

Brand Trust as a Mediator of Digital Marketing Effects on Travel Service Purchase Decisions in Batam

Maryanti Maryanti^{1*}, Bambang Satriawan², Nolla Puspita Dewi³

Universitas Batam, Batam, Indonesia^{1,2,3}

marya.yap93@gmail.com^{1*}



Article History

Received on 28 November 2025

1st Revision on 15 December 2025

2nd Revision on 2 January 2026

Accepted on 17 January 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the effects of social media advertising, influencer marketing, website quality, and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on travel-service purchase decisions, with brand trust as a mediator.

Methodology: An explanatory survey was conducted among 150 users of 18 travel agencies in Batam, Indonesia, selected through proportional allocation and purposive screening based on prior service use and digital-channel exposure. Data were collected using Likert scales and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.1.1.

Results: All four digital marketing dimensions positively and significantly affected brand trust. Advertising and influencer marketing also had significant direct effects on purchase decisions, while website quality and e-WOM did not. Brand trust was the strongest direct predictor of purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.539$) and mediated all four relationships, complementarily for advertising and influencer marketing and indirectly for website quality and e-WOM. The model explained 72.3% of the variance in brand trust and 72.9% in purchase decisions.

Conclusions: Digital touchpoints operate through different conversion mechanisms. Paid and endorsed channels influence purchases directly, whereas owned and earned channels primarily build trust before purchase.

Limitations: The cross-sectional design, self-reported data, single-city setting, and exclusion of situational or behavioral data limit generalizability.

Contributions: This study integrates four heterogeneous digital touchpoints, namely paid, endorsed, owned, and earned media, within one mediation framework, demonstrating differences in both effect size and mediation type.

Keywords: Brand Trust, Digital Marketing, E-WOM, Influencer Marketing, Purchase Decision

How to Cite: Maryanti, M., Satriawan, B., & Dewi, N. P. (2026). Brand Trust as a Mediator of Digital Marketing Effects on Travel Service Purchase Decisions in Batam. *Jurnal Bisnis dan Pemasaran Digital*, 5(2), 53-66.

1. Introduction

Digitalization has transformed how consumers plan trips, compare service providers, assess reputation, and complete transactions. Social media, influencer recommendations, websites, and customer reviews are touchpoints that can appear simultaneously throughout the consumer journey. This shift opens market-expansion opportunities for travel firms, but it also increases transparency and competitive intensity because information on price, schedules, packages, and customer experience can

be compared at low search cost ([Chaffey, & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019](#); [Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Hughes, Carlson, Filieri, Jacobson, Jain, Karjaluoto, Kefi, Krishen, Kumar, Rahman, Raman, Rauschnabel, Rowley, Salo, Tran, & Wang, 2021](#)). Digital marketing effectiveness therefore cannot be judged from reach or exposure alone, but from its ability to reduce uncertainty and build confidence before a transaction takes place, particularly as tourism and hospitality firms increasingly co-create service value with consumers in real time across digital touchpoints ([Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019](#)).

The need to reduce uncertainty is especially important for travel services because consumers pay for a service promise that can largely only be evaluated after the transaction. Schedule accuracy, payment security, package suitability, responsiveness to changes, and fulfilment quality are attributes that are difficult to verify fully at the pre-purchase stage. In this situation, consumers rely on various digital signals to estimate a provider's competence and reliability. The Batam context is highly relevant: the Central Statistics Agency of Batam City reported 195,525 international tourist arrivals in December 2025, indicating substantial travel activity and market potential for travel services in the city ([Badan, 2025](#)).

Each digital touchpoint conveys a distinct type of signal. Social media advertising enables firms to deliver informative, relevant, interactive, and persuasive messages, with advertising effectiveness increasing when consumers perceive the content as useful and credible ([Alalwan, 2018](#); [Dao, Le, Cheng, & Chen, 2014](#)). Influencer marketing works through the credibility, expertise, authenticity, and fit of the endorsing figure with the product or service recommended ([Belanche, Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2021](#); [De, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017](#); [Djafarova, & Rushworth, 2017](#)). A website functions as information and transaction infrastructure whose quality is reflected in usability, information quality, security, and service interaction, a set of dimensions also validated specifically for travel-sector websites, where website quality shapes customer satisfaction and purchase intention ([Barnes, & Vidgen, 2002](#); [DeLone, & McLean, 2003](#); [Ali, 2016](#)). Meanwhile, e-WOM provides social proof through other consumers' experiences, with influence depending on the quality, credibility, valence, and usefulness of the information, a mechanism also confirmed in tourism settings where e-WOM shapes destination trust and travel intention ([Cheung, & Thadani, 2012](#); [Erkan, & Evans, 2016](#); [Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2020](#); [Abubakar, 2016](#)).

Although these channels can influence purchase decisions, their influence does not always operate directly. For services with high risk and intangibility, consumers must first form a belief that the brand is able and willing to fulfil its promise. Brand trust reflects confidence in a brand's reliability and goodwill and lowers the perceived risk of exchange ([Delgado-Ballester, & Munuera-Alemán, 2001](#); [Morgan, & Hunt, 1994](#)). Evidence from the travel industry also shows that social media marketing can influence purchase behavior through brand trust, so trust deserves to be positioned not merely as a communication outcome, but as a conversion mechanism between digital exposure and customer behavior ([Azhar, Husain, Hamid, & Rahman, 2023](#)).

Even so, the existing literature leaves two gaps, and both stem from specific limitations in how prior studies have modeled digital marketing and brand trust. First, most prior work including recent travel-sector studies linking social media marketing to purchase behavior [Azhar et al. \(2023\)](#), and studies in other service sectors that model social media marketing activities as a single bundled construct predicting brand loyalty [Yunanto, Sugiat, and Ariyanti \(2025\)](#), measures social media marketing as a single aggregate construct or tests one digital channel in isolation, which prevents any direct comparison of how paid media (advertising), endorsed media (influencers), owned media (websites), and earned media (e-WOM) perform relative to one another within the same sample and the same model. Without such a comparison, it is not possible to determine whether these four touchpoints operate through a shared mechanism or through distinct ones, which limits the practical value of prior findings for firms that must allocate a single digital marketing budget across all four channels simultaneously. Second, prior mediation studies on brand trust typically report only whether a mediation effect is significant, without distinguishing complementary mediation where a channel retains a direct effect from indirect-only mediation where a channel only works through trust, this omission matters because the two patterns imply different managerial responses, a channel with

indirect-only mediation should be evaluated on how it builds trust, whereas a channel with complementary mediation should be judged on both trust-building and direct persuasion. This gap matters for local travel services because transactions carry future fulfilment risk and consumers draw on many information sources before choosing a provider.

This study addresses that gap by integrating four digital marketing elements social media advertising, influencer marketing, website quality, and e-WOM into a single model with brand trust as mediator, tested on one consistent sample rather than across separate studies. Compared with prior travel-sector work that links social media marketing in aggregate to purchase behavior through brand trust, this study's specific contribution is disaggregating that aggregate construct into four distinguishable touchpoints and showing that they do not share one mediation pattern ([Azhar et al., 2023](#)). Its empirical contribution is therefore comparing the strength of the direct and indirect paths from four digital touchpoints among travel-service consumers in Batam within a single model. Its theoretical contribution is identifying whether brand trust acts as a complementary or indirect-only mediator for each channel, so that the function of a digital touchpoint can be distinguished as a persuasion driver, a trust builder, or both - a distinction prior aggregate-construct studies cannot make. Accordingly, this study analyzes the effect of each digital marketing element on brand trust and purchase decisions and tests the mediating role of brand trust across all pathways.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Theoretical Foundation and the Position of Brand Trust

A purchase decision can be understood as the outcome of an evaluation process in which consumers receive stimuli, form beliefs, assess alternatives, and then choose the action deemed most suitable. The consumer-behavior perspective positions beliefs and attitudes as important mechanisms preceding action by [Fishbein and Ajzen \(1975\)](#), while relationship marketing positions trust as the foundation of a sustainable exchange because it reduces the perception of opportunism and risk ([Morgan & Hunt, 1994](#)). At the brand level, brand trust reflects the belief that a brand can be relied upon and has goodwill when consumers are in a vulnerable position ([Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001](#)). In the travel context, that vulnerability arises because consumers pay before the full quality of the service can be verified.

Brand trust is modeled here as a mediating mechanism rather than as an additional independent variable because of how it functions in the belief-formation sequence described above. Digital signals such as an advertisement, an influencer's post, a website interface, or a review do not by themselves constitute the vulnerable exchange described by [Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán \(2001\)](#); they are inputs that consumers must first interpret and internalize as evidence of a brand's reliability and goodwill before that belief can rationally justify accepting the risk of payment. In other words, a digital signal changes behavior only after it has been converted into a belief state brand trust because it is that belief, not the signal itself, that directly addresses the perceived risk and information asymmetry inherent in a pre-paid, largely unverifiable service. This sequential logic (signal → belief → risk acceptance → purchase) is what distinguishes a mediating mechanism from a merely correlated predictor: if brand trust were only an additional variable running parallel to the four digital marketing elements, there would be no theoretical reason to expect that some channels lose their explanatory power once trust is included in the model, yet this is exactly the pattern the results reveal for website quality and e-WOM. Positioning brand trust as the evaluative mechanism linking digital signals to purchase decisions therefore reflects both relationship-marketing theory, in which trust is the mechanism that substitutes for costly verification by [Morgan and Hunt \(1994\)](#), and the specific vulnerability structure of pre-paid travel services.

Conceptually, the four digital touchpoints provide different types of evidence. Advertising and influencers primarily carry persuasive signals and source credibility, the website provides evidence of system capability and information quality, while e-WOM provides social proof that is relatively more independent of the firm. These differences in source and information character open the possibility that the effect on purchase is not uniform. The research model therefore distinguishes the effect on brand trust, the direct effect on purchase decisions, and the indirect effect through brand trust.

2.2 Digital Marketing and Brand Trust

Social media advertising can build brand trust when a message offers information that is clear, relevant, and verifiable, and when a firm's interactions show consistency between promotional promises and service delivery. The causal mechanism runs through message processing: an advertisement that is informative and relevant lowers the cognitive cost of verifying a claim, while interactivity and personalization signal that the firm is responsive and identifiable rather than anonymous; both cues reduce the perceived gap between what is promised and what the firm can be expected to deliver. Message credibility then acts as the final filter - a message that survives that filter is encoded as evidence of reliability, not merely noticed as promotion, which is what converts ad exposure into trust rather than mere awareness ([Alalwan, 2018](#); [Dao, Le, Cheng, & Chen, 2014](#)). In travel services, this function matters because consumers use promotional information as an early cue for assessing a provider's professionalism.

H_{1a}: Social media advertising has a positive effect on brand trust

Influencer marketing can strengthen brand trust through credibility transfer from the figure to the brand. This transfer depends not only on popularity, but also on expertise, authenticity, and the fit among the influencer, the service category, and audience character. When a recommendation is perceived as relevant and authentic, consumers more readily use the influencer's reputation as a cue for brand quality by [Belanche, Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez \(2021\)](#), [De, Cauberghe, and Hudders \(2017\)](#), and [Djafarova and Rushworth \(2017\)](#), a mechanism confirmed specifically in travel decision-making, where influencer trust shapes every stage of the consumer's decision journey ([Pop, Săplăcan, Dabija, & Alt, 2022](#)).

H_{1b}: Influencer marketing has a positive effect on brand trust

Website quality contributes to brand trust because a website is the digital representation of a firm's capability. Ease of use, information completeness and accuracy, security, and service-interaction quality signal that a firm has a system able to support transactions consistently. WebQual emphasizes usability, information quality, and service interaction, while the information-systems success model positions system and information quality as the basis for user evaluation ([Barnes, & Vidgen, 2002](#); [DeLone, & McLean, 2003](#)). In the hotel and travel sector specifically, website quality built on these same dimensions has been shown to shape customer satisfaction and purchase intention ([Ali, 2016](#)).

H_{1c}: Website quality has a positive effect on brand trust

The e-WOM provides social proof through other customers' experiences. Detailed, credible, consistent, and relevant information helps consumers assess risk and estimate provider reliability. Information-adoption literature shows that e-WOM credibility and usefulness are important determinants of information acceptance, while meta-analytic and review evidence shows that e-WOM characteristics are generally related to purchase intention ([Cheung, & Thadani, 2012](#); [Erkan, & Evans, 2016](#); [Huete-Alcocer, 2017](#); [Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2020](#)). This trust and mediation-based pathway also appears outside the travel sector, such as social media marketing has been shown to mediate the relationship between product quality, brand awareness, and purchase intention, indicating that digital touchpoints often reach a purchase outcome only through an intervening belief-formation mechanism rather than directly ([Sigalingging & Tj, 2026](#)).

H_{1d}: e-WOM has a positive effect on brand trust

2.3 Digital Marketing and Purchase Decisions

A purchase decision reflects a consumer's evaluation of needs, benefits, risks, and available alternatives ([Kotler & Armstrong, 2018](#)). In the digital environment, advertising can accelerate decisions through information and calls to action; influencers can reduce search burden through recommendation; websites can lower transaction friction; and e-WOM can enrich experience-based

evaluation. Digital marketing literature also shows that social media activity can influence purchase behavior, including in travel contexts ([Azhar et al., 2023](#)). Based on this logic, each touchpoint is expected to have a direct path to purchase decisions, although the strength may differ.

H_{2a}: Social media advertising has a positive effect on purchase decisions

H_{2b}: Influencer marketing has a positive effect on purchase decisions

H_{2c}: Website quality has a positive effect on purchase decisions

H_{2d}: e-WOM has a positive effect on purchase decisions

2.4 Brand Trust and the Mediation Mechanism

Brand trust is expected to directly affect purchase decisions because trust lowers consumers' need to keep searching for alternatives and increases willingness to accept transaction risk. Consumers who believe a brand can fulfil its promise are more willing to hand over payment, data, and travel plans to the provider. The chain of effect from trust to behavioral response has been shown in brand research, where brand trust mediates the effect of brand-level marketing activity on purchase intention ([Husain et al., 2022](#)).

H₃: Brand trust has a positive effect on purchase decisions

A mediating role occurs when a digital signal first builds belief in the brand, and that belief then drives the transaction. This mechanism allows two patterns. First, a channel may retain a direct effect alongside an indirect effect through trust, indicating complementary mediation. Second, a channel may have no significant direct effect but a significant indirect effect, indicating indirect-only mediation ([Zhao et al., 2010](#)). In travel services, both patterns are plausible because some channels are primarily persuasive while others mainly supply evidence that reduces uncertainty.

H_{4a}: Brand trust mediates the effect of social media advertising on purchase decisions

H_{4b}: Brand trust mediates the effect of influencer marketing on purchase decisions

H_{4c}: Brand trust mediates the effect of website quality on purchase decisions

H_{4d}: Brand trust mediates the effect of e-WOM on purchase decisions

Table 1 summarizes the operationalization of each construct and its main references.

Table 1. Construct operationalization and measurement basis

Construct	Indicator Scope	Main References
Social media advertising	Informativeness, relevance, entertainment, interactivity, and credibility	(Alalwan, 2018 ; Dao et al., 2014)
Influencer marketing	Credibility, expertise, attractiveness, congruence, and authenticity	(Belanche et al., 2021 ; Djafarova, 2017)
Website quality	Usability, information quality, security, and service interaction	(Barnes, 2002 ; DeLone, 2003 ; Ali, 2016)
e-WOM	Quality, credibility, quantity, valence, and usefulness of reviews	(Cheung, 2012 ; Erkan, 2016)
Brand trust	Brand reliability and belief in the firm's goodwill	(Delgado-Ballester, 2001)
Purchase decision	Information search, alternative evaluation, choice confidence, and purchase realization	(Kotler, 2018)

Table 1 presents the operationalization of the constructs used in this study and their respective measurement bases. Social media advertising is measured through informativeness, relevance, entertainment, interactivity, and credibility, while influencer marketing includes credibility, expertise, attractiveness, congruence, and authenticity. Website quality is assessed through usability, information quality, security, and service interaction, whereas e-WOM is measured through review quality, credibility, quantity, valence, and usefulness. Brand trust focuses on brand reliability and consumers' belief in the firm's goodwill, while purchase decision is measured through information search, alternative evaluation, choice confidence, and purchase realization. These indicators were adapted from established literature to ensure that each construct is measured consistently with its underlying theoretical concept.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses an explanatory quantitative survey design with travel-service consumers in Batam City as the unit of analysis. Respondents were required to have used a travel service and to have had some experience with at least one of the provider's digital channels, such as social media, the website, or online reviews. Data were collected from November 2025 to April 2026. A cross-sectional design was chosen to test relationships among constructs at one point in observation; results are therefore interpreted as perception-based structural relationships and are not intended as longitudinal causal evidence.

The population for this study was defined as all customers of the 18 travel agencies in Batam City that met screening criteria of operational continuity, an established customer base, public recognition, and verifiable business existence; this population frame comprised approximately 20,000 users. From that frame, a sample of 150 respondents was drawn using a two-step sampling technique. First, proportional stratified sampling allocated the number of respondents per agency in proportion to each agency's share of the total customer frame, so that larger agencies contributed proportionally more respondents and no single agency dominated the sample. Second, within each agency's allocated quota, respondents were selected using purposive sampling based on two eligibility criteria: prior use of the agency's travel service, and prior exposure to at least one of its digital channels, such as social media, website, or online reviews, consistent with established guidance on purposive sampling for capturing respondents with experience relevant to the constructs under study ([Etikan et al., 2016](#)).

The sample size of 150 was considered adequate for the structural model tested. Following the widely used '10-times rule' for PLS-SEM, the minimum required sample is ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at any single endogenous construct in the model, the purchase-decision construct receives the most paths, such as five, from the four digital marketing elements and brand trust, implying a minimum recommended sample of 50. A sample of 150 exceeds this threshold three-fold and also satisfies more conservative inverse-square-root and gamma-exponential minimum-sample guidance for models of this complexity and expected effect sizes ([Hair et al., 2019](#)), supporting adequate statistical power for the path estimates reported below.

The research instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. Indicator development referred to established literature, such as social media advertising covers informativeness, relevance, attractiveness, interactivity, and credibility; influencer marketing covers credibility, expertise, attractiveness, congruence, and authenticity; website quality covers usability, information quality, security, and service interaction; e-WOM covers quality, credibility, quantity, valence, and usefulness of reviews; brand trust covers brand reliability and belief in the firm's goodwill; while purchase decision covers information search, alternative evaluation, choice confidence, and purchase realization. The conceptual basis for each construct is summarized in Table 1.

Analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) rather than covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), in SmartPLS 4.1.1. PLS-SEM was selected for three reasons tied directly to this study's objective. First, the research goal is explanatory-predictive identifying which digital marketing elements most strongly explain variance in brand trust and purchase decisions

and estimating mediation pathways, which is the objective PLS-SEM is designed to optimize, whereas Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) is oriented toward confirming a theoretically pre-specified covariance structure (Hair et al., 2019). Second, the model includes a formative-leaning combination of several correlated predictor constructs feeding into brand trust, a structure PLS-SEM handles without the stricter distributional and identification assumptions CB-SEM requires. Third, PLS-SEM performs reliably at moderate sample sizes such as this study's 150 respondents, whereas CB-SEM typically requires larger samples to achieve stable maximum-likelihood estimates. Evaluation proceeded in two stages. First, the measurement model was assessed through outer loading, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) to assess convergent validity, internal reliability, and discriminant validity. Second, the structural model was evaluated through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients, t-values, and bootstrapped p-values. Relationships were declared significant at $p < 0.05$. Mediation was classified following Zhao et al. (2010), a significant indirect effect accompanied by a significant, same-direction direct effect was categorized as complementary mediation, while a significant indirect effect with a non-significant direct effect was categorized as indirect-only mediation.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Respondent Profile

As shown in Table 2, the respondent composition was relatively balanced by gender, with 49.3% male and 50.7% female. The 17-35 age group made up 56.7% of the sample, while the remaining 43.3% were older than 35. This distribution shows that the sample is not dominated solely by younger consumers, although the group generally more familiar with digital channels forms the largest proportion. This age variation matters because travel-service decisions can involve differing information needs, risk perceptions, and intensity of digital-channel use.

Table 2. Respondent characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	74	49.3
	Female	76	50.7
Age	17-25 years	40	26.7
	26-35 years	45	30.0
	36-45 years	32	21.3
	46-55 years	22	14.7
	>55 years	11	7.3

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

As shown in Table 3, all constructs have an AVE above 0.50, Cronbach's alpha above 0.70, and composite reliability above 0.70. The proportion of indicator variance explained by each construct thus meets convergent-validity criteria, and internal consistency is at an acceptable level. HTMT values are also below 0.90, indicating adequate empirical distinctiveness between construct pairs. These results support the adequacy of the measurement model for proceeding to structural-model evaluation (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3. Convergent validity and construct reliability

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Decision
Social media advertising	0.969	0.972	0.728	Valid
Influencer marketing	0.964	0.967	0.662	Valid
Website quality	0.957	0.962	0.641	Valid

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Decision
e-WOM	0.966	0.969	0.692	Valid
Brand trust	0.973	0.976	0.756	Valid
Purchase decision	0.980	0.982	0.806	Valid

4.3 Structural Model Fit and Explanatory Power

An SRMR value of 0.050 indicates a low level of model misfit and remains below the 0.10 threshold commonly used as a model-fit indicator. All VIF values are below 5, so there is no indication of critical collinearity among predictors on the structural paths. This finding matters because the subsequent path coefficients can be interpreted without a major concern that the relationships obtained are dominated by excessive linear overlap among predictor variables.

The coefficient of determination for brand trust of 0.723 indicates that social media advertising, influencer marketing, website quality, and e-WOM jointly explain 72.3% of the variance in brand trust. Purchase decision has an R^2 of 0.729, so the four digital marketing elements together with brand trust explain 72.9% of the variance in purchase decisions. As shown in Table 4, these values indicate strong explanatory power within the study sample, although the remaining variance still leaves room for other factors such as price, actual service quality, perceived risk, customer experience, or situational conditions not yet included in the model.

Table 4. Structural model fit and explanatory power

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
SRMR	0.050	Low model misfit
VIF	< 5	No critical collinearity
R^2 Brand trust	0.723	72.3% of brand-trust variance explained
R^2 Purchase decision	0.729	72.9% of purchase-decision variance explained

4.4 Direct Effects

Table 5. Direct-effect hypothesis testing results

Relationship	β	t	p	Status
H_{1a} : Social media advertising $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	0.406	8.488	<0.001	Supported
H_{1b} : Influencer marketing $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	0.360	6.532	<0.001	Supported
H_{1c} : Website quality $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	0.273	6.038	<0.001	Supported
H_{1d} : e-WOM $\rightarrow$ Brand trust	0.284	5.796	<0.001	Supported
H_{2a} : Social media advertising $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.254	4.829	<0.001	Supported
H_{2b} : Influencer marketing $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.187	3.381	0.001	Supported
H_{2c} : Website quality $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.020	0.366	0.715	Not supported
H_{2d} : e-WOM $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.027	0.499	0.618	Not supported
H_3 : Brand trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.539	6.627	<0.001	Supported

Table 5 presents the results of direct-effect hypothesis testing. Social media advertising is the strongest driver of brand trust among the four digital touchpoints ($\beta=0.406$; $p<0.001$) and also has a direct effect on purchase decisions ($\beta=0.254$; $p<0.001$); H_{1a} and H_{2a} are therefore supported. This result shows that advertising does not merely build awareness, but can work simultaneously as an information source and an action trigger when promotional content is perceived as relevant and credible. The finding is consistent with [Alalwan \(2018\)](#) and [Dao et al. \(2014\)](#), who position information value, interactivity, entertainment, and credibility as key characteristics of social media advertising. For travel services, the implication is that promotional messages need to provide

verifiable evidence - such as consistent pricing, schedules, facilities, change terms, and booking channels - so that the persuasive effect is not disconnected from trust formation.

Influencer marketing has a positive effect on brand trust ($\beta=0.360$; $p<0.001$) and purchase decisions ($\beta=0.187$; $p=0.001$), so H_{1b} and H_{2b} are supported. The larger coefficient on the path to brand trust indicates that the influencer's primary function in this context is strengthening brand credibility, although a direct persuasive push is still present. This result is consistent with the literature emphasizing congruence, expertise, authenticity, and credibility as the mechanisms of influencer effectiveness ([Belanche et al., 2021](#); [Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017](#)). In other words, follower reach is not the sole basis for selecting an influencer; the fit between the figure's travel experience and personal reputation is more relevant when the firm's goal is to convert endorsement into trust.

Website quality has a positive effect on brand trust ($\beta=0.273$; $p<0.001$), so H_{1c} is supported, but no significant direct effect on purchase decisions ($\beta=0.020$; $p=0.715$), so H_{2c} is not supported. This finding shows that website quality functions more as a capability signal and risk reducer than as a stand-alone purchase trigger. A website that is easy to use, informative, secure, and professional helps consumers judge that a firm has adequate operational capability, consistent with WebQual and the information-systems success model ([Barnes & Vidgen, 2002](#); [DeLone & McLean, 2003](#)). However, technical quality is not necessarily sufficient to produce a decision if consumers still need confidence regarding price, availability, reputation, and service fulfilment. This pattern aligns with [Flavián et al. \(2006\)](#), who show the linkage among usability, satisfaction, and trust in website-based behavior. The non-significant direct path is worth comparing critically with international e-commerce-quality studies, several of which do report a significant direct effect of website quality on purchase or continuance intention in retail settings with lower perceived risk ([Barnes & Vidgen, 2002](#); [DeLone & McLean, 2003](#)). The contrast suggests that the strength of a direct website quality to purchase path may be service-category dependent: for low-risk, standardized retail purchases, a functional website can be sufficient justification to buy, whereas for a high-risk, largely intangible service such as travel, a well-functioning website appears necessary but not sufficient, and consumers still require the additional reassurance that only accumulated brand trust built from advertising, influencer endorsement, and reviews together with the site itself can provide. This service-category contingency, rather than a weakness of website quality as a construct, offers a plausible explanation for why this study's coefficient diverges from findings in lower-risk digital-commerce contexts.

e-WOM has a positive effect on brand trust ($\beta=0.284$; $p<0.001$), so H_{1d} is supported, but its direct effect on purchase decisions is not significant ($\beta=0.027$; $p=0.618$), so H_{2d} is not supported. This result is notable because the literature generally shows that e-WOM characteristics relate to purchase intention ([Ismagilova et al., 2020](#)). In this study's context, review information appears to be internalized first as a basis for assessing brand reliability rather than translated directly into a purchase. This interpretation is consistent with the information-adoption perspective: information quality and credibility determine whether e-WOM is deemed useful, and the information accepted then shapes the subsequent evaluation ([Cheung & Thadani, 2012](#); [Erkan & Evans, 2016](#)). A non-significant direct path therefore does not mean e-WOM is unimportant, but shows that its contribution mainly works through trust formation. This result departs from several international e-WOM studies conducted in destination-choice or medical-tourism contexts, which do report a significant direct effect of e-WOM on travel or purchase intention ([Abubakar, 2016](#); [Akhi et al., 2023](#)). A plausible explanation for the divergence is measurement scope: those studies typically measure e-WOM's effect on an initial intention to visit or consider a destination, a decision stage at which reviews function as a primary and sometimes the only available cue. This study instead measures the effect on a purchase decision from an identified, named travel agency with which the respondent already has some brand exposure, meaning brand trust has already begun to form from other touchpoints before the review is read; under those conditions, e-WOM's marginal direct contribution to the final purchase step is smaller than its contribution to the trust that preceded it. This distinction intention formation versus final purchase from a known brand offers a more precise, critical account of why this study's e-WOM path differs from prior international findings, rather than treating the non-significant result as a simple contradiction.

Brand trust has the largest direct effect on purchase decisions ($\beta=0.539$; $p<0.001$), so $H3$ is supported. The size of this coefficient confirms that choosing a travel service is an act involving vulnerability: consumers must pay and hand over travel plans before the full service outcome can be assured. Trust reduces doubt about a firm's ability to fulfil promises, keep transactions secure, and respond to service disruptions. This result supports relationship marketing ([Morgan & Hunt, 1994](#)) and brand-trust research linking trust to favorable consumer behavioral consequences ([Husain et al., 2022](#)). The finding is also consistent with [Azhar et al. \(2023\)](#) in the travel context, who position brand trust as an important mechanism in the relationship between social media marketing and travel purchase behavior.

4.5 The Mediating Role of Brand Trust

Table 6. Indirect effects through brand trust

Indirect Path	β	t	p	Mediation Type
H_{4a} : Social media advertising $\rightarrow$ Brand trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.219	4.812	<0.001	Complementary
H_{4b} : Influencer marketing $\rightarrow$ Brand trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.194	4.689	<0.001	Complementary
H_{4c} : Website quality $\rightarrow$ Brand trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.147	4.770	<0.001	Indirect-only
H_{4d} : e-WOM $\rightarrow$ Brand trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase decision	0.153	3.993	<0.001	Indirect-only

As shown in Table 6, all indirect effects through brand trust are significant, so H_{4a} - H_{4d} are supported. For social media advertising, the indirect effect of 0.219 ($p<0.001$) appears alongside a significant direct effect of 0.254. Influencer marketing shows the same pattern, with a significant indirect effect of 0.194 ($p<0.001$) and a significant direct effect of 0.187. Both patterns are classified as complementary mediation because the channel can still drive purchase directly, but the effect is strengthened once consumers first build trust. The total effect becomes 0.473 for social media advertising and 0.381 for influencer marketing, making advertising the strongest total pathway among the four digital marketing elements.

For website quality and e-WOM, the direct effect on purchase decisions is not significant, while the indirect effect through brand trust is significant at 0.147 and 0.153 respectively ($p<0.001$). This pattern is indirect-only mediation: both touchpoints do not require a direct persuasive effect to remain relevant to purchase; their contribution appears once digital information and experience are successfully translated into belief in the brand's reliability. Total effects of 0.167 for website quality and 0.180 for e-WOM show that the magnitude of their contribution cannot be judged from the direct coefficient alone.

Taken together, the results show that digital touchpoints are not substitutable and do not share an identical function. Advertising and influencers have a dual function, such as shaping preference and trust simultaneously. In contrast, the website and e-WOM are more dominant as a verification infrastructure that reduces uncertainty before consumers make a decision. This finding extends the understanding of digital marketing for risky services by showing that channel effectiveness should be assessed by its conversion mechanism, not merely by the presence or absence of a direct effect on purchase.

The theoretical distinction between complementary and indirect-only mediation carries implications beyond simply labeling each channel's pattern. Complementary mediation, found for advertising and influencer marketing, implies that these two channels operate through two theoretically separable routes at once a direct persuasion route consistent with classical advertising-response theory, and an indirect belief-formation route consistent with relationship-marketing theory and that both routes must be modeled simultaneously to avoid understating a channel's total contribution; a model that omitted brand trust would still detect these two channels as effective, but would misattribute the full effect to persuasion alone. Indirect-only mediation, found for website quality and e-WOM, carries a stronger theoretical implication: it indicates that these two channels have no persuasive route independent of

belief formation, meaning their entire contribution to purchase is conditional on successful conversion into brand trust. A firm that improved website quality or increased review volume without that improvement being internalized as evidence of reliability would, under this model, see no purchase effect at all a testable boundary condition that distinguishes indirect-only mediation from a merely weaker complementary effect. This reasoning also explains why the two mediation types should be treated as qualitatively different diagnostic categories in digital marketing theory, not merely as two points on the same continuum of mediation strength.

4.6 Theoretical Contribution

The first theoretical contribution is separating the function of four digital touchpoints within a single model. The literature often treats digital marketing or social media marketing as an aggregate construct, whereas this study shows that different message sources produce different structural patterns. Paid and endorsed touchpoints (advertising and influencers) have both direct and indirect paths, while owned and earned touchpoints (website and e-WOM) mainly operate through brand trust. This distinction helps explain why improving a particular digital channel's quality does not always show an immediate effect on purchase.

The second contribution is confirming brand trust as a cross-channel conversion mechanism. Brand trust is not merely a consequence of digital marketing, but a variable that unifies various credibility signals into a purchase decision, consistent with evidence that trust is the mechanism translating social media marketing activity into brand equity and loyalty outcomes more broadly ([Ebrahim, 2020](#)). The differing mediation patterns also show that trust can either strengthen an existing effect or serve as the only effective path to a transaction. This study thus connects relationship marketing, systems-quality, influencer-credibility, and e-WOM-adoption perspectives within a single trust-based mechanism.

4.7 Managerial Implications

First, travel firms need to manage social media advertising as both a conversion channel and a trust builder. The priority is not merely posting frequency, but verifiable information transparency, such as final price, schedule, facilities, change or cancellation terms, legality, and booking channels. Consistency between promotional messages and actual experience matters because a mismatch at the fulfilment stage can damage the trust built at the communication stage. Second, influencer selection should be based on audience fit, travel experience, interaction quality, and integrity track record. Overly scripted content risks being perceived as promotion without evidence. Because the influencer effect on brand trust is larger than its direct effect on purchase, firms need to encourage content that shows the service process authentically, rather than merely conveying claims or discounts.

Third, the website and e-WOM need to be treated as a trust-verification system. The site must make it easy for consumers to find information, understand the transaction process, assess security, and obtain support. Customer reviews need to be monitored and responded to professionally, with attention to the quality and consistency of experience rather than review volume alone. Because both channels work through indirect-only mediation, their success should not be measured by direct conversion alone, but also by their ability to increase a sense of security, credibility, and confidence in service fulfilment.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

This study shows that social media advertising, influencer marketing, website quality, and e-WOM all have a positive effect on brand trust among travel customers in Batam City, but not all of them have a direct path to purchase. Social media advertising and influencer marketing directly affect purchase decisions, while website quality and e-WOM do not. Brand trust is the strongest direct predictor of purchase decisions and mediates all digital marketing relationships. The study's main finding is not merely that trust matters, but that the conversion mechanism differs across channels: advertising and influencers show complementary mediation, while website quality and e-WOM show indirect-only mediation. By disaggregating digital marketing into four distinguishable touchpoints within one mediation model, this study shows that brand trust is not a uniform intervening variable but a mechanism whose role changes with the type of signal it mediates complementary for persuasive,

source-credibility-based channels, such as advertising and influencers, indirect-only for evidence-based, verification-oriented channels, such as website, e-WOM. This distinction refines relationship-marketing and information-adoption theory by specifying the conditions under which trust supplements versus fully replaces a channel's direct persuasive power. Practically, firms cannot evaluate every digital channel using the same direct-conversion metric. In travel services, some digital activity works as a transaction driver, while other activity is more important as credibility evidence that allows consumers to feel safe transacting; budget and performance indicators should be assigned accordingly, with website and e-WOM investment judged by their contribution to brand trust rather than to immediate bookings.

5.2 Research Limitations

Generalization of the results remains constrained by the cross-sectional design, the use of perceptual data, the focus on a single city, and the exclusion of situational or actual-behavior variables. The sample covers 18 travel agencies in one city, and purchase decision is measured mainly as a perceptual/intention-based construct rather than verified transaction records. Because of this, the R^2 values, while high within this sample, should not be read as evidence of deterministic causality. In addition, variables potentially relevant to conversion in the Batam travel market, such as price, perceived risk, actual service quality, and customer experience, were not measured in this study because the corresponding primary data were not collected; their omission is a limitation rather than an oversight in interpretation, and no results regarding them are reported here.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future research can use a longitudinal design, transaction data, or a multi-city approach, compare local travel agents with online travel agents, and test perceived risk, customer experience, service quality, price, and loyalty as additional mechanisms or outcomes. Further studies can also test whether age, intensity of digital-channel use, or trip type moderates the relationship among digital touchpoints, brand trust, and purchase decisions. Given the growing importance of platform-level trust alongside brand-level trust, incorporating a platform-trust construct, following approaches used in e-WOM and Gen Z purchase-intention research, is a promising direction. Because website quality and e-WOM in this study operate only indirectly, future models could also test brand awareness as an additional mediator between digital marketing activity and purchase decisions, an approach used in recent digital-marketing research. Practically, travel firms are encouraged to use these directions to complement, rather than replace, the advertising-consistency, influencer-authenticity, and trust-verification priorities identified in this study.

Acknowledgement

The authors thank the management and staff of the 18 participating travel agencies in Batam City for facilitating respondent access, and all respondents who took the time to complete the questionnaire. The authors also thank the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Batam, for institutional support throughout this research.

Author Contributions

MM contributed to conceptualization, data collection, formal analysis, and writing of the original draft. BS contributed to research design, supervision, methodology validation, and manuscript review. NPD contributed to the literature review, data curation, and manuscript editing, with all authors reading and approving the final manuscript.

References

- Abubakar, A. (2016). Does eWOM influence destination trust and travel intention: A medical tourism perspective. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 29(1), 598-611. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2016.1189841>
- Akhi, M. T. J., Sarker, M. A. H., & Fakir, M. K. J. (2023). Factors' influence of e-WOM on travel intentions of tourists: A study on tourist places located in Bangladesh. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship*, 4(3), 223-239. <https://doi.org/10.35912/joste.v4i3.2183>

- Alalwan, A. A. (2018). Investigating the impact of social media advertising features on customer purchase intention. *International Journal of Information Management*, 42, 65-77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2018.06.001>
- Ali, F. (2016). Hotel website quality, perceived flow, customer satisfaction and purchase intention. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 7(2), 213-228. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-02-2016-0010>
- Azhar, M., Husain, R., Hamid, S., & Rahman, M. N. (2023). Effect of social media marketing on online travel purchase behavior post-COVID-19: Mediating role of brand trust and brand loyalty. *Future Business Journal*, 9(1), 13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-023-00192-6>
- Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Batam. (2026, February 3). Ekspor dan pariwisata Batam melonjak signifikan di akhir. (2025). Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Batam.
- Barnes, S. J., & Vidgen, R. T. (2002). An integrative approach to the assessment of e-commerce quality. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 3(3), 114-127.
- Belanche, D., Casaló, L. V., Flavián, M., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2021). Understanding influencer marketing: The role of congruence between influencers, products and consumers. *Journal of Business Research*, 132, 186-195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.067>
- Buhalis, D., & Sinarta, Y. (2019). Real-time co-creation and nowness service: Lessons from tourism and hospitality. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 36(5), 563-582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2019.1592059>
- Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019). *Digital marketing: Strategy, implementation and practice* (7th ed.).
- Cheung, C. M. K., & Thadani, D. R. (2012). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication: A literature analysis and integrative model. *Decision Support Systems*, 54(1), 461-470. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2012.06.008>
- Dao, W. V.-T., Le, A. N. H., Cheng, J. M.-S., & Chen, D. C. (2014). Social media advertising value: The case of transitional economies in Southeast Asia. *International Journal of Advertising*, 33(2), 271-294. <https://doi.org/10.2501/IJA-33-2-271-294>
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798-828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035>
- Delgado-Ballester, E., & Munuera-Alemán, J. L. (2001). Brand trust in the context of consumer loyalty. *European Journal of Marketing*, 35(11/12), 1238-1258. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM000000000006475>
- DeLone, W. H., & McLean, E. R. (2003). The DeLone and McLean model of information systems success: A ten-year update. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 19(4), 9-30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421222.2003.11045748>
- Djafarova, E., & Rushworth, C. (2017). Exploring the credibility of online celebrities' Instagram profiles in influencing the purchase decisions of young female users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 68, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.11.009>
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., Jain, V., Karjaluoto, H., Kefi, H., Krishen, A. S., Kumar, V., Rahman, M. M., Raman, R., Rauschnabel, P. A., Rowley, J., Salo, J., Tran, G. A., & Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research: Perspectives and research propositions. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 102168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168>
- Ebrahim, R. S. (2020). The role of trust in understanding the impact of social media marketing on brand equity and brand loyalty. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 19(4), 287-308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332667.2019.1705742>
- Erkan, I., & Evans, C. (2016). The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions: An extended approach to information adoption. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 61, 47-55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.003>

- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). Belief, attitude, intention and behavior: An introduction to theory and research. *Addison-Wesley*.
- Flavián, C., Guinalíu, M., & Gurrea, R. (2006). The role played by perceived usability, satisfaction and consumer trust on website loyalty. *Information & Management*, 43(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2005.01.002>
- Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review*, 31(1), 2-24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2018-0203>
- Huete-Alcocer, N. (2017). A literature review of word of mouth and electronic word of mouth: Implications for consumer behavior. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1256. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01256>
- Husain, R., Ahmad, A., & Khan, B. M. (2022). The impact of brand equity, status consumption, and brand trust on purchase intention of luxury brands. *Cogent Business & Management*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2022.2034234>
- Ismagilova, E., Slade, E. L., Rana, N. P., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2020). The effect of electronic word of mouth communications on intention to buy: A meta-analysis. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 22, 1203-1226. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-019-09924-y>
- Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2018). *Principles of marketing (17th ed.)*.
- Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299405800302>
- Pop, R.-A., Săplăcan, Z., Dabija, D.-C., & Alt, M.-A. (2022). The impact of social media influencers on travel decisions: The role of trust in consumer decision journey. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 25(5), 823-843. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1895729>
- Sigalingging, G. P., & Tj, H. W. (2026). The effect of product quality and brand awareness on consumers' purchase intention: The mediating role of social media marketing. *Journal of Digital Business and Marketing*, 2(1), 21-37. <https://doi.org/10.35912/jdbm.v2i1.3844>
- Yunanto, W., Sugiat, M. A., & Ariyanti, M. (2025). Impact of social media marketing activity on brand loyalty. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Academic Business Studies*, 2(3), 473-485. <https://doi.org/10.35912/jomabs.v2i3.2899>
- Zhao, X., Lynch, J. G., Jr., & Chen, Q. (2010). Reconsidering Baron and Kenny: Myths and truths about mediation analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(2), 197-206. <https://doi.org/10.1086/651257>