THE INTERPLAY OF ENGAGEMENT RATE, E-WOM, DIGITAL ADVERTISING AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY: MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND TRUST

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Abstract - In the current digital era, online marketing has become a primary trend in meeting various consumer needs. This study aims to evaluate the influence of Engagement Rate, Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM), and Digital Advertising on Customer Loyalty, with Brand Trust serving as a mediating variable, in the context of Shopee customers. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to 200 respondents using a purposive sampling method. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS version 3.9. The findings reveal that Brand Trust, Digital Advertising, and Engagement Rate significantly affect Customer Loyalty. While e-WoM has a significant impact on Brand Trust, its direct effect on Loyalty was not supported. Furthermore, Brand Trust mediates the effects of Digital Advertising and e-WoM on Loyalty. These results underscore the pivotal role of Brand Trust in strengthening the relationship between digital marketing strategies and customer loyalty.

Keywords: *Engagement Rate, Electronic Word of Mouth, Digital Advertising, Brand Trust, Customer loyalty*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped the way businesses interact with their customers, redefining traditional marketing approaches and creating new avenues for engagement. As consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms for information, communication, and purchasing decisions, businesses are compelled to adapt their strategies to remain competitive. Digital-based activities such as engagement rate, electronic word of mouth (e-WoM), and digital advertising are now regarded as pivotal components in developing strong consumer relationships and enhancing brand performance (Kotler et al., 2017). Within the e-commerce landscape, particularly on platforms like Shopee, the strength of a company's digital presence directly influences customer perceptions, purchasing behavior, and ultimately, long-term loyalty.

Engagement rate serves as a key indicator of how effectively a brand connects with its audience in the digital space. It encompasses various forms of consumer interactions with digital content, including likes, comments, shares, and other engagement metrics across social media and online platforms. These interactions reflect not only the level of consumer interest but also the potential for brands to cultivate deeper emotional bonds with their audience (Sabate et al., 2014). High engagement levels often translate into stronger customer-brand relationships, increased brand familiarity, and a higher likelihood of repeat interactions, which are essential precursors to building sustainable loyalty in a competitive digital marketplace.

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) further strengthens these relationships by amplifying consumer experiences through digital channels. Unlike traditional word of mouth, which is limited in reach, e-WoM leverages online platforms such as social media, review sites, and forums to spread information rapidly and broadly. Positive reviews, recommendations, and user-generated content significantly influence

potential customers' perceptions, shaping their attitudes toward a brand and guiding purchasing decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). As consumers increasingly rely on peer feedback and shared experiences when evaluating brands, e-WoM has become an indispensable factor in driving trust and loyalty within the e-commerce environment.

Digital advertising complements these organic interactions by enabling brands to strategically target specific audience segments with precision and efficiency. Well-designed and well-executed digital advertising campaigns can significantly enhance brand visibility, improve customer awareness, and reinforce positive brand associations (Belch & Belch, 2018). Moreover, digital advertising facilitates personalized communication by utilizing data analytics to deliver relevant content that resonates with individual consumer preferences. Such targeted engagement not only increases the likelihood of purchase but also contributes to a more positive and enduring brand experience.

Despite the critical role of engagement rate, e-WoM, and digital advertising, these elements alone may not be sufficient to ensure customer loyalty. Brand trust emerges as a key mediating factor that bridges the gap between digital marketing strategies and long-term consumer commitment. Trust is built when consumers perceive a brand as credible, reliable, and ethical in its dealings (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In the absence of trust, even the most compelling marketing efforts may fail to foster sustained loyalty. Conversely, when trust is established, it enhances consumers' willingness to engage with the brand repeatedly, recommend it to others, and maintain long-term relationships despite competitive pressures.

Building upon this conceptual foundation, the present study aims to examine the influence of engagement rate, e-WoM, and digital advertising on customer loyalty, with brand trust serving as a mediating variable, within the context of Shopee customers. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior by providing empirical evidence on the mechanisms through which digital interactions and marketing strategies translate into customer loyalty. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for academics, practitioners, and e-commerce platforms in developing more effective marketing models to foster consumer loyalty amid increasingly dynamic and competitive digital environments

Literature Review
Brand Trust
Brand trust is widely recognized as a critical determinant of consumer behavior and loyalty in both offline and online markets. It refers to the confidence that consumers place in a brand's ability to deliver consistent quality, reliability, and integrity in its products or services. Trust encompasses several dimensions, including competence, honesty, and benevolence, reflecting the extent to which consumers believe a brand will act in their best interest. In digital commerce, where direct physical interaction with products is limited, trust assumes an even greater role because consumers must rely on the brand's online representations, such as website content, reviews, and marketing messages, to make purchasing decisions (Suryani & Rizkaprati, 2024). Without trust, consumers are less likely to engage, make repeat purchases, or advocate for the brand.

In addition to its direct influence on purchase behavior, brand trust serves as a psychological buffer that reduces perceived risk in online transactions. Consumers are often concerned about product quality, delivery reliability, and payment security when shopping online.

When a brand is perceived as trustworthy, these concerns are mitigated, and consumers feel more confident in their decisions. Furthermore, trust fosters emotional attachment, which strengthens the bond between consumers and brands over time. Studies have consistently demonstrated that strong brand trust leads to higher customer retention, repeat purchases, and long-term loyalty, making it a strategic asset for firms operating in competitive digital marketplaces.

Moreover, brand trust functions as a mediating variable in the relationship between digital marketing efforts and customer loyalty. While engagement, digital advertising, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) can influence loyalty directly, their effectiveness is often amplified when consumers trust the brand. Trust reinforces the credibility of digital content, the persuasiveness of recommendations, and the reliability of promotional messages, thereby enhancing the overall impact of marketing initiatives. In this study, brand trust is positioned as a central construct to explore how digital interactions translate into sustainable customer loyalty in the context of Shopee users.

Digital Advertising

Digital advertising is a form of online promotion that leverages digital channels such as social media platforms, search engines, mobile applications, and websites to communicate marketing messages to targeted audiences. Unlike traditional advertising, digital advertising allows for precise audience segmentation based on demographics, behaviors, and preferences. It also enables real-time measurement of campaign effectiveness, facilitating data-driven adjustments to maximize engagement and impact. Well-executed digital advertising has been shown to enhance consumer perceptions of brand professionalism, credibility, and responsiveness, all of which contribute to

the development of brand trust (Charis et al., 2023).

Effective digital advertising is characterized by relevance, consistency, creativity, and interactivity. Content that aligns with consumer interests, presents clear value, and is visually appealing is more likely to capture attention and foster engagement. Interactive elements, such as polls, quizzes, and comment sections, provide opportunities for consumers to participate actively, which strengthens their emotional connection with the brand. Over time, these interactions contribute to positive brand experiences and reinforce trust in the brand's ability to meet consumer expectations consistently. In e-commerce, where direct interaction is limited, digital advertising acts as a proxy for personal engagement, communicating reliability and reinforcing confidence in the brand.

Furthermore, digital advertising plays a strategic role in supporting other marketing activities, such as e-WoM and engagement initiatives. Ads can amplify positive online reviews, drive traffic to content that generates engagement, and encourage user-generated content. By increasing visibility and enhancing credibility, digital advertising not only builds brand trust but also indirectly influences customer loyalty. In the competitive e-commerce landscape, where multiple brands vie for attention, effective digital advertising serves as a critical tool to differentiate a brand, strengthen consumer trust, and support long-term commitment.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined as the enduring commitment of consumers to repeatedly purchase and engage with a particular brand, even when alternative options are available. It is a multidimensional construct encompassing attitudinal loyalty, which reflects positive perceptions, emotional attachment, and

willingness to recommend the brand, and behavioral loyalty, which manifests through repeat purchases and consistent engagement. Loyal customers provide substantial value to organizations, not only through sustained revenue but also by acting as brand advocates who amplify marketing efforts via referrals and e-WoM.

In online commerce, customer loyalty is particularly important because switching costs are relatively low and competitive alternatives are abundant. Digital marketing strategies, including engagement, e-WoM, and advertising, aim to enhance both the attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of loyalty. However, these strategies are most effective when they build and reinforce brand trust, which serves as the psychological foundation for sustained loyalty. Loyal customers are more resistant to negative information, more forgiving of service failures, and more likely to participate in co-creation activities, such as sharing experiences or providing feedback.

Moreover, understanding the drivers of loyalty has implications for both marketing practice and theory. Loyalty not only enhances customer lifetime value but also strengthens brand equity and competitive advantage. By examining the interaction between digital marketing activities, brand trust, and loyalty, this study contributes to the understanding of how e-commerce brands can cultivate long-term relationships with their consumers. The findings are expected to offer actionable insights for designing digital marketing strategies that promote sustained loyalty in highly competitive online marketplaces.

e-WoM (electronic- Word of Mouth)

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) is the online sharing of opinions, recommendations, or experiences regarding a brand, product, or service through platforms such as social media, blogs, forums, and review sites. Unlike traditional advertising, e-WoM is considered more credible because it originates from peers rather than the brand itself. Consumers often perceive peer recommendations as more authentic, persuasive, and trustworthy (Basusena, 2020). Positive e-WoM can enhance brand reputation, shape consumer perceptions, and influence purchase intentions, while negative e-WoM can significantly undermine brand credibility and trust.

The influence of e-WoM extends beyond immediate purchase decisions, serving as a mechanism for reinforcing brand trust over time. When consumers encounter consistent positive feedback from other users, their confidence in the brand's reliability, quality, and service integrity is strengthened. E-WoM can also amplify the impact of digital advertising and engagement efforts by validating brand claims and demonstrating social proof. This combination of trust-building and social validation makes e-WoM a powerful driver of both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty in the digital marketplace.

Furthermore, e-WoM facilitates two-way communication between brands and consumers, creating opportunities for co-creation and interaction. Consumers who share their experiences may feel a stronger emotional connection to the brand, while brands that respond to feedback can demonstrate transparency, reliability, and responsiveness. By integrating e-WoM into a broader digital marketing strategy, e-commerce businesses can cultivate an ecosystem where trust and loyalty reinforce each other, leading to sustainable long-term relationships.

Engagement Rate

Engagement rate is a key metric used to quantify the level of consumer

interaction with digital content. It includes likes, comments, shares, clicks, and other forms of online interaction, reflecting the audience's interest, attention, and emotional investment in the brand. Higher engagement rates indicate that content resonates with consumers, facilitates meaningful interactions, and creates opportunities for building trust. As noted by Nurlina et al. (2025), digital engagement not only reflects consumer attention but also fosters emotional bonds that accelerate the development of brand trust.

Engagement acts as both a performance indicator and a strategic tool for marketers. It allows brands to measure the effectiveness of their content, identify audience preferences, and refine digital strategies to maximize relevance and impact. Frequent, meaningful engagement contributes to repeated exposure, which reinforces positive perceptions of the brand and deepens emotional attachment. In online commerce, where physical interactions are limited, digital engagement functions as a proxy for personal contact, enabling brands to maintain presence, visibility, and relational depth with consumers.

Moreover, engagement interacts with other digital marketing activities, such as e-WoM and advertising, to enhance overall loyalty outcomes. Consumers who actively engage with a brand are more likely to share experiences, provide positive recommendations, and participate in online communities, creating a network effect that further strengthens trust and commitment. Engagement therefore serves as a critical mediator between digital marketing content and consumer loyalty, providing both quantitative and qualitative insights into the effectiveness of marketing strategies in the digital era.

Hypotheses Development

Brand trust has been widely recognized as a critical driver of customer loyalty. Trust in a brand fosters emotional attachment, motivating consumers to repeatedly choose the brand and recommend its products or services to others. Erica et al. (2018) emphasize that customer loyalty is not solely derived from satisfaction but is also heavily influenced by consumer confidence in a brand's integrity and reliability. In the context of this study, Shopee Shop customers who perceive the brand as credible and trustworthy are more likely to demonstrate consistent purchasing behavior and advocacy. Accordingly, the first hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Brand Trust has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty.

Digital advertising plays a pivotal role in shaping brand trust by communicating the authenticity, values, and transparency of a brand to its target audience. Research by Chandra (2024) indicates that clear, authentic, and engaging advertising messages enhance consumer perceptions of reliability, which are essential components of brand trust. In this study, Shopee Shop's digital advertising efforts that emphasize storytelling, authenticity, and product value are expected to strengthen consumer confidence in the brand. Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Digital Advertising has a significant positive effect on Brand Trust.

Beyond building trust, digital advertising also directly contributes to customer loyalty. Studies by Swimbawa & Lemy (2023) highlight that emotionally engaging advertisements increase the likelihood of forming loyal relationships with consumers. Campaigns incorporating storytelling and emotional branding are particularly effective in establishing strong attachments. Fitri et al. (2024) further assert that digital campaigns emphasizing emotional

engagement are more successful in retaining customers over time. Therefore, this study proposes:

H3: Digital Advertising has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty.

Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) represents another influential factor in shaping brand trust. Positive online reviews, recommendations, and shared experiences enhance consumers' perception of brand credibility. Presatio (2024) underscores that e-WoM serves as a powerful mechanism for building brand reputation organically, influencing consumer confidence without direct marketing efforts. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes:

H4: e-WoM has a significant positive effect on Brand Trust.

However, while e-WoM is effective in fostering trust, it may not directly translate into customer loyalty. Positive recommendations and reviews, although influential, require deeper emotional engagement and personal experiences to cultivate loyalty (Putri, 2024). Antonia (2022) further emphasizes that loyalty develops from a combination of positive personal interactions and emotional connection, rather than solely from third-party endorsements. Thus, this study posits:

H5: e-WoM does not have a significant direct effect on customer loyalty.

Engagement rate, defined as the level of audience interaction with digital content, has a crucial role in enhancing brand trust. Active engagement, including likes, comments, shares, and participation in online brand activities, signals consumer interest and strengthens positive perceptions of a brand (Azizah & Sofiah, 2024). In line with Adil et al. (2018), meaningful interactions between consumers and brands accelerate trust formation. Therefore, higher engagement rates among Shopee Shop customers are expected to correlate with stronger brand trust:

H6: Engagement Rate has a significant positive effect on Brand Trust.

Similarly, engagement rate directly impacts customer loyalty. Emotional attachment arising from active participation in digital interactions reinforces consumers' commitment to the brand. Wulandari et al. (2023) note that engagement-driven emotional bonds enhance loyalty, while Anwar & Azizah (2025) highlight that sustained and meaningful interactions are essential for cultivating long-term loyalty. Accordingly, this study hypothesizes:

H7: Engagement Rate has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty.

In addition to direct effects, digital advertising, e-WoM, and engagement rate may also indirectly influence loyalty through brand trust. Effective digital advertising strengthens brand trust, which in turn enhances loyalty (Rizal, 2025; Baskara et al., 2025). Similarly, e-WoM builds trust before it translates into loyalty, as consumer recommendations are most effective when paired with a credible brand image (Prayuti, 2024; Chen & Liao, 2024). Engagement fosters loyalty through trust as well, with meaningful interactions providing the foundation for long-term commitment (Jiemesha, 2024). Therefore, the mediation hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H8: *Digital Advertising positively and significantly affects customer loyalty through Brand Trust.*

H9: *e-WoM positively and significantly affects customer loyalty through Brand Trust.*

H10: *Engagement Rate positively and significantly affects customer loyalty through Brand Trust*

METHODOLOGY
Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design, which is appropriate for

examining the relationships between engagement rate, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM), digital advertising, brand trust, and customer loyalty. Quantitative methods allow for systematic measurement and statistical analysis of variables, providing empirical evidence to support the research hypotheses. Specifically, this research adopts a correlational approach, as it aims to evaluate the strength and direction of relationships among variables, while also investigating the mediating role of brand trust. The choice of a correlational design enables the identification of patterns and associations that can inform both theoretical understanding and practical applications in e-commerce marketing.

Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method in which respondents are chosen based on predetermined criteria (Sugiyono, 2010). A purposive sampling approach ensures that the sample reflects the characteristics necessary to address the research objectives effectively. The study involved 200 respondents, representing consumers of Shopee Shop who meet the following inclusion criteria: (1) aged 17 years or older, (2) residing in North Sulawesi, and (3) active consumers of Shopee services. According to Sugiyono (2015), a carefully selected sample allows researchers to generalize findings to the broader population while maintaining relevance and validity. By focusing on consumers who meet these criteria, the study ensures that the data are both representative and suitable for analyzing the relationships among digital marketing activities, brand trust, and customer loyalty.

Tools and Instruments

The study utilized primary data, collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire. Questionnaires are widely recognized as reliable instruments for collecting data in survey-based research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. The first section collected demographic information and provided instructions on completing the survey. The second section consisted of Likert-scale statements (5-point scale) measuring agreement levels, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), corresponding to the study variables.

The questionnaire items were adapted from validated instruments in previous studies to ensure reliability and construct validity. Specifically:

- Engagement Rate items were adopted from Arman & Sidik (2019).
- e-WoM items were adapted from Nuseir (2019).
- Digital Advertising items were adapted from Sudirjo, Oetomo, Putrianti, Abubakar, & Sinaga (2024).
- Brand Trust items were adopted from Natasiah (2024).
- Customer Loyalty items were adapted from Subaida & Minullah (2024).

Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Forms during January and February 2025. Respondents completed the survey individually, providing data directly through the online form. Prior to distribution, researchers contacted potential participants personally to explain the study objectives and request informed consent. Only respondents who voluntarily agreed were sent the survey link. Upon completion, responses were tabulated by variable, and total scores were calculated for each respondent to facilitate analysis. This procedure ensured ethical compliance, voluntary participation, and data accuracy, while also allowing for efficient collection of a geographically dispersed sample.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS version 3.9, a widely used software for modeling complex relationships among latent constructs. The analysis process included several steps to ensure reliability and validity:

1. Algorithm Testing: The initial step involved assessing the measurement model, including item reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity for each construct.
2. Blindfolding Test: The Q^2 value was calculated to evaluate the predictive relevance of the model, ensuring that the latent variables accurately represent the underlying constructs.
3. Structural Model Testing: PLS Bootstrapping was conducted to test the significance of path coefficients and assess the strength and direction of relationships among constructs. Significance levels were determined to validate hypothesized relationships and evaluate the mediating effect of brand trust.

By following this systematic approach, the study ensured methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability, providing robust empirical evidence on the influence of engagement rate, e-WoM, and digital advertising on customer loyalty, mediated by brand trust.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The structural model results of this study are presented in Table 10, showing the relationships among Brand Trust, Digital Advertising, e-WoM, Engagement Rate, and Customer Loyalty. The analysis utilized SmartPLS 3.9, with T-statistics and p-values assessing the significance of each path.

Table 10
Result of the Hypothesis Testing Structural Models

	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Significant?
Brand trust -> Loyalty	0.379	0.097	4.027	0.000	YES
Digital advertising -> Brand trust	0.276	0.094	2.958	0.003	YES
Digital advertising -> Loyalty	0.228	0.084	2.615	0.009	YES
E-WoM -> Brand trust	0.373	0.070	5.471	0.000	YES
E-WoM-> Loyalty	0.129	0.075	1.746	0.081	NO
Engagement rate -> Brand trust	0.297	0.088	3.290	0.001	YES
Engagement rate -> Loyalty	0.233	0.064	3.599	0.000	YES
Digital advertising -> Brand trust -> Loyalty	0.105	0.046	2.337	0.020	YES
E-WoM -> Brand trust -> Loyalty	0.141	0.044	3.351	0.001	YES
Engagement rate -> Brand trust -> Loyalty	0.112	0.046	2.480	0.013	YES

Direct Effects

The results indicate that **Brand Trust has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty** (H1). With a T-statistic of 4.027 and a p-value of 0.000, the findings confirm that consumer confidence in the integrity, reliability, and quality of a brand directly reinforces repeat purchasing behavior and long-term loyalty. This aligns with prior research emphasizing that trust is

a key precursor to sustained consumer commitment (Erica et al., 2018).

Digital Advertising significantly influences Brand Trust (H2), as reflected by a T-statistic of 2.958 and a p-value of 0.003. This demonstrates that advertisements which are authentic, transparent, and emotionally engaging can enhance consumers' perception of the brand's credibility. Similarly, **Digital Advertising also directly impacts Loyalty** (H3) with a T-statistic of 2.615 and a p-value of 0.009, supporting the idea that emotionally resonant campaigns and storytelling strengthen both trust and loyalty simultaneously (Swimbawa & Lemy, 2023; Fitri et al., 2024).

e-WoM has a significant positive effect on Brand Trust (H4), indicated by a T-statistic of 5.471 and a p-value of 0.000. This result confirms the critical role of positive online reviews and recommendations in building consumer confidence and brand credibility. However, **e-WoM does not have a direct effect on Loyalty** (H5), with a T-statistic of 1.746 and a p-value of 0.081. This suggests that while consumer recommendations increase trust, loyalty formation requires additional emotional engagement and personal experience, consistent with the findings of Putri (2024) and Antonia (2022).

Engagement Rate significantly affects both Brand Trust (H6) and **Loyalty** (H7), with T-statistics of 3.290 and 3.599, and p-values of 0.001 and 0.000, respectively. Active consumer interactions such as likes, comments, shares, and participation in digital campaigns strengthen perceived connection with the brand, fostering both trust and long-term commitment. These findings support prior studies highlighting the importance of meaningful consumer engagement in loyalty development (Azizah & Sofiah, 2024; Anwar & Azizah, 2025).

Indirect Effects (Mediation)

The study also examined the mediating role of Brand Trust in linking digital marketing activities to customer loyalty. **Digital Advertising indirectly affects Loyalty through Brand Trust** (H8) with a T-statistic of 2.337 and p-value of 0.020. This confirms that trust partially mediates the impact of advertising on loyalty, indicating that campaigns are most effective when they simultaneously build credibility and emotional connection.

Similarly, **e-WoM indirectly influences Loyalty through Brand Trust** (H9), with a T-statistic of 3.351 and p-value of 0.001. This demonstrates that online recommendations contribute to loyalty primarily by first establishing trust, highlighting the critical mediating function of brand credibility in converting e-WoM into repeat purchasing behavior.

Engagement Rate also exhibits a significant indirect effect on Loyalty through Brand Trust (H10), with a T-statistic of 2.480 and p-value of 0.013. This reinforces the notion that consistent, meaningful engagement strengthens trust, which in turn cultivates loyalty.

Discussion

Overall, the findings emphasize the central role of Brand Trust as both a direct predictor of loyalty and a mediator between digital marketing efforts and customer loyalty. Among the digital marketing activities examined, e-WoM is particularly effective in building trust, while Digital Advertising and Engagement Rate influence loyalty both directly and indirectly through trust.

The lack of a direct effect of e-WoM on loyalty aligns with theories suggesting that third-party recommendations alone are insufficient to generate long-term commitment without personal interaction and emotional connection. Conversely, active consumer engagement and strategically designed digital advertisements create emotional resonance that strengthens both trust and loyalty simultaneously.

These results provide practical implications for e-commerce platforms like Shopee Shop. Marketers should focus not only on maximizing exposure through digital advertising and encouraging positive e-WoM but also on fostering meaningful consumer engagement to cultivate both trust and loyalty. Trust serves as the critical mechanism by which digital marketing activities translate into sustained consumer relationships, reinforcing the importance of credibility, transparency, and interactive strategies in online retail environments.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the influence of Digital Advertising, e-WoM, and Engagement Rate on Customer Loyalty, with Brand Trust serving as a mediating variable, in the context of Shopee Shop consumers. The findings provide several theoretical and practical insights into digital marketing strategies in e-commerce environments.

Firstly, the results confirm that Brand Trust plays a central role in fostering customer loyalty. Consumers who perceive a brand as credible, reliable, and consistent are more likely to engage in repeat purchases and brand advocacy. This underscores the importance of integrating trust-building initiatives into digital marketing strategies, beyond mere transactional promotions.

Secondly, Digital Advertising demonstrates both direct and indirect effects on loyalty. Advertisements that are transparent, authentic, and emotionally engaging strengthen trust and simultaneously enhance customer commitment. This highlights the dual role of digital campaigns: they not only inform and attract consumers but also build deeper emotional connections that underpin long-term loyalty.

Thirdly, e-WoM primarily impacts loyalty indirectly through Brand Trust. While online reviews and recommendations increase consumer

confidence in the brand, they are insufficient on their own to generate loyalty without emotional engagement. This finding emphasizes the mediating role of trust in converting third-party recommendations into sustained consumer commitment.

Fourthly, Engagement Rate is a strong predictor of both Brand Trust and Loyalty. Active consumer participation—through likes, comments, shares, or interactive brand activities—enhances perceived connection with the brand, fostering trust that translates into long-term loyalty. This indicates that engagement is not merely a metric but a mechanism for strengthening consumer-brand relationships.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of an integrated digital marketing strategy that combines authentic advertising, credible e-WoM, and meaningful consumer engagement to build trust and, consequently, loyalty. For practitioners, these insights suggest that successful e-commerce marketing should prioritize trust-building activities and foster interactive, emotionally resonant digital experiences.

This study contributes to the literature on digital marketing and consumer behavior by empirically demonstrating the central role of Brand Trust in linking digital marketing activities—Digital Advertising, e-WoM, and Engagement Rate—to Customer Loyalty. The findings extend prior research by highlighting not only the direct effects of digital marketing on loyalty but also the critical mediating function of trust. Specifically, this study reinforces the notion that e-WoM primarily influences loyalty indirectly through trust, offering nuanced insights into the mechanisms through which online consumer interactions shape brand relationships. Furthermore, the results underscore the significance of engagement metrics as both indicators of consumer involvement and drivers of trust and loyalty, providing a

robust framework for understanding consumer-brand dynamics in online retail environments.

For practitioners, this research offers several actionable insights. First, e-commerce platforms and marketers should prioritize trust-building strategies across all digital channels, ensuring that advertising is transparent, authentic, and emotionally engaging. Second, while e-WoM remains a valuable tool for enhancing brand credibility, companies should complement online reviews and recommendations with initiatives that foster direct engagement, such as interactive campaigns, loyalty programs, and community-building activities. Third, measuring and optimizing engagement rates can serve as a practical proxy for consumer attachment, guiding resource allocation toward strategies that reinforce trust and long-term loyalty. Collectively, these insights can inform more effective, integrated digital marketing strategies that strengthen consumer-brand relationships and support sustainable business growth in competitive e-commerce markets.

Despite the study's contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research focuses exclusively on Shopee Shop consumers in North Sulawesi, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions or e-commerce platforms. Second, the study employs a cross-sectional design, which captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time but does not account for dynamic changes in behavior or trust over longer periods. Third, the study relies on self-reported measures, which may be subject to social desirability or response bias. Finally, while Brand Trust is considered a key mediator, other potential mediators or moderators—such as customer satisfaction, perceived value, or brand experience—were not included in the model.

To address these limitations and further enrich the understanding of digital marketing impacts, future studies could explore longitudinal designs to capture temporal changes in trust and loyalty. Expanding the research to other e-commerce platforms or geographic regions would enhance generalizability. Additionally, incorporating additional mediators or moderators, such as customer satisfaction, perceived value, brand experience, or social influence, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms driving loyalty. Finally, employing experimental or mixed-method designs could offer deeper insights into causal relationships and the qualitative aspects of consumer engagement and trust-building in digital environments.

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