

Digital Marketing: Examining Students' Purchase Decision-Making in Private Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study is to assess students' decision in the selection of private universities in Padang City, West Sumatra Province. Specifically, this research investigates the predictors of the purchase decisions of students, the independent variable being digital marketing (X1), the mediating variable being brand trust, and purchase decision as the dependent variable (Y). 357 undergraduate students at Universitas Bung Hatta were included in the study population. Data were examined using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach as implemented in SmartPLS version 3.2.9. The research results show that, for students' purchase preference, digital marketing has positive influence. In addition, brand trust mediates the effect of digital marketing on purchase decisions. These results indicate that proper strategic digital marketing tactics help trustworthiness of a brand, which, in turn, affects the choice of higher education institutions by the students.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Brand Trust, Purchase Decision, Undergraduate Students Universitas Bung Hatta.

INTRODUCTION

Padang City's higher education institutions are major institutions which contribute a great part in generating human resources to advance the region. That role is exemplified by the accomplishment of Universitas Bung Hatta, an academe rated superior private university in West Sumatra as well as third in the higher education rankings of the University among universities and faculties in the province by Webometrics. This accomplishment shows that Universitas Bung Hatta is on par with top public higher education institutions in Padang City. It also shows that the institution puts in a lot of effort and focus in reaching quality of education.

In order for possible students to make conscious purchase decisions toward Universitas Bung Hatta, successful marketing campaigns are needed. One such way to optimize the above is digital marketing methodology. In the time of digital technologies, it has become more important to apply information technology in marketing and contact more students

Digital marketing, as described by Schiffman & Wisenblit (2015), is a marketing approach utilizing digital technologies so as to target and introduce products and services for specific audiences. It encompasses different types of internet marketing, including websites, social networking sites, emails, social media platforms, and mobile applications. Hence, strengthening digital marketing approaches, especially website management, is critical to affect students' purchasing choices. Recent studies also showed that digital marketing positively impacts consumer purchasing decision (Sunendar et al., 2023).

Peter and Olson (2010) stated that brand trust is consumers' trust that a specific brand will meet their customer expectations in quality, value and experience. Trust comes in the form of trust towards a brand comes from repeated, frequent engagements with products or services, based on positive experiences, which are good interactions between brands and consumers and customers. According to the same brand trust can be seen in terms of the quality of experiences with the product on the products and services you offer that is developed by consistency. Trust in the role of brand image and trust in the brand and brand credibility are integrated in

determining consumer behaviour and purchase decision. Brand trust appears to have a significant yet positive impact on purchase decisions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase Decision

The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) states that consumers' intentions to make a purchase are influenced by three main factors: their attitudes toward the purchase (based on beliefs about the outcome), subjective norms (perceived social pressure), and perceived behavioral control (belief in their ability to make the purchase). These intentions, combined with actual behavioral control, determine whether the purchase is made.

In the context of Purchase decision, which involves several stages undertaken by consumers before making a Purchase decision for a product. Consumer Purchase decisions can be influenced by product quality and image (Kotler, 2009). Many factors cause consumers to choose a product or service as their preference, including Brand trust and Brand image. Brand plays an important role in determining the Purchase decision. Purchase decision is when consumers intend to buy their preferred brand (Kotler, 2012). Purchase decision is the stage in the decision-making process where consumers actually make a purchase.

Digital marketing

According to (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2016), digital marketing is briefly defined as "Achieving marketing goals thru the application of technology and digital media." This definition reminds us that what is important is not the adoption of the technology itself, but rather the results produced by that technology that should determine the investment in internet marketing. Like display advertising, the use of online ads such as banners and rich media ads to achieve brand awareness and drive clicks to the target site. Furthermore, (Ryan & Jones, 2009) state that digital marketing is about connecting people (marketers) with others (consumers) to build relationships and drive sales. Technology is merely a means that enables those connections. Digital consumers are increasingly comfortable with online media, desire instant information, feel in control, tend to be disloyal, and are vocal in expressing their opinions online. Digital marketing provides the ability to reach a wider audience while also targeting specific market segments.

Brand Trust

According to (Kotler & Keller, 2016), brand trust is when consumers trust a product with all its risks because of high hopes or expectations that the brand will deliver positive results to consumers, thereby creating loyalty and trust toward the brand. An individual who has used the product and is then followed by others proves that the quality of this product is guaranteed, thus instilling trust in the product. Brand trust becomes increasingly important in the digital era, where consumers have broad access to information and can easily compare various brands. (Kapferer & Noël, 2008) state that brand trust is one of the important functions of a brand for consumers. Brand trust relates to consumers' belief that they will receive the same quality regardless of when or where they purchase the product or service from the brand. Brand trust is one of the components that form Brand Equity or brand value. Trusted brands tend to have higher value. (Sitorus et al., 2022) add that Brand trust is one of the important components in building strong Brand Equity. The measure of Brand trust includes the extent to which consumers believe in the quality, reliability, and

METHODOLOGY

The object of this study is undergraduate students of Universitas Bung Hatta, located in Padang City, West Sumatra Province. The population of this study consists of all undergraduate students from seven faculties who are currently enrolled in their first semester. The study employed a purposive sampling technique, resulting in a total sample of 357 respondents.

To obtain valid and reliable measurements of the research variables, previously validated measurement scales were adopted to assess all constructs in this study. For hypothesis testing, this research employed the Structural

Equation Modeling approach using Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), which is supported by previous studies (Natasiah & Syaefulloh, 2024).

RESULTS

Structural Model Assessment (SMA) refers to the structural model evaluation used to predict causal relationships among latent variables. The assessment of the structural model was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure

Table 1: Direct effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
BT -> PD	0,337	0,337	0,079	4,277	0,000
DM -> BT	0,812	0,813	0,031	26,324	0,000
DM -> PD	0,480	0,484	0,070	6,815	0,000

Based on Figure 1 the results of hypothesis testing can be interpreted as follows:

1. The effect of *brand trust* on purchase decisions shows an original sample value of 0.337 (positive coefficient), a T-statistic value of 4.277 (greater than 1.96), and a P-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that brand trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions, indicating that H₁ is supported.
2. The effect of *digital marketing* on brand trust shows an original sample value of 0.812 (positive coefficient), a T-statistic value of 26.324 (greater than 1.96), and a P-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand trust, indicating that H₂ is supported.
3. The effect of *digital marketing* on purchase decisions shows an original sample value of 0.480 (positive coefficient), a T-statistic value of 6.815 (greater than 1.96), and a P-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions, indicating that H₃ is supported.

Table 2: Indirect effect

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
DM -> BT -> PD	0,273	4,340	0,000

Furthermore, the results of the mediation analysis examining the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between digital marketing and purchase decisions are presented in Table 2 :

The analysis of brand trust as a mediating variable between digital marketing and purchase decisions ((DM→BI→BT) shows an original sample value of 0.273, a T-statistic value of 4.340 (greater than 1.96), and a P-value of 0.000 (less than 0.05). These results indicate that brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between digital marketing and purchase decisions, thus supporting H₄. The direct effect of digital marketing on purchase decisions is significant, and the indirect effect of digital marketing on purchase decisions through brand trust is also significant. Therefore, based on the mediation classification proposed by Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010), the mediating effect of brand trust in the relationship between digital marketing and purchase decisions is categorized as indirect-only mediation.

DISCUSSION

The Influence of Digital Marketing on Purchase Decisions

The results of the first hypothesis (H1) test regarding the influence of digital marketing on purchase decisions found an original sample of 0.480 (positive), T statistics of 6.815 (greater than 1.96), and P values of 0.000 (less than 0.05). Therefore, it can be concluded that digital marketing positively affects purchase decisions, thus the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted. The results of this study found that this research is significant, as digital marketing, based on the study (Hermawan et al., 2024), positively influences purchase decisions in choosing a university. The results of this study are in line with the findings of previous research (Karismawan & Candra, 2023).

The Influence of Digital Marketing on Brand Trust

The second hypothesis (H2) test regarding the influence of digital marketing on brand trust found an original sample of 0.812 (positive), T statistics of 26.324 (greater than 1.96), and P values of 0.000 (less than 0.05). Thus, it can be concluded that digital marketing has a positive influence on brand trust, and the second hypothesis (H2) is accepted.

Digital marketing has a positive influence on brand trust among new undergraduate students at Universitas Bung Hatta, meaning that digital marketing involving interaction, entertainment, and personalization on social media platforms like Twitter can help build consumer trust in the brand. This is because consumers feel more connected to brands that actively engage them thru interactive and relevant content. Based on the research (Mukti & Isa, 2024)

The influence of brand trust on purchase decisions

The results of the fourth hypothesis (H3) test regarding the influence of brand trust on purchase decisions found an original sample of 0.337 (positive sign), T statistics of 4.277 (greater than 1.96), and P values of 0.001.

Thus, it can be concluded that brand trust has a positive influence on purchase decisions, so the third hypothesis (H3) is accepted.

When new students face various choices of universities offered to them, trust in a brand becomes the main determining factor in their decision-making process when choosing a university. The higher the self-efficacy possessed by the community, the more it will impact the increase in purchase decisions made by the community. Similarly, if the brand trust obtained by the community is low or lacking, purchase decisions will decrease (Nabila et al., 2021).

Brand trust mediates the relationship between digital marketing and purchase decisions

The analysis results (H4) regarding the impact of brand trust as a mediating variable between digital marketing and purchase decisions (DM→BI→BT) have an original sample of 0.101, a T statistic of 4.340 (greater than 1.96), and P values of 0.000 (less than 0.05), thus it can be concluded that brand trust positively mediates the relationship between digital marketing and purchase decisions, so H4 is accepted.

The findings of this research indicate that digital marketing affects purchase decisions, showing that effective digital marketing activities build consumer trust before ultimately driving purchase decisions. Therefore, Bung Hatta University needs to optimize its digital marketing strategy by focusing on building brand trust to influence consumer purchase decisions. To achieve the desired marketing goals, business actors who use digital marketing to sell products must enhance their social media platforms to create engaging content and disseminate marketing messages in order to increase brand trust, thereby influencing students' purchase decisions (Juleha et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study also strengthens the brand trust theory by demonstrating that digital marketing has a positive effect on brand trust. This finding indicates that effective digital marketing quality plays a key role in enhancing purchase decisions.

This study is limited to undergraduate freshmen at Universitas Bung Hatta as the research object. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other private universities in West Sumatra Province. Future researchers are encouraged to apply this research model and conduct further investigations across a broader scope, such as private universities in West Sumatra Province or higher education institutions throughout Indonesia.

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