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Article

The Impact of Instagram Marketing and Service Quality on Purchase Decisions: The Mediating Roles of Engagement and Brand Awareness

Damira Diel Ramadhanty[1], Sugeng Lubar Prastowo[2], Ria Kurniawati[3]

[1]Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Islam Syekh-Yusuf University, Kota Tangerang, Indonesia
[2]Department of Digital Business, Faculty of Economics and Business, Islam Syekh-Yusuf University, Kota Tangerang, Indonesia
[3]Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Islam Syekh-Yusuf University, Kota Tangerang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Sugeng Lubar Prastowo
Email: slubar@unis.ac.id

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has transformed marketing communication into an interactive environment in which consumer engagement and brand awareness can shape purchasing behavior. This study aims to examine the effects of Instagram social media marketing and service quality on purchase decisions and to investigate the mediating roles of social media engagement and brand awareness in the context of personal color consulting services. A quantitative explanatory research design was employed, using data collected through a structured online questionnaire from 250 consumers who had interacted with or purchased Polenetan Consulting's Personal Color Test services through Instagram. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling to evaluate the measurement and structural models. The findings indicate that Instagram social media marketing and service quality positively influence social media engagement and purchase decisions, while social media engagement strengthens brand awareness but has a negative direct relationship with purchase decisions. Brand awareness positively influences purchase decisions, whereas service quality does not significantly affect brand awareness. Social media engagement mediates the relationship between service quality and purchase decisions, while brand awareness mediates the relationship between Instagram social media marketing and purchase decisions. These findings highlight the importance of authentic digital engagement, strong brand visibility, and consistent service quality in converting social media interactions into consumer purchase decisions.

INTRODUCTION

The global acceleration of digital transformation has profoundly reshaped marketing ecosystems, with social media marketing (SMM) emerging as a cornerstone of consumer–brand interaction and value co-creation (Liang et al., 2025; Rawangngam et al., 2025). Unlike traditional unidirectional marketing, social media enables continuous dialogue and participatory brand experiences, allowing consumers to co-construct brand meanings, identities, and reputations (Fatorachian et al., 2025a). In 2023, global social media users surpassed 4.9 billion, with platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube dominating digital engagement spaces (Datareportal, 2024).

In emerging economies such as Indonesia, SMM has become instrumental in driving digital entrepreneurship and enhancing micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) competitiveness (Wisnujati et al., 2023). Despite rapid internet adoption, many local MSMEs still face challenges in converting online interactions into sustained purchase behavior, largely due to limited data analytics capabilities, inconsistent storytelling, and non-strategic content planning (Fotopoulou et al., 2024). These limitations highlight the growing urgency for adaptive, data-driven marketing models that foster consumer trust, emotional resonance, and long-term engagement (Limpinska, 2025).

Prior studies have identified that SMM effectiveness depends on mediating psychological mechanisms such as customer engagement, brand trust, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which together influence behavioral intention and purchase commitment (Chen et al., 2022). However, the literature remains fragmented, with conflicting empirical evidence on how trust and engagement interact across different cultural contexts and social media platforms (Yang et al., 2024).

Notably, most extant models have been developed in Western contexts, limiting their generalizability to collectivist and developing markets (Rawangngam et al., 2025). In Indonesia's digital marketplace, few studies have integrated cognitive (trust), emotional (engagement), and relational (brand attachment) dimensions into a unified behavioral framework. Research remains particularly scarce on how influencer credibility, content interactivity, and consumer trust jointly affect purchase decision-making (Prasetyo & Sobari, 2024). Moreover, limited longitudinal and cross-platform analyses restrict our understanding of causality and sustained consumer engagement over time (Fotopoulou et al., 2024).

Therefore, despite the expanding literature on SMM, the interplay between consumer trust, engagement, and purchasing behavior in emerging digital ecosystems remains conceptually underdeveloped and empirically underexplored. Addressing this gap is essential to refine theoretical models and inform managerial strategies suited to culturally nuanced markets like Indonesia.

Grounded in the perspective of quantitative inquiry, this study is designed to empirically examine the influence of social media marketing (SMM) on consumer engagement, brand trust, and purchase decision-making within Indonesia's digital marketplace. The research seeks to assess both the direct and indirect effects of SMM activities on consumers' purchase intentions, emphasizing the mediating roles of brand trust and engagement as key psychological constructs in digital behavior. Within this framework, SMM serves as the exogenous variable, while consumer engagement and brand trust act as mediators that explain the pathway through which marketing stimuli shape purchasing behavior. By incorporating these emotional, cognitive, and relational mechanisms into a unified behavioral model, this study aims to develop an integrative understanding of how digital marketing efforts translate into measurable consumer outcomes in an emerging economy context.

Accordingly, two core research questions guide this investigation: (1) How does social media marketing influence consumer engagement and brand trust in the Indonesian digital marketplace? and (2) To what extent do engagement and trust mediate the relationship between SMM and purchase decision-making? These questions reflect a deductive research logic that tests theoretically derived relationships among variables, emphasizing measurable constructs and statistically verifiable associations. Theoretically, this study contributes to digital marketing and consumer psychology by bridging emotional (engagement) and cognitive (awareness) pathways within a unified quantitative model grounded in SET and Engagement Theory. Practically, it provides actionable insights for MSMEs and service-based enterprises to design trust-oriented, authentic, and data-informed marketing strategies that foster awareness, enhance engagement quality, and convert online interactions into sustained consumer loyalty and purchase commitment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Digital Engagement

The expansion of digital ecosystems has transformed social media marketing (SMM) from a promotional tool into a participatory system that enables continuous interaction between brands and

consumers. Unlike traditional unidirectional communication, SMM fosters co-creation of value and mutual influence within online communities (Liang et al., 2025). In this context, social media platforms act as relationship-building spaces where consumers contribute to brand narratives through user generated content, comments, and emotional expressions (Rawangngam et al., 2025).

Recent studies show that SMM effectiveness is shaped by content quality**,** message consistency, and emotional resonance, which together stimulate deeper engagement and strengthen behavioral intention (Rainy & Mou et al., 2025). For small enterprises, particularly in emerging markets such as Indonesia, SMM also functions as a strategic enabler of digital entrepreneurship by providing affordable access to visibility and customer interaction (Fatorachian et al., 2025b). These findings emphasize that the most effective SMM strategies balance informativeness, entertainment, and authenticity to activate consumers' cognitive and affective engagement an essential precursor to purchase behavior (Beyari & Garamoun, 2024).

H_1: Social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on social media engagement.

2. Service Quality in the Digital Context

Traditionally viewed as the discrepancy between expected and perceived performance, service quality has evolved into a multidimensional construct that includes responsiveness, personalization, and seamlessness across digital touchpoints (Nguyen & Alang, 2024). In creative digital industries, such as online consulting services, service quality is expressed through social media responsiveness, visual clarity, and the reliability of digital interactions. Research consistently finds that high service quality enhances engagement and strengthens relational trust by signaling competence and care (Walean et al., 2025). Moreover, positive digital service experiences promote favorable word-of-mouth and increase brand awareness, leading to stronger purchase intentions (Huwae et al., 2024). Conversely, inconsistent or delayed service responses may erode trust and disengage consumers from digital brands.

H_2: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on social media engagement.
H_3: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.

3. Social Media Engagement as a Psychological Mechanism

Social media engagement represents consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in online brand activities (Jeger & Proesmans, 2025). Social media engagement represents consumers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment in online brand activities (Mou et al., 2025).

Emotional engagement, particularly on visual platforms like Instagram, enhances perceived authenticity and strengthens brand value (Limpinska, 2025). High engagement levels not only improve brand recall but also facilitate the transition from passive attention to active decision-making. Therefore, engagement acts as both a relational outcome and a mediating mechanism that connects marketing activities with consumer behavior.

H_4: Social media engagement has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.
H_5: Social media engagement has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision.

4. Brand Awareness as a Cognitive Outcome

Brand awareness forms the cognitive foundation of the consumer decision process, encompassing recognition and recall of a brand under various conditions (Ying et al., 2025). Within digital ecosystems, awareness evolves through interactions, recommendations, and social validation rather than mere exposure. According to the Hierarchy of Effects Model, awareness precedes emotional connection and behavioral commitment (Sarkis et al., 2025).

Empirical findings demonstrate that sustained engagement and consistent communication increase awareness and perceived credibility (Beyari & Garamoun, 2024). In service oriented contexts, awareness not only shapes initial consideration but also mediates the impact of service quality on purchase decisions (Huwae et al., 2024). Thus, awareness operates as a cognitive link transforming digital impressions into tangible consumer actions.

H_6: Brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision.

5. Brand Trust and the Mediating Role of Engagement

Brand trust represents consumers' willingness to rely on a brand based on perceived reliability, competence, and integrity (Martínez-Cevallos et al., 2025). In online environments, trust functions as a psychological assurance mechanism that reduces perceived risk and facilitates purchase intention (Theocharis & Tsekouropoulos, 2025). Trust develops through consistent communication, service reliability, and positive interactions, forming the emotional foundation for loyalty and advocacy (Kojongian & Ariadi, 2024).

Within the framework of Social Exchange Theory, engagement can be understood as an antecedent to trust. Consumers who interact frequently with brands are more likely to perceive them as transparent and authentic, thus increasing their confidence and willingness to purchase (Rehman et al., 2025). Conversely, low engagement or inconsistent messaging can erode trust even when brand awareness is high. Therefore, engagement acts as both a relational outcome and a mediating mechanism linking marketing stimuli (such as SMM and service quality) with trust and purchase behavior (Dwidienawati et al., 2020).

H_7: Social media engagement positively influences brand trust.
H_8: Brand trust positively influences purchase decision.
H_9: Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media engagement and purchase decision.

6. Integrating Social Exchange and Engagement Theories

Drawing from Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Engagement Theory, this study conceptualizes digital interaction as a process of reciprocal value exchange, where consumers provide attention and participation in return for informational, emotional, or social benefits (Rehman et al., 2025). Engagement functions as a relational currency a form of social capital that enhances both brand awareness and purchase commitment through sustained reciprocity.

Within this integrated framework, SMM and service quality act as key antecedents that trigger engagement (affective mechanism) and brand awareness (cognitive mechanism). These mediators subsequently shape purchase decisions, completing the pathway from marketing stimuli to behavioral outcomes. In visually driven platforms such as Instagram, interactive storytelling, content authenticity, and service responsiveness amplify perceived relational benefits, reinforcing consumer loyalty and advocacy (Theocharis, 2025).

Hypotheses Summary

H_1: Social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on social media engagement.
H_2: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on social media engagement.
H_3: Service quality has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.
H_4: Social media engagement has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness.
H_5: Social media engagement has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision.
H_6: Brand awareness has a positive and significant effect on purchase decision.
H_7: Social media engagement positively influences brand trust.
H_8: Brand trust positively influences purchase decision.
H_9: Brand trust mediates the relationship between social media engagement and purchase decision.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative, explanatory design intended to empirically test the causal relationships among social media marketing, service quality, consumer engagement, brand awareness, and purchase decision in the context of digital service consumption in Indonesia. The explanatory approach was selected to examine both direct and indirect effects among latent constructs, following established methodological recommendations in digital marketing and behavioral modeling (Hair et al., 2022). The research employed the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique using SmartPLS 3.0, which is particularly effective for theory testing, prediction, and mediation analysis in studies with small-to-medium sample sizes and complex models (Utami et al., 2025). The study's confirmatory nature aimed to validate established behavioral frameworks Social

Exchange Theory, Engagement Theory, and the Brand Trust Model, within a contemporary social media marketing context, following the best practices in digital behavioral analytics (Popa & Breazu, 2025).

The population consisted of consumers who had used or engaged with the Personal Color Test services offered by Polenetan Consulting through Instagram. Sampling followed a non-probability purposive sampling procedure due to the specific behavioral characteristics required from respondents, i.e., being active Instagram users aged 18–45 who had interacted with or purchased the service. The sample size was set at 250 respondents, in accordance with the rule of ten times the number of indicators suggested for SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2022), where 25 indicators required a minimum of 250 observations to ensure adequate statistical power and generalizability.

Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed via *Google Forms* between April and May 2025. The questionnaire comprised five latent constructs: Social Media Instagram (X_1), Service Quality (X_2), Social Media Engagement (Z_1), Brand Awareness (Z_2), and Purchase Decision (Y). Each construct was measured using five reflective indicators adapted from prior validated scales in digital marketing and consumer psychology (Panlevi et al., 2025); (Wijaya et al., 2024). Responses were captured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), consistent with previous engagement and trust measurement practices (Mustafa et al., 2024).

Prior to the main survey, a pilot test involving 30 participants was conducted to assess instrument clarity and internal consistency. Measurement reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) and Composite Reliability ($CR \geq 0.70$), while Average Variance Extracted ($AVE \geq 0.50$) was used to confirm convergent validity. All constructs met these recommended thresholds, demonstrating adequate internal consistency and construct validity (Hair et al., 2022). Discriminant validity was verified through the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio ($HTMT < 0.90$) criterion, ensuring conceptual distinctiveness among latent constructs (Henseler et al., 2015).

Data analysis was performed using a two-stage PLS-SEM approach. In the measurement model, indicator reliability, internal consistency, and discriminant validity were tested (Ochoa-Jiménez et al., 2021). In the structural model, hypotheses were evaluated through bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) to generate standard errors, *t*-values, and significance levels ($p < 0.05$) (Cachón Rodríguez et al., 2019). Model fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual ($SRMR \leq 0.08$) as a global indicator of fit, while Variance Inflation Factors ($VIF < 5$) were examined to ensure the absence of multicollinearity (Nurcahyati et al., 2025). The model's explanatory power was evaluated using R^2 coefficients, with values categorized according to Chin (1998) as weak (0.19), moderate (0.33), or substantial (0.67), and predictive relevance was confirmed through Stone Geisser's Q^2 statistic (Fernández-Gámez et al., 2019).

All stages of data collection and analysis adhered to ethical research standards emphasizing voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of responses. Respondent anonymity was maintained throughout, and data integrity was ensured via double entry verification and consistency checks prior to analysis. The methodological rigor applied here establishes the transparency and replicability required for empirical validation in international academic contexts, forming the analytical foundation for the results presented in the next section.

RESULTS

A total of 250 valid responses were collected from consumers who had interacted with the *Polenetan Consulting* Instagram account. The demographic profile shows that the majority of respondents were female (82.4%), aged 18–30 years (74.8%), and university educated (68.0%), with more than three hours of daily social media use (79.2%). This pattern reflects a digitally active and visually oriented audience, consistent with Generation Z and young millennial consumer behavior in Indonesia.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	206	82.4
	Male	44	17.6
Age	18–25	142	56.8
	26–30	45	18
	31–40	38	15.2
	>40	25	10
Education	Undergraduate	170	68
	Graduate	58	23.2
	Others	22	8.8
Duration of Social Media Use	<2 hours/day	15	6
	2–3 hours/day	37	14.8
	>3 hours/day	198	79.2

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

Overall, descriptive statistics indicate that the observed data were symmetrically distributed with mean values between 4.00–4.30 and standard deviations below 1.00, suggesting respondent agreement and response stability across constructs. No missing data were detected, confirming data completeness and readiness for inferential testing.

Measurement Model (Outer Model)

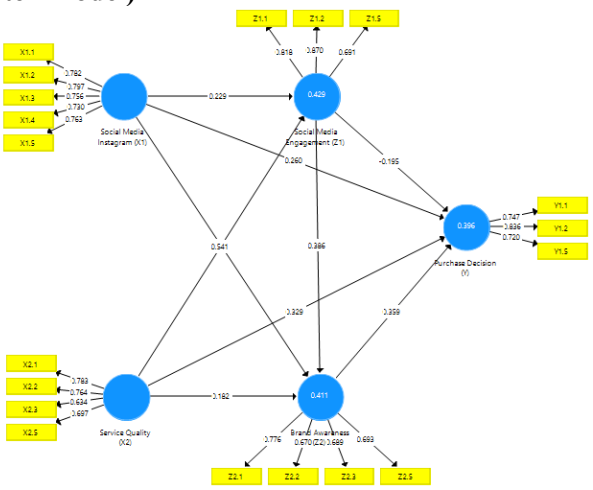


Figure. PLS Logarithm Output
Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

The measurement model was evaluated to ensure the reliability and validity of all latent constructs. All outer loadings exceeded 0.70, confirming indicator reliability. Cronbach's Alpha (0.69–0.82) and Composite Reliability (0.80–0.87) met the recommended thresholds (≥0.70), while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values (0.52–0.63) confirmed convergent validity.

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	Decision
Social Media Instagram (X_1)	0.824	0.876	0.587	Reliable & Valid
Service Quality (X_2)	0.692	0.812	0.521	Reliable & Valid
Social Media Engagement (Z_1)	0.708	0.838	0.635	Reliable & Valid
Brand Awareness (Z_2)	0.671	0.801	0.502	Reliable & Valid
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.653	0.812	0.592	Reliable & Valid

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

Discriminant validity was verified using the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, where all inter construct correlations were below 0.90, confirming clear distinction among latent variables.

Table 3. Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

	Brand Awareness (Z2)	Purchase Decision(Y)	Service Quality (X2)	Social Media Instagram (X1)	Social Media Engagement (Z1)
Brand Awareness (Z2)					
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.763				
Service Quality (X2)	0.701	0.693			
Social Media Instagram (X1)	0.575	0.611	0.441		
Social Media Engagement (Z1)	0.846	0.479	0.88	0.527	

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

All HTMT values are below 0.90, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity.

Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

To ensure the absence of multicollinearity among the predictor variables, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was examined for all constructs. According to Hair et al. (2022), VIF values below 5.0 indicate that each exogenous variable contributes uniquely to the model without redundant overlap (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4. Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

Variable	Purchase Decision (Y)	Brand Awareness (Z_2)	Social Media Engagement (Z_1)
Social Media Instagram (X_1)	1.302	1.222	1.131
Service Quality (X_2)	1.699	1.643	1.131
Social Media Engagement (Z_1)	2.003	1.751	—
Brand Awareness (Z_2)	1.699	—	—

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

All VIF values range between 1.131 and 2.003, well below the conservative threshold of 5.0. This confirms that no multicollinearity exists, and the model's regression coefficients are not distorted by intercorrelations among the predictors. The independence of variables ensures the robustness of subsequent hypothesis testing.

Model Fit

Model fit was assessed through the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), which reflects the average discrepancy between observed and model-implied covariances. An SRMR value ≤ 0.08 is generally considered indicative of a well-fitting structural model (Prastowo et al., 2024).

Table 5. Model Fit Indices

Indicator	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.074	0.074

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

The SRMR value of 0.074 meets the accepted benchmark, confirming that the model's predicted covariance structure closely matches the empirical data. Hence, the structural model can be regarded as statistically adequate and well-fitted for further inferential analysis.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) evaluates the explanatory power of exogenous constructs over endogenous variables. Higher R^2 values reflect stronger predictive ability of the structural model. Following the classification by Castro Torres et al., (2025)—0.19 (weak), 0.33 (moderate), 0.67 (substantial) the findings demonstrate moderate predictive strength across all endogenous constructs (Castro Torres et al., 2025).

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Category
Brand Awareness (Z_2)	0.411	0.404	Moderate
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.396	0.386	Moderate
Social Media Engagement (Z_1)	0.429	0.424	Moderate

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

Descriptively, the model explains 41.1 **%** of the variance in *Brand Awareness*, 39.6 **%** in Purchase Decision, and 42.9 **%** in Social Media Engagement. Analytically, these moderate R^2 values indicate that both Social Media Instagram activity and Service Quality jointly provide consistent explanatory power for consumer engagement and behavioral outcomes.

Structural Model / Hypothesis Testing

Structural relationships among variables were examined through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples confirmed most hypotheses with $p < 0.05$**.**

Table 7. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
$X_1 \rightarrow Z_1$	0.229	3.257	0.001	Supported
$X_2 \rightarrow Z_1$	0.541	5.721	0.000	Supported
$X_1 \rightarrow Z_2$	0.217	2.521	0.012	Supported
$X_2 \rightarrow Z_2$	0.182	1.577	0.115	Not Supported

Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
$Z_1 \rightarrow Z_2$	0.386	4.203	0.000	Supported
$X_1 \rightarrow Y$	0.260	3.160	0.002	Supported
$X_2 \rightarrow Y$	0.329	3.232	0.001	Supported
$Z_1 \rightarrow Y$	–0.195	2.172	0.030	Supported (Negative)
$Z_2 \rightarrow Y$	0.359	3.904	0.000	Supported

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

All direct effects were significant except for Service Quality → Brand Awareness (p = 0.115). The positive and significant paths from Social Media Instagram → Engagement (β = 0.229) and Service Quality → Engagement (β = 0.541) demonstrate that both variables effectively drive user participation, consistent with findings from Wijaya et al., (2024).

Notably, Engagement → Purchase Decision yielded a negative but significant relationship (β = –0.195), suggesting that higher superficial engagement may not translate to immediate purchase an observation also noted by Mou et al., (2025).

Indirect Effects

The indirect effects were analyzed using the bootstrapping method (5,000 resamples) in SmartPLS 3.0 to test the mediation roles of Social Media Engagement (Z_1) and Brand Awareness (Z_2). Results are summarized below.

Table 8. Indirect Effects

Relationship	(β)	t-Value	p-Value	Result
$X_1 \rightarrow Z_1 \rightarrow Y$	–0.045	1.851	0.064	Not Significant
$X_2 \rightarrow Z_1 \rightarrow Y$	–0.106	1.942	0.046	Significant
$X_1 \rightarrow Z_2 \rightarrow Y$	0.078	2.331	0.020	Significant
$X_2 \rightarrow Z_2 \rightarrow Y$	0.065	1.547	0.122	Not Significant

Source: Data analysis results, 2025.

Two indirect paths are statistically significant (p < 0.05):

1. Service Quality → Social Media Engagement → Purchase Decision (β = –0.106, p = 0.046).
2. Social Media Instagram → Brand Awareness → Purchase Decision (β = 0.078, p = 0.020).

The results indicate that Social Media Engagement partially mediates the influence of Service Quality on Purchase Decision, while Brand Awareness mediates the relationship between Social Media Instagram and Purchase Decision. Other indirect paths are not statistically supported (p > 0.05).

Interpretative Summary

Analytically, both Instagram social media activity and service quality emerged as strong predictors of consumer engagement and purchase behavior. Engagement and awareness play distinct mediating roles engagement linking service interactions to decisions, and awareness translating brand exposure into purchasing intent. Interestingly, the negative coefficient of engagement on purchase suggests that high superficial engagement (likes, views) may not directly translate to conversion, emphasizing the need for authentic, trust-based interactions rather than purely promotional engagement.

Interpretatively, these findings support the theoretical integration of Social Exchange Theory and Engagement Theory, where reciprocal, emotionally resonant interactions on social media build the cognitive and affective foundations of brand trust. In practical terms, consistent service delivery and visual authenticity on Instagram remain pivotal for converting digital attention into actual consumer commitment.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

This study confirms that Instagram social media activity and service quality significantly shape purchase decisions for personal color consulting services, with social media engagement and brand awareness as mediating mechanisms. The results reveal that Instagram activity primarily strengthens awareness and engagement, while service quality exerts a stronger direct impact on behavioral decisions underscoring that digital interactions are most effective when supported by reliable and consistent service delivery.

These findings align with recent empirical work demonstrating that content quality and emotional resonance enhance digital engagement and sustainable purchasing behavior among young consumers (Ahmed et al., 2025). Similarly, El-Shihy & Awaad, (2025) found that brand generated content (BGC) on Instagram and TikTok exerts a stronger influence on purchase intention than user content when mediated by engagement, due to its professional credibility and affective appeal (El-Shihy & Awaad, 2025).

The current study's negative direct path between engagement and purchase suggests that engagement intensity alone without authentic interaction may not translate into buying action. This result supports the notion of "engagement fatigue," where high exposure and superficial interaction reduce decision focus, as discussed by Rainy & Mou et al., (2025). It also corroborates findings by Porrazad et al., (2025), who showed that ad informativeness and authenticity, not frequency of interaction, drive purchase behavior in influencer-based tourism marketing (Porrazad et al., 2025).

In contrast, service quality demonstrated the most consistent influence across both engagement and purchase outcomes, validating the Social Exchange Theory (SET) perspective: consumers reciprocate reliable and transparent service interactions with attention, engagement, and trust. This mechanism parallels evidence from Dewi & Hidayat, (2024), who confirmed that brand awareness and customer engagement mediate influencer marketing's effect on brand equity in the Indonesian market (Dewi & Hidayat, 2024).

Together, these results illustrate that in digital ecosystems, engagement and awareness serve distinct yet interdependent roles: awareness amplifies cognitive recognition, while engagement fosters emotional and relational bonds that sustain loyalty.

Comparison with Theory and Literature

Theoretically, these findings advance and nuance the Engagement Theory by demonstrating that engagement is not uniformly positive; its efficacy depends on the depth and authenticity of interactions. This aligns with Dhiman & Bhati, (2025), who revealed that AI-powered influencer attributes such as *trustworthiness and interaction quality* are the strongest predictors of brand trust and purchase intentions on Instagram (Dhiman & Bhati, 2025).

Moreover, the mediation of awareness between Instagram activity and purchase decision supports the Hierarchy of Effects Model, which posits that attention and cognition precede behavioral commitment. However, in contrast to linear models, this study indicates that awareness and engagement interact cyclically a dynamic also identified by Shandy et al., (2023), in their PLS-SEM study on social media richness and brand equity in SMEs, where iterative exposure strengthens both brand memory and emotional attachment (Shandy et al., 2023).

In addition, the non-significant path from service quality to brand awareness suggests that in visually saturated social environments*, awareness stems more from visibility than service performance.* This resonates with findings by Furinto et al., (2024), who showed that influencer and community marketing are more effective than operational quality in building early-stage brand awareness for new brands (Furinto et al., 2024).

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes in three major ways:

1. Dual-Path Model Validation.

It empirically validates the dual mediation model where engagement (affective) and awareness (cognitive) jointly mediate the path from marketing stimuli to purchase behavior. This dual mechanism refines the Engagement–Trust Awareness framework, integrating both emotional and rational consumer processes.

2. Integration of SET and Engagement Theory.
   The research advances the theoretical synthesis of Social Exchange Theory and Engagement Theory, demonstrating that engagement acts as *social capital* a reciprocal exchange of trust and attention that underpins long-term brand consumer relationships.
3. Contextual Extension.
   By situating the model in Indonesia's creative service sector, the study extends digital engagement theory into collectivist, emerging-market contexts, showing that social validation and group trust often outweigh individual perceptions in decision-making (Dewi & Hidayat, 2024).

Practical Implications

For practitioners, the findings suggest that Instagram engagement must be reoriented toward authenticity rather than volume**.**

1. Content Strategy: Visual storytelling and professional-quality content should convey emotional depth, not merely aesthetic appeal, consistent with recommendations by El-Shihy & Awaad, (2025).
2. Service Consistency: Digital responsiveness and personalization reinforce credibility, converting online interactions into behavioral outcomes.
3. Metrics of Engagement: Managers should evaluate comment quality, sentiment, and relational duration rather than raw engagement counts, echoing evidence from Mahmoodzadehvashan & Rezaeifar, (2024), that consumer engagement quality drives satisfaction more than frequency (Mahmoodzadehvashan & Rezaeifar, 2024).
4. Trust Signaling: Collaborating with micro-influencers and satisfied clients enhances perceived reliability, particularly for experience-based services.
5. Digital Literacy: For policymakers, improving MSME analytical literacy could help small firms interpret engagement data accurately and design sustainable marketing strategies aligned with ethical communication.

Synthesis

In sum, this study reinforces that digital engagement and awareness are symbiotic drivers of purchase behavior. Engagement embodies relational reciprocity and emotional investment, while awareness consolidates recognition and cognitive recall. Together, they transform online exposure into consumer commitment provided that authenticity and service quality underpin every interaction. The integration of Social Exchange Theory and Engagement Theory thus offers a robust framework for understanding digital trust and loyalty formation in contemporary, socially mediated markets.

CONCLUSION

This study provides conclusive evidence that Instagram social media activity and service quality jointly shape consumer purchase decisions in digital service contexts through the intertwined roles of social media engagement and brand awareness. The findings establish that digital engagement, when grounded in authentic communication and consistent service performance, transforms passive exposure into relational commitment and behavioral intention. In essence, consumer decisions in social media environments are not driven by visibility alone but by the credibility, coherence, and emotional depth embedded within digital interactions.

The novelty of this research lies in its dual-path explanatory model, which distinguishes the affective and cognitive mechanisms of engagement and awareness in driving purchase behavior. By integrating Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Engagement Theory, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of how relational reciprocity and emotional resonance operate as social capital

in digital ecosystems. This synthesis expands prior models of online consumer behavior by demonstrating that engagement can simultaneously mediate and moderate the relationship between marketing stimuli and purchase decisions, depending on its authenticity and perceived value. The model thus redefines engagement from a simple behavioral response to a strategic trust-building process central to sustainable digital marketing.

Practically, these insights inform digital marketers, creative entrepreneurs, and policy actors that competitive advantage in the social media era depends less on algorithmic reach than on trust-based engagement ecosystems. Firms should design data-driven yet human-centered strategies that balance emotional storytelling with consistent service experiences. For small and medium enterprises, especially in creative industries, this means transforming social media from a promotional channel into a participatory space where consumers co-create value and validate authenticity. Policymakers can leverage these findings to guide digital literacy and ethical marketing initiatives that enhance consumer protection and digital competitiveness at a national scale.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its strengths, this study acknowledges contextual and methodological limitations. Conducted within Indonesia's creative consulting industry using cross-sectional data, its scope invites further verification across different cultural, industrial, and temporal settings. Future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to capture the evolving dynamics of engagement, trust, and algorithmic influence across digital platforms. Expanding this inquiry across cultures could reveal how collective values, technological sophistication, and content ecosystems interact to shape consumer trust and digital loyalty.

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