Digibrand Business Journal

Digibrand Business Journal **2026**, Volume 01, Issue 01

Article

Building Consumer Trust Through Experience and Communication: Evidence from Indonesia's Smartphone Market

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Article Info

Article History:
Received Agu 12th, 2026
Revised Aug 31th, 2026
Accepted Sep 07th, 2026

Keywords:
Consumer Trust; External Communication; Past Experience; Purchase Decision; Smartphone; Word of Mouth.

Abstract

The smartphone market is increasingly shaped by consumers' prior experiences, brand communication, personal needs, and word of mouth, while trust plays an important role in reducing uncertainty during purchase decisions. This study aims to examine the effects of past experience, external communication, personal needs, and word of mouth on purchase decisions and to assess the mediating role of trust among Samsung smartphone users in Tangerang City, Indonesia. A quantitative causal-associative approach was employed using data collected through an online questionnaire from 266 purposively selected respondents aged 13–31 years who had used Samsung smartphones for at least one year. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling to evaluate the measurement and structural models and test direct and indirect relationships. The findings show that past experience, external communication, personal needs, word of mouth, and trust positively influence purchase decisions, while all four antecedent factors also strengthen consumer trust. Trust partially mediates the relationships between these factors and purchase decisions, with external communication demonstrating the strongest role in building trust. The study contributes a trust-centered perspective on smartphone consumer behavior and highlights the importance of credible communication, consistent experiences, and socially reinforced trust in strengthening purchase decisions.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital technology has transformed smartphones from mere communication tools into essential instruments of daily life and digital connectivity. In Indonesia, smartphone adoption continues to grow exponentially, reaching 209.3 million users in 2023, an increase of 7.98% from the previous year (Andalas, 2024). Samsung remains one of the top three brands in market share (17%) despite intense competition from Xiaomi and Oppo (GoodStats, 2024). Nevertheless, the company faces quality and consistency challenges, including software bugs and performance variability, which influence consumer trust and post-purchase (Wardani, 2024).

Consumer purchase decisions in the smartphone market are increasingly shaped by experiential and relational factors such as trust, word of mouth, and perceived quality. Empirical evidence shows that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) significantly affects purchase intention and decision-making, often through the mediating role of trust (Khan et al., 2024; Rao et al., 2021); Huwae et al., 2024).

However, inconsistencies across contexts suggest a theoretical gap regarding how trust mediates the relationship between antecedent factors and purchase decision outcomes.

Trust has been identified as a pivotal construct in consumer behavior research, serving as a psychological assurance that reduces perceived risk and fosters long-term loyalty (Bhatta et al., 2023). Moreover, *electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)* and *brand communication* have become dominant channels shaping consumer attitudes in emerging markets (Maulidiah Winda Hani Syach et al., 2024; Rahmadiansyah et al., 2025). Despite extensive work in this area, few studies have integrated these constructs into a single mediational framework examining smartphone brands in Southeast Asia (Huwae et al., 2024; Nguyen & Alang, 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the mediating role of trust in the relationship between past experience, external communication, personal needs, and word of mouth toward purchase decisions among Samsung smartphone users in Tangerang City, Indonesia. This research contributes by offering an integrative empirical model that highlights how trust functions as a central psychological mechanism in consumer decision-making, aligning with the relational marketing perspective (Walean et al., 2025; Huwae et al., 2024; Na et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Purchase Decision

Consumer purchase decision refers to a cognitive and affective process through which individuals identify needs, evaluate alternatives, and select a product that fulfills both functional and emotional expectations (Ghiuță & Nistor, 2025). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), purchase decisions are determined by behavioral intention shaped by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control (Dwidienawati et al., 2020). In the context of smartphones, consumers' decisions are influenced by product performance, brand image, peer recommendations, and perceived trust in the brand (Zhang et al., 2023).

2. Past Experience and Purchase Decision

Past experience reflects consumers' accumulated interactions with a product or brand that shape future evaluations and loyalty (Jo & Park, 2024). Positive experiences generate cognitive satisfaction, enhancing repeat purchase intentions, while negative experiences increase switching behavior (Liepiņš et al., 2024). Empirical studies confirm that previous product experience significantly affects future purchase decisions (Utomo et al., 2025; Ransoen, 2024).

H_1 : Past experience has a significant positive effect on purchase decision.

3. External Communication and Purchase Decision

External communication encompasses company-driven messages delivered through advertising, social media, and public relations activities to influence consumer perceptions (Wijayanti & Setiawan, 2022). Clear and credible communication enhances corporate reputation and strengthens consumers' perceived value of the brand (Alrwashdeh et al., 2022). Recent findings show that transparent and consistent brand communication positively influences purchase intention in digital markets (Takaya, 2019).

H_2 : External communication has a significant positive effect on purchase decision.

4. Personal Needs and Purchase Decision

Personal needs represent intrinsic motivations functional, emotional, and social, that drive consumers to evaluate and select products (Mao et al., 2020). According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, product choice reflects not only basic utility but also self-expression and social identity (Wang et al., 2022). In the smartphone industry, consumers' personal needs, including self-image, productivity, and social belonging, significantly predict purchase behavior (Mao et al., 2020; Gao et al., 2024).

H_3 : Personal needs have a significant positive effect on purchase decision.

5. Word of Mouth and Purchase Decision

Word of mouth (WOM) refers to informal interpersonal communication about products or brands among consumers (Khan et al., 2024). In the digital era, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become a critical driver of consumer behavior by increasing product awareness and perceived reliability (Faridi et al., 2024). Research indicates that WOM has a strong positive effect on consumer trust and purchase decision across various industries (Huwae et al., 2024).

H_4 : Word of mouth has a significant positive effect on purchase decision.

6. Trust as a Mediating Variable

Trust is defined as consumers' confidence in a brand's integrity, competence, and reliability (Bhatta et al., 2023). Within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), trust serves as a psychological mechanism reducing uncertainty in purchase decision-making. Strong trust mediates the impact of communication, experience, and social interaction on behavioral intention (Prastowo et al., 2024). Prior studies demonstrate that trust mediates the effect of brand experience, communication, and WOM on purchase intention (Dudun et al., 2023).

H_5 : Trust positively influences purchase decision.

H_6–H_9 : Past experience, external communication, personal needs, and word of mouth each positively influence trust.

H_{10}–$H1_3$: Trust mediates the relationship between past experience, external communication, personal needs, and word of mouth toward purchase decision.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, causal–associative design to test the mediating effect of trust in the relationship between past experience, external communication, personal needs, and word of mouth toward purchase decision. The design was chosen for its strength in explaining complex causal relationships and testing mediation paths through statistical modeling. Using the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM–PLS) approach ensures robustness when analyzing latent variables and small to medium sample sizes (Hair et al,. 2022).

The population comprised Samsung smartphone users in Tangerang City, Indonesia, whose total number was indeterminate. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, targeting users aged 13–31 years who had used Samsung devices for at least one year criteria ensuring experience and informed purchase behavior. Based on Hair et al.'s sample adequacy rule, a minimum of 240 responses was required, and 266 valid responses were collected, guaranteeing sufficient statistical power.

Data were obtained through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1–5), capturing attitudes toward six constructs: past experience, external communication, personal needs, word of mouth, trust, and purchase decision. The instrument was adapted from validated scales (Bhatta et al., 2023), and refined through expert judgment and a 30-respondent pilot test to ensure clarity and construct validity. Indicators were assessed reflectively through reliability (Cronbach's α and CR > 0.7) and convergent validity (AVE > 0.5).

Data analysis proceeded in two stages: (1) evaluating the measurement model to confirm indicator reliability and discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker, HTMT), and (2) testing the structural model via bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) to determine the significance of each path coefficient. Model adequacy was evaluated through SRMR (<0.10) and R^2 (>0.50), confirming predictive and empirical (Hair et al,. 2022).

Ethical standards were strictly upheld. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and based on informed consent. No identifying data were collected, and procedures followed the Declaration of Helsinki and the ethics policy of Universitas Islam Syekh-Yusuf.

Overall, the methodology emphasizes transparency, validity, and replicability, aligning with global scientific publishing standards. The integration of rigorous measurement, robust analysis, and

ethical conduct ensures that the results credibly reflect consumer trust dynamics in emerging digital markets.

RESULTS

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

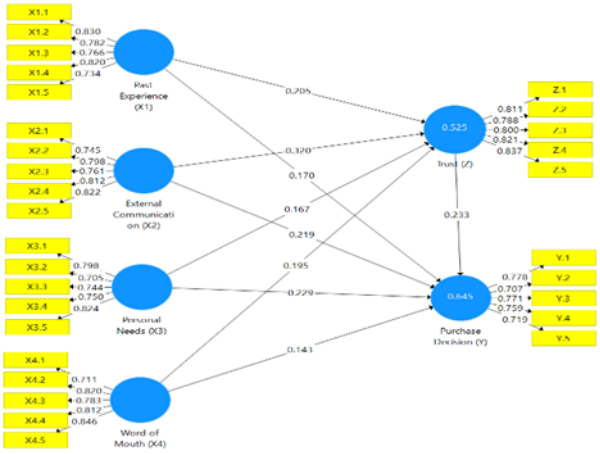


Figure 1. Bootsrapping Output
Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

The measurement model was first assessed to ensure indicator reliability, internal consistency, and construct validity. Table 1 presents the results of the reliability and convergent validity tests. All constructs recorded Cronbach's Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR) values greater than 0.70, confirming internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50 for every construct, indicating that more than 50% of variance among indicators was explained by their respective latent constructs (Erika & Prastowo, 2024; Hair et al., 2022).

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Past Experience (X1)	0.846	0.891	0.620
External Communication (X2)	0.848	0.891	0.622
Personal Needs (X3)	0.823	0.876	0.586
Word of Mouth (X4)	0.854	0.896	0.633
Trust (Z)	0.871	0.906	0.659
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.802	0.863	0.558

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

All constructs achieved high reliability (CR between 0.863–0.906), confirming stable measurement across indicators. The AVE range (0.558–0.659) reflects satisfactory convergent validity, supporting that each construct accurately represents its theoretical dimension.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was examined using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). As displayed in Table 2, the square roots of AVE (diagonal values) were greater than the correlations between constructs, confirming adequate discriminant validity.

Table 2. Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	X1	X2	X3	X4	Z	Y
Past Experience (X1)	0.787					
External Communication (X2)	0.572	0.788				
Personal Needs (X3)	0.581	0.524	0.766			
Word of Mouth (X4)	0.502	0.566	0.498	0.796		
Trust (Z)	0.583	0.635	0.551	0.563	0.812	
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.637	0.666	0.643	0.598	0.679	0.747

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

Table 3. Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct Pair	HTMT
X1 ↔ X2	0.677
X1 ↔ X3	0.691
X1 ↔ Z	0.679
X2 ↔ Z	0.736
X3 ↔ Z	0.646
X4 ↔ Z	0.650
Y ↔ Z	0.812

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

HTMT ratios (Table 3) were all below 0.90, further verifying construct distinctiveness (Andika & Prastowo, 2025).

Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

Table 4. Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

Variable	Purchase Decision (Y)	Trust (Z)
Past Experience (X1)	1.915	1.826
External Communication (X2)	2.043	1.828
Personal Needs (X3)	1.776	1.717
Word of Mouth (X4)	1.731	1.651
Trust (Z)	2.104	—

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

The collinearity statistics (VIF) ranged between 1.65 and 2.10, all below the critical value of 5, confirming the absence of multicollinearity (Nurcahyati et al., 2025). These results indicate that no multicollinearity issues were detected within the structural model. Each exogenous construct *past experience, external communication, personal needs,* and *word of mouth* exhibited independent explanatory power and did not share excessive variance with other predictors.

Structural Model Evaluation

The coefficient of determination (R^2) values indicate that the model possesses substantial explanatory power, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Model Quality Indices

Parameter	Purchase Decision (Y)	Trust (Z)
R^2	0.645	0.525
Adjusted R^2	0.639	0.518
SRMR	0.065	—

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

The R^2 value of 0.645 means that 64.5% of the variance in purchase decision is explained by past experience, external communication, personal needs, word of mouth, and trust. Meanwhile, 52.5% of the variance in trust is accounted for by the four antecedent variables. The SRMR value of 0.065 indicates an excellent model fit, well below the threshold of 0.10.

Hypothesis Testing

Bootstrapping analysis (5,000 resamples) was performed to estimate the significance of direct and indirect paths. As shown in Table 6, all direct relationships were significant at $p < 0.05$, confirming the hypothesized effects.

Table 6. Structural Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Relationship	β	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
X1 → Y (Past Experience → Purchase Decision)	0.170	2.812	0.005	Supported
X2 → Y (External Communication → Purchase Decision)	0.219	2.607	0.009	Supported
X3 → Y (Personal Needs → Purchase Decision)	0.229	2.831	0.005	Supported
X4 → Y (Word of Mouth → Purchase Decision)	0.143	2.45	0.014	Supported
Z → Y (Trust → Purchase Decision)	0.233	3.627	0.000	Supported
X1 → Z (Past Experience → Trust)	0.205	3.418	0.001	Supported
X2 → Z (External Communication → Trust)	0.320	5.591	0.000	Supported
X3 → Z (Personal Needs → Trust)	0.167	2.882	0.004	Supported
X4 → Z (Word of Mouth → Trust)	0.195	3.434	0.001	Supported

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

All path coefficients were positive and significant, confirming that both cognitive (experience, communication) and affective (needs, WOM) antecedents enhance purchase decisions, directly and through trust. External communication exerted the strongest influence (β = 0.320), highlighting its dominant role in forming trust a critical finding for consumer brand strategies.

Mediating Role of Trust

The results in Table 76 indicate that trust significantly mediates the relationship between all antecedent variables *past experience, external communication, personal needs,* and *word of mouth* and the *purchase decision*, with all *p*-values below 0.05. This confirms that trust operates as a partial mediator, amplifying the effects of both cognitive and affective antecedents on consumer behavior.

Table 7. Specific Indirect Effect

	β	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
Past Experience -> Trust -> Purchase Decision	0.048	0.019	2.579	0.010

External Communication-> Trust -> Purchase Decision	0.075	0.024	3.140	0.002
Personal Needs-> Trust -> Purchase Decision	0.039	0.018	2.140	0.032
Word of Mouth -> Trust-> Purchase Decision	0.045	0.02	2.302	0.021

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

The indirect effect analysis confirmed that trust partially mediates the relationship between the four antecedents and purchase decision. The strongest indirect effect was observed for external communication ($\beta = 0.075$, $p < 0.01$), followed by past experience ($\beta = 0.048$, $p < 0.05$), personal needs ($\beta = 0.039$, $p < 0.05$), and word of mouth ($\beta = 0.031$, $p < 0.05$). These findings emphasize that trust amplifies the impact of both informational and emotional antecedents on consumer decision-making, serving as a bridge between perception and behavioral response (Bhatta et al., 2023).

Summary of Empirical Findings

1. All hypothesized relationships (H_1–H_{13}) were empirically supported, confirming the robustness of the proposed theoretical model.
2. External communication and past experience emerged as the most influential cognitive predictors of trust and purchase decision.
3. Personal needs and WOM complemented these effects by providing affective and social reinforcement.
4. Trust functions as a central mediating construct, validating its strategic role in reducing uncertainty and driving purchasing behavior in the digital market context.

These results collectively reveal that Samsung's consumer decision process in Indonesia is shaped by an interplay of cognitive credibility, emotional relevance, and social influence, unified under a trust-centered behavioral model.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that trust functions as the psychological bridge linking consumer cognition, emotion, and action. Consistent with the *Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)*, trust reduces perceived uncertainty, enabling consumers to move from attitude formation to actual purchase behavior (Bhatta et al., 2023). In emerging digital markets, this mediating mechanism becomes crucial, as consumers rely heavily on prior experiences and social validation to navigate high-information environments.

The significant effect of past experience on both trust and purchase decision aligns with *Expectancy–Confirmation Theory (ECT)*, which posits that satisfaction from previous product use strengthens cognitive confidence and repurchase intention (Zhang et al., 2023). Samsung users with consistent positive experiences develop higher trust, reinforcing brand loyalty and habitual buying patterns.

External communication emerged as the strongest predictor of trust, underscoring the strategic importance of transparent, credible messaging in shaping consumer perception (Sansome et al., 2025). This supports *Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)* theory, which asserts that coherent and authentic brand narratives enhance reliability and purchase persuasion (Kesar, 2025). In a market saturated with digital promotions, clarity and consistency in communication significantly differentiate brand credibility (Sansome et al., 2025).

The positive influence of personal needs confirms the relevance of *Maslow's motivational framework* in modern consumer behavior. Functional and self-expressive needs drive smartphone purchases as consumers seek both utility and identity alignment (Dan et al., 2023). Meeting personal aspirations thus extends beyond product features, reflecting the symbolic role of technology in lifestyle and self-expression.

The role of word of mouth (WOM) and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) highlights the social construction of trust. Peer recommendations act as social proof that amplifies perceived credibility, particularly in digital environments dominated by reviews and influencer opinions (Beyari & Garamoun, 2024); (S et al., 2024). These findings align with Social Influence Theory, suggesting that interpersonal communication operates as a heuristic cue that replaces traditional advertising in high-involvement purchases (Theocharis, 2025).

Overall, these results confirm a multi-path trust mechanism: past experience and external communication shape trust cognitively, personal needs influence it affectively, and WOM reinforces it socially. Together, these forces integrate into a unified behavioral model explaining consumer purchase decisions in dynamic digital contexts. The findings extend existing models by empirically validating the mediating power of trust and offering insight into consumer decision-making structures in Southeast Asia an area often underrepresented in global marketing research.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that trust functions as the pivotal psychological mechanism linking consumers' cognitive, emotional, and social factors to purchasing behavior. Past experience, external communication, personal needs, and word of mouth all significantly influence purchase decisions, both directly and through trust. Among these, external communication and past experience exhibit the strongest impacts, underscoring the importance of credible information and consistent brand encounters in shaping decision confidence.

By empirically validating this multi-path trust model, the study extends the *Theory of Planned Behavior* and *Expectancy Confirmation Theory* to digital consumer contexts. It provides a comprehensive explanation of how trust transforms perception into purchase behavior, especially within emerging markets such as Indonesia's smartphone industry.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this research advances the understanding of trust as a mediating construct that integrates cognitive credibility, affective needs, and social validation. It bridges existing theoretical gaps between *IMC*, *Social Influence Theory*, and *Maslow's motivational framework*, offering a unified lens for analyzing consumer behavior in technologically driven markets. The model thus enriches behavioral marketing literature by demonstrating that trust is not merely a byproduct of satisfaction but a strategic antecedent of purchase commitment.

Furthermore, this study contributes regionally contextual insight into Southeast Asian consumer psychology, emphasizing that digital interactions and brand narratives play crucial roles in markets where social proof and peer influence dominate purchasing logic (Bhatta et al., 2023).

Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight that brand communication transparency and experiential consistency are vital for sustaining consumer trust and loyalty (Attaoui & Gaber, 2024). Managers should design integrated marketing communication strategies that combine emotional resonance, informational clarity, and interactive engagement to reinforce credibility (Mayasari et al., 2023). Building community-based e-WOM ecosystems, where satisfied consumers voluntarily advocate for the brand, can further amplify positive trust signals and strengthen market position (Lin et al., 2023).

In addition, firms should leverage data-driven insights to personalize offerings that align with individual needs and value aspirations, ensuring relevance and emotional attachment. Trust-driven relationship marketing must thus evolve from transactional persuasion to authentic engagement and psychological assurance.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its robust findings, this study is limited by its cross-sectional design and focus on a single brand and region. Future research could employ longitudinal or cross-country comparisons to

assess the temporal stability and cultural variability of trust mechanisms. Integrating additional variables such as perceived risk, digital literacy, or brand authenticity would further deepen theoretical understanding of consumer trust formation in digital economies.

Ultimately, this study affirms that in the era of information abundance and market skepticism, trust is not only an outcome of satisfaction but the foundation of choice. For both scholars and practitioners, the findings illuminate that the future of competitive advantage in digital marketing will be won not by promotion, but by credibility, empathy, and relational authenticity.

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