convergent validity.

Among all constructs, Digital Trust exhibited the highest level of reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.983, a rho_A value of 0.984, and a Composite Reliability value of 0.984. Its AVE value of 0.757 also exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that the indicators adequately explain the latent construct.

Meanwhile, the Social Media Marketing construct achieved a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.951, a rho_A value of 0.952, and a Composite Reliability value of 0.962. The AVE value of 0.837 was the highest among all constructs, indicating that 83.7% of the variance in the indicators is explained by the construct. These findings confirm a very strong level of convergent validity.

Overall, all constructs fulfilled the recommended criteria for internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, and Composite Reliability > 0.70) and convergent validity (AVE > 0.50). Therefore, the measurement model (outer model) was considered valid and reliable, allowing the analysis to proceed to structural model evaluation (inner model) and hypothesis testing.

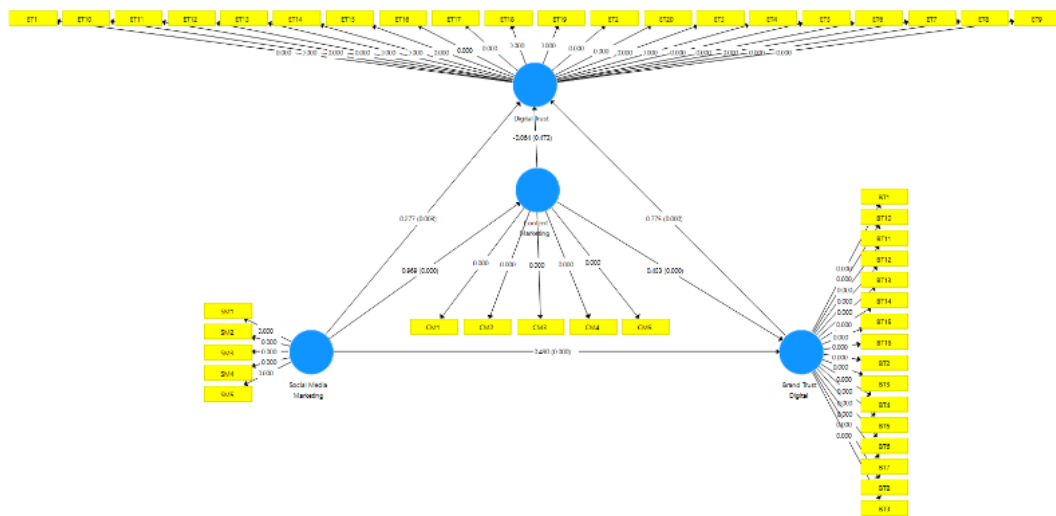


Figure 4. Inner Model

The structural model developed in SmartPLS consists of four main constructs: Social Media Marketing (SMM) as the exogenous variable, Content Marketing (CM) and Digital Trust (DT) as mediating variables, and Digital Brand Trust (DBT) as the endogenous variable. The model explains how social media marketing activities influence digital brand trust directly and indirectly through content marketing and digital trust.

Table 3. Direct Effect Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Digital Trust -> Brand Trust Digital	0.775	0.759	0.103	7.501	0.000
Content Marketing -> Brand Trust Digital	0.453	0.453	0.090	5.015	0.000
Content Marketing -> Digital Trust	-0.064	-0.055	0.089	0.719	0.473
Social Media Marketing -> Brand Trust Digital	0.490	0.489	0.094	5.224	0.000
Social Media Marketing -> Content Marketing	0.969	0.969	0.005	214.745	0.000

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Social Media Marketing -> Digital Trust	0.277	0.284	0.094	2.951	0.003

Based on the direct effect results presented in Table 3, hypothesis testing was performed by comparing the t-statistic with the critical t-value of 1.969 at a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$). A relationship was considered statistically significant when the t-statistic exceeded 1.969 and the p-value was less than 0.05.

H1: Digital Trust → Digital Brand Trust

The relationship between Digital Trust and Digital Brand Trust yielded a path coefficient of 0.775, a t-statistic of 7.501, and a p-value of 0.000. Since the t-statistic exceeded the critical value and the p-value was below 0.05, H1 was accepted. These findings indicate that Digital Trust has a positive and significant effect on Digital Brand Trust. As consumers' trust in the digital environment increases, their trust in digital brands also increases.

H2: Content Marketing → Digital Brand Trust

The relationship between Content Marketing and Digital Brand Trust produced a path coefficient of 0.453, a t-statistic of 5.015, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H2 was accepted, indicating that Content Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Digital Brand Trust. High-quality marketing content contributes to strengthening consumer trust in digital brands.

H3: Content Marketing → Digital Trust

The relationship between Content Marketing and Digital Trust produced a path coefficient of -0.064, a t-statistic of 0.719, and a p-value of 0.473. Since the t-statistic was below the critical value and the p-value exceeded 0.05, H3 was rejected. This result indicates that Content Marketing does not significantly influence Digital Trust. Therefore, content quality alone is insufficient to directly enhance consumers' trust in the digital environment.

H4: Social Media Marketing → Digital Brand Trust

The relationship between Social Media Marketing and Digital Brand Trust resulted in a path coefficient of 0.490, a t-statistic of 5.224, and a p-value of 0.000. Consequently, H4 was accepted, demonstrating that Social Media Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Digital Brand Trust. More effective social media marketing activities contribute to higher levels of consumer trust in digital brands.

H5: Social Media Marketing → Content Marketing

The relationship between Social Media Marketing and Content Marketing produced a path coefficient of 0.969, a t-statistic of 214.745, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H5 was accepted. These findings indicate that Social Media Marketing has a very strong positive influence on Content Marketing, suggesting that social media activities play a critical role in determining the quality and effectiveness of marketing content.

H6: Social Media Marketing → Digital Trust

The relationship between Social Media Marketing and Digital Trust yielded a path coefficient of 0.277, a t-statistic of 2.951, and a p-value of 0.003. Since both significance criteria were satisfied, H6 was accepted. These findings demonstrate that Social Media Marketing positively and significantly influences Digital Trust. Effective marketing activities conducted through social media enhance consumers' trust in digital platforms and the information provided by brands.

Table 4. Indirect Effect Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ((O/STDEV))	P Values
Social Media Marketing -> Content Marketing -> Brand Trust Digital	0.439	0.439	0.088	4.998	0.000
Content Marketing -> Digital Trust -> Brand Trust Digital	0.351	0.341	0.074	4.775	0.000
Social Media Marketing -> Content Marketing -> Digital Trust	0.340	0.331	0.071	4.756	0.000
Social Media Marketing -> Digital Trust -> Brand Trust Digital	0.380	0.373	0.094	4.041	0.000
Social Media Marketing -> Content Marketing -> Digital Trust	-0.062	-0.053	0.086	0.719	0.473

Based on the indirect effect results presented in Table 4, mediation analysis was conducted by comparing the t-statistic with the critical t-value of 1.969 at a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$). A mediation effect was considered statistically significant when the t-statistic exceeded 1.969 and the p-value was less than 0.05.

H7: Social Media Marketing → Content Marketing → Digital Brand Trust

The indirect relationship between Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, and Digital Brand Trust produced a path coefficient of 0.439, a t-statistic of 4.998, and a p-value of 0.000. Since the t-statistic

exceeded the critical value and the p-value was below 0.05, H7 was accepted. These findings indicate that Content Marketing significantly mediates the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Digital Brand Trust. In other words, more effective social media marketing activities improve the quality of marketing content, thereby strengthening consumers' trust in digital brands.

H8: Content Marketing → Digital Trust → Digital Brand Trust

The indirect relationship between Content Marketing, Digital Trust, and Digital Brand Trust yielded a path coefficient of 0.351, a t-statistic of 4.775, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H8 was accepted. These findings indicate that Digital Trust significantly mediates the influence of Content Marketing on Digital Brand Trust. High-quality marketing content enhances consumers' digital trust, which ultimately strengthens their trust in digital brands.

H9: Social Media Marketing → Content Marketing → Digital Trust

The indirect relationship between Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, and Digital Trust produced a path coefficient of 0.340, a t-statistic of 4.756, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H9 was accepted. These findings indicate that Content Marketing significantly mediates the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Digital Trust. Effective social media marketing activities improve the quality of marketing content, which subsequently enhances consumers' digital trust.

H10: Social Media Marketing → Digital Trust → Digital Brand Trust

The indirect relationship between Social Media Marketing, Digital Trust, and Digital Brand Trust resulted in a path coefficient of 0.380, a t-statistic of 4.041, and a p-value of 0.000. Consequently, H10 was accepted. These findings demonstrate that Digital Trust significantly mediates the influence of Social Media Marketing on Digital Brand Trust. Thus, social media marketing not only directly strengthens digital brand trust but also indirectly enhances it by increasing consumers' digital trust.

H11: Social Media Marketing → Content Marketing → Digital Trust

The indirect relationship between Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, and Digital Trust produced a path coefficient of -0.062, a t-statistic of 0.719, and a p-value of 0.473. Since the t-statistic did not exceed the critical value and the p-value was greater than 0.05, H11 was rejected. These findings indicate that the indirect effect is not statistically significant. Therefore, Content Marketing does not significantly mediate the tested relationship through Digital Trust. This finding is consistent with the direct effect results, which also showed that the relationship between Content Marketing and Digital Trust was not statistically significant.

Table 5. Blindfolding Results

	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
Brand Trust Digital	4032.000	1340.096	0.668
Content Marketing	1260.000	306.257	0.757
Digital Trust	5040.000	1447.786	0.713
Social Media Marketing	1260.000	1260.000	

Blindfolding analysis was conducted to evaluate the predictive relevance (Q²) of the structural model. An endogenous construct is considered to have predictive relevance when its Q² value is greater than zero. Higher Q² values indicate stronger predictive capability of the structural model (Hair et al., 2017).

According to Table 5, the Digital Brand Trust construct achieved a Q² value of 0.668, which is substantially higher than the recommended threshold of 0.35. This result indicates that the model has very strong predictive relevance for Digital Brand Trust. In other words, the variables included in the model are capable of explaining and predicting Digital Brand Trust with a high level of accuracy.

The Content Marketing construct obtained the highest Q² value (0.757) among all endogenous variables, indicating excellent predictive capability. This finding suggests that the exogenous variables included in the model explain variations in Content Marketing very well.

Similarly, the Digital Trust construct achieved a Q² value of 0.713, which also exceeds the recommended threshold. This indicates that the model possesses strong predictive relevance for Digital Trust and effectively predicts consumers' perceptions of trust in the digital environment.

Meanwhile, Social Media Marketing does not have a Q² value because it is an exogenous construct. Since exogenous variables are not predicted by other constructs in the structural model, they are not evaluated using the blindfolding procedure.

Overall, these findings indicate that the proposed structural model demonstrates excellent predictive relevance. The relationships among Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, Digital Trust, and Digital Brand Trust are capable of accurately explaining and predicting the endogenous constructs, indicating that the model is suitable for hypothesis testing and subsequent interpretation of the research findings.

Previous studies have shown that the digitalization of village tourism marketing is influenced by credibility, accessibility, interactivity, and digital transformation, all of which enhance community readiness to adopt technology-based marketing practices. These findings are consistent with the results of this study,

which demonstrate that Social Media Marketing has a significant positive influence on both Digital Trust and Digital Brand Trust. This suggests that the more effectively digital transformation is implemented through social media, the greater the level of consumer trust in digitally marketed brands. Therefore, digital credibility serves as a fundamental basis for developing Digital Brand Trust (Fikri et al., 2024).

Research on the effectiveness of Content Marketing in sustainable tourism destinations has shown that engaging and relevant content enhances visitor satisfaction by creating positive perceptions of tourism destinations. These findings support the results of the present study, which indicate that Content Marketing positively and significantly influences Digital Brand Trust. However, this study also reveals that Content Marketing does not directly influence Digital Trust. Therefore, content quality should be complemented by factors such as security, credibility, and positive digital experiences to establish stronger consumer trust (Fikri, et al., 2025).

Furthermore, a digital literacy enhancement program conducted in Sugau Village demonstrated that improving community understanding of digital technology increases awareness of utilizing social media and digital marketing as tools for economic empowerment. These findings are also consistent with the present study, which found that Social Media Marketing positively influences both Digital Trust and Digital Brand Trust. Higher levels of digital literacy enable consumers to better understand information disseminated through social media, thereby strengthening trust in promoted brands.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that Social Media Marketing has a positive and significant influence on Content Marketing, Digital Trust, and Digital Brand Trust. These findings demonstrate that the effective use of social media enhances the quality of marketing content while strengthening consumers' trust in digital brands. Furthermore, Digital Trust emerged as the most influential factor in shaping Digital Brand Trust, highlighting that the security, credibility, and reliability of digital information are essential for building consumer confidence in the digital environment.

This study also found that Content Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Digital Brand Trust but does not significantly influence Digital Trust. These findings suggest that consumers evaluate Digital Trust not only based on content quality but also by considering other factors, such as transaction security, platform reputation, and user experience. In addition, the mediation analysis confirmed that Content Marketing and Digital Trust serve as significant mediating variables that strengthen the relationship between Social Media Marketing and Digital Brand Trust. Moreover, the blindfolding analysis demonstrated that the proposed structural model possesses strong predictive relevance.

Future research is recommended to incorporate additional variables, such as e-service quality, perceived security, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), customer engagement, and brand image, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing Digital Brand Trust. Future studies may also extend the research to different business sectors and adopt a longitudinal approach to examine changes in consumer behavior over time.

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