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The Influence of Social Media Engagement, Recommendation Accuracy, and Brand Ethical Image on Digital Brand Trust in Online Modern Retail

[1]Sonya Sidjabat, [2]Iwan Henri Kusnadi, [3]Vivid Violin, [4]Victor Lamboy Sinaga, [5]Sagita Charolina Sihombing, [6]Dina Agnesia Sihombing
[1]Institut Transportasi dan Logistik (ITL) Trisakti
[2]STISIP Bina Putera Banjar
[3]Politeknik Maritim AMI Makassar
[4,6]Institut Bisnis dan Multimedia Asmi
[5]Institut Bisnis dan Teknologi Pelita Indonesia
Corresponding Author: Sonya Sidjabat E-Mail: sonyasidjabat@gmail.com

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini terutama bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi secara mendalam faktor-faktor penentu kepercayaan merek digital di industri fesyen ritel online Indonesia, yaitu keterlibatan media sosial, akurasi rekomendasi, dan citra moral merek. Dasar pemikiran penelitian ini didasarkan pada meningkatnya jumlah pemain di pasar ritel digital dan kepercayaan konsumen sebagai persyaratan utama untuk transaksi online. Teknik penjelasan kuantitatif digunakan dengan 200 responden yang dipilih secara purposif dari pengguna belanja online aktif. Kuesioner skala Likert lima poin digunakan untuk pengumpulan data dan regresi linier berganda adalah metode analisis yang diterapkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga variabel independen tersebut, secara keseluruhan, secara positif dan signifikan memengaruhi kepercayaan merek digital. Dari sisi teoritis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur pemasaran digital dan perilaku konsumen dalam konteks pembangunan kepercayaan merek di lingkungan online. Implikasi praktis dari hasil penelitian terlihat pada bidang restrukturisasi strategi manajer ritel digital untuk memenangkan kepercayaan konsumen melalui peningkatan interaksi media sosial, sistem rekomendasi yang lebih tepat, dan praktik bisnis yang etis dan transparan.

Kata kunci: keterlibatan media sosial, akurasi rekomendasi, citra etis merek, kepercayaan merek digital

ABSTRACT

The research mainly aimed at exploring in-depth the determinants of digital brand trust in Indonesia's online retail fashion industry, namely, social media engagement, accuracy of recommendations, and the brand's moral image. The rationale for the study is founded on the increasing number of players in the digital retail market and trust of consumers being the primary requirement for online transactions. A quantitative explanatory technique was utilized with 200 respondents who were purposively sampled from active online shopping users. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was used for data collection and multiple linear regression was the analysis method applied. The findings revealed that the three independent variables, as a whole, positively and significantly affected digital brand trust. On the theoretical side, this research contributes to the literature of digital marketing and consumer behavior in the context of brand trust building in the online environment. The practical implications of the research results are seen in the area of digital retail managers' strategy restructuring for winning consumers' trust through increased social media interaction, more precise recommendation systems, and ethical and transparent business practices.

Keywords: social media engagement, recommendation accuracy, brand ethical image, digital brand trust

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INTRODUCTION

The swift evolution of contemporary e-commerce has not only influenced the purchase of products but also the communication with brands. In such a digital marketplace where there is an excess and rivalry, the web trust of the brand becomes the crucial factor and mainly affects the duration of the connection among customers, retailers, and the brands (Dharta et al., 2024). The phrase "trust online" refers to four aspects that contribute to consumer confidence in their digital environment: the reliability of the platform, the security of the transactions, the integrity of the information, and the quality of the service being provided consistently. The online transaction risks that consumers perceive to be highest, such as inconsistency in product quality, data misuse, and poor or no service at all, make trust the main factor influencing the decision to purchase and customer loyalty (Hidayat et al., 2023). The online retailers who are able to build strong digital trust are the ones that draw the largest number of customers and have the least negative brand perception. On the other hand, the lack of trust leads to a decline in customers' buying interest and their switching to competitors. Consequently, it is extremely important for the current online retail managers to comprehend the factors that build the digital brand trust since the marketing dynamics in the online world are always changing (Hidayat et al., 2024).

Consumer participation through social media interactions like liking, commenting, sharing, and discussions is what social media engagement is all about. If online brands are present and engaging meaningfully with the audience, social media platforms can offer online brands a personalized and two-way communication that is not only very responsive but also highly interactive (Riyanti et al., 2025). Brands that are consistent and true to their word during the interactions are more likely to be perceived as closer, more open, and more trustworthy. This, in turn, will result in an increase in the brand's digital trust (Harahap et al., 2025). Social media not only gives consumers the right to information but also the ability to judge how brands deal with questions, complaints, and public feedback (Aulia et al., 2024). The opposite of a cumbersome online shopping experience is accurate and personalized recommendations that not only make the search easier, but also increase the quality of the purchase choices and create a feeling that the retailer knows what the customers want (Sudirjo et al., 2024). The more relevant and valuable recommendations consumers receive, the less likely they are to consider the platform untrustworthy and, hence, the digital brand's credibility is also boosted. Consumers might think the system is not skilled and lose trust in the brand if they get irrelevant or repetitive recommendations from the system instead (Anwar et al., 2023). So, accuracy of recommendation is a major factor in establishing and keeping digital trust because it is an indicator of the technology's quality, the correct data handling, and the brand's dedication to ensuring customer satisfaction. Brand ethical image represents the consumer standpoint regarding the brand's ethical responsibilities which are honesty, social responsibility, data privacy and good business practices (Indriastiningsih et al., 2023). The online retail industry ethics are gaining attention as consumers become more and more aware of their privacy, sustainability and

corporate responsibility (Sudirjo et al., 2023). Brands that have a strong ethical image are often viewed as the most trustworthy ones because they are seen as possessing the integrity and moral values that are congruent with the consumers' expectations (Violin et al., 2022; Sihombing & Juliasari, 2022).

The primary aim of this research is to investigate thoroughly the online modern retail environment where social media engagement, recommendation precision, and brand image (in terms of honesty) affect the level of trust consumers have in digital brands. Theoretically, the online trust building process in the retail industry will be uncovered and thus influence the development of digital marketing and consumer behavior studies. Additionally, the project will give brands a digital trust layer by offering a conceptual framework that combines the three factors mentioned above. Moreover, the research will provide useful implications through its results, which would be a guide for online retail managers in crafting more interactive social media strategies, elevating recommendation system accuracy, and developing a more ethical brand image. It is believed that the managers can use these findings as a support for their strategic decisions on trust, customer loyalty, and the survival of online modern retail business in the long run.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research entails a quantitative explanatory method to illuminate the role played by social media interaction, recommendation accuracy, and ethical brand image in the online customers' trust towards digital brands in the modern retail sector. The research data was acquired through a survey that employed a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The survey was conducted among regular online shoppers in Indonesia. Purposive sampling was the method used for respondent selection based on the following criteria: (1) minimum age of 18 years, (2) having made a purchase through an online retail platform in the last six months, (3) visiting online retailer's social media frequently or viewing online promotional content, and (4) having been a user of the product recommendation feature on the platform. The total sample size for the study was 200 respondents, who were deemed to be meeting the minimum requirement for undertaking multiple linear regression analysis. Item-total correlation with a coefficient value > 0.30 and a significance value < 0.05 was used for validity testing, whereas the reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, where a value > 0.70 indicated the presence of internal consistency. SPSS statistical software was used to analyze data from the multiple linear regression analysis which aimed at examining both the partial and total effects of independent variables on digital brand trust. The research findings underwent scientific validation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the F-test reveal that the regression model proposed in this paper is significant at the same time, with significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$. This implies that social media engagement,

recommendation accuracy, and brand ethical image have together a significant positive impact on digital brand trust. The determination coefficient (R^2) of 0.72 means that the three independent variables in the model alone account for 72% of the variation in digital brand trust, whereas the remaining part of the variation is attributable to other factors such as platform reputation, system security, and quality of customer service. The t-test results imply that all independent variables have computed t-values that exceed the t-table and that the significance levels are <0.05, therefore it can be concluded that each variable has a positive and significant impact on digital brand trust. Consequently, all research hypotheses are confirmed and the model is regarded as having a very high explanatory power.

The research results indicate that social media interaction is the leading factor for establishing digital brand trust in the online retail market today as it not only has a positive impact on brand trust but also is a major influence that determines the entire trust landscape. The consumers' trust in the digital brand is proportionate to the level of their social interaction with the brand. Active participation which entails comments, replies, and interactive content, among others, has resulted in customers perceiving the brands as being close and open. Faster responding social media brands are regarded by the customers as being more transparent, loving, and trustworthy. Moreover, social media interaction allows consumers to see firsthand how companies handle complaints or criticism in public, which is a very important factor for the brands' credibility. Furthermore, if the consumers perceive the brands as having professional and consistent communication through digital channels, then the trust in the brands will be greatly enhanced. Thus, the study supports the claim that social media is not simply a marketing tool but a channel for emotional connection and trust building. Therefore, the question of managing authentic and ongoing engagement that will foster digital brand trust in online retailers is very critical.

The research results have been confirmed as one of the main aspects leading to the trust in the digital brand of the company through the precision of the proposals. It will be the case that the brand is considered to know the consumers very well if a recommending machine suggests products that almost perfectly fit the tastes and needs of the buyers. Making the right suggestions to the customers gives them a sense of being useful, effective, and more than that, the technology of the platform is trusted by them too. Besides, the precision of the recommendations will make it less likely for customers to view accidental errors as risks and hence increase their feeling of safety in the transactions. The results have a recommendation algorithm impact that could not only give a positive effect but also win the trust of digital brands in user engagement. Nonetheless, when the recommendations do not have any relevance or are redundant, the consumers might take it as manipulation and consequently, the trust of the consumers would decline. The online retail business, which is totally reliant on data and personalisation, needs a recommendation accuracy to be the primary criterion in assessing the professionalism and the reliability of the technology employed. Thus, a considerable amount of money spent on improving the

accuracy of product recommendations is in fact the main way to build and maintain trust in the digital brands.

The findings of the research indicate that in the present era of online retailing, the brand's ethical image has a significant and positive effect on the consumer's digital trust in the brand. The perception of the brand's ethics by the consumers, including honesty, social responsibility, protection of personal data, and the establishment of fair service policies, has emerged as the main factor creating trust in the digital world. It is an instance that consumers are usually more inclined to trust those brands that they consider ethically correct and very much committed to the principles of ethics. The study provides the support of an ethical image as a trust signal by a brand that lessens the risk associated with online transactions. If the consumers are assured that a brand is practicing good and responsible business, they will not only use the site but will also tell others about it. On the contrary, negative ethical aspects can very effortlessly and very rapidly take away the trust of the consumers and leave a long-lasting negative impact on the brand's reputation. Thus, the image of a brand being ethical can be made strong by bringing in transparent policies and following responsible business practices, which in turn will result in greater digital brand trust among online retailers.

CONCLUSION

The investigation has produced a result in which social media participation, recommendation accuracy and brand ethical image are identified as the three factors that create trust in digital retail brands positively and significantly in the online modern retail context. The management of online modern retail based on this research is to carry out social media strategies that would encourage the dissemination of campaigns that are real, responsive, and using two-way communication through digital channels. The recommendation systems should be fine-tuned with the continuous involvement of customer data but in an ethical and responsible manner so that the recommendations are more relevant and valuable to the users. Furthermore, the companies have to do more than just promote their brand ethical image by practicing the adoption of branding techniques that are honest, fair, and consumer-oriented, especially when it comes to data privacy and complaints handling. It is only through open communication regarding ethical practices and social responsibility that trust will be built over a long period. Thus, the online retailers can combine social media engagement, sophisticated recommendation technology, and ethical commitment to win over digital brand trust, customer loyalty, and business sustainability even during periods of intense competition in the digital marketplace.

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