

The Mediating Role of Trust in the Relationship Between E-Marketing and E-Business Performance

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Abstract

Digital commerce has become a magnet for micro and small business entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia. This study investigates whether e-marketing practices and consumer trust affect e-business performance among Indonesian online entrepreneurs. The survey gathered data from 203 respondents across e-commerce sites, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, online food delivery services, etc. To evaluate measurement reliability, established indicators should meet acceptable levels. The composite reliability values, which range from 0.840 to 0.887, and average variance extracted values that exceed 0.50, met those requirements. Model structural modelling revealed that e-marketing significantly strengthened e-trust ($\beta = 0.616$, $p < 0.001$). E-marketing and e-trust also positively affected e-business ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < 0.001$), and e-trust has a positive effect on e-business. Mediation analyses indicated that e-trust partially mediated for strengthening the e-business course of e-marketing. The findings underscore strong online engagement and trust-building through efficacious means as an indispensable strategic tool for digital entrepreneurs. Through this research, practitioners can identify practical evidence-based guidance for performing better online business amidst high competition in a dynamic digital environment.

Keywords

E-marketing, E-trust, E-business performance, Digital entrepreneurship, Indonesia

Introduction

Digital platforms have become an important part of commercial business activity in Indonesia, particularly for small and micro-enterprises that use social media, messaging applications, and online marketplaces to help them stay in business. These platforms enable entrepreneurs to increase visibility, interact with consumers and do other marketing activities necessary for sales and income. The use of social media as a way to reach more markets and get in touch with customers was eloquently explained by the author research of Genaro and Rifiyanti (2023). The increased use of technology is a structural opportunity for entrepreneurs to be more able

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to see where the market opportunity exists, and they can evaluate it more accurately for their business, said Udayana et al., (2024).

Digital marketing is a useful tool to support an entrepreneur's ability as an actor in a competitive environment (Udayana et al., 2024). Trust is key, as consumers often rely on digital signals to assess credibility, service quality, and product reliability. In its entirety, scholars prove that trust matter, said by Nguyen et al. (2025), consumer trust greatly affects the consumer behavior in the digital marketplace. Recent studies found that customers experience through social media increases entrepreneur intention behaviour and encourages consumer trust to e-brands (Verma, 2024; Waters et al. 2021). Social media provide digital witnessing and hence necessary for communication forum to experience, reviews and communities for associating to endorsing brands" (Waters et al., 2021). "While these powerful digital platforms provide tremendous opportunities for Indonesian entrepreneurs, they also bring structural and institutional challenges. Large platform operators control a lot of power in determining visibility and visibility and create power and information asymmetries that disadvantage smaller Indonesian players dependent on dominant social media. Entrepreneurs reliant on these dominant platforms must adapt to sudden algorithm changes or changes in platform policies that are at odds with their businesses (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021; Brahem & Boussema, 2022).

While constraints require small and micro-enterprise to be adaptive to differentiate brands and gain loyalty and customer trust (Taylor-Wesselink & Teulon, 2021)" (p. 73). The are empirical research that could clarify which online mechanisms help contribute to successful business outcome among Indonesian entrepreneurs. For example, identifying how e-marketing activities affect business outcomes, both directly and indirectly through the mediating role of e-trust for online businesses in Indonesia (Udayana et al., 2024). There is an empirical evidence how digital marketing could bolster business outcome when matched well with local preference and consumer behaviour (Sukumar et al., 2021). Overall, this work expands the parlance of digital entrepreneurship and helps understand practitioners looking for credible guidelines to maintain their online presence and improve online business outcomes in a competitive landscape.

Literature Review

E-Marketing

E-marketing using online tools, communication and social platform for marketing of goods and services", previous studies E-marketing leads to more reach to the customers, greater customer relationship building, and helps position the business successfully, Jadhav et al. (2023). In terms of small business, digital marketing improves the visibility or awareness of a brand (Goel et al., 2024). Most of the measurement items for e-marketing was found to have good reliability with loadings between 0.693 and 0.788 and composite reliability of 0.863, thus its confirms the use of the measurement tools employed in getting e-marketing engagements measurements.

E-Trust

Trust is important in online transactions where customers lack the opportunity to handle products or meet sellers face to face. Trust alleviates uncertainty and creates readiness to buy (Sheeraz et al, 2023). The dataset indicates that e-marketing activities form significant trust ($\beta = 0.616$), signifying regular, open, and immediate online communication's role in shaping

perceptions (Meganingsih et al., 2024). This is consistent with existing literature, which has documented the association between e-marketing and the forming of e-trust, driving online transactions.

E-Business Performance

E-Business Performance is defined here as success perceived on parameters such as customer acquisition, volumes of sales, and business growth. Predictors for e-business outcomes based on the dataset are e-marketing and e-trust, confirming that the depth of electronic engagement and trust significantly influences business performance (Theodosiou & Katsikea, 2012). Empirical studies in contemporary e-commerce contexts further demonstrate that e-service quality embedded within digital marketing activities, including responsiveness, reliability, and perceived security, plays a decisive role in shaping behavioural outcomes such as repurchase intention and sustained platform engagement (Teo et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the view that organisations implementing structured digital marketing strategies demonstrate improved performance outcomes (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

Mediating Role of Trust

Trust often plays a mediating role in the relationship between digital communication and consumer behaviour, particularly in online environments characterised by information asymmetry and limited physical interaction. From a stimulus–organism–response perspective, digital marketing activities and platform cues function as external stimuli that shape internal cognitive evaluations such as trust, which subsequently influence behavioural outcomes. Empirical evidence from Indonesian e-commerce contexts demonstrates that digital stimuli affect consumer behaviour indirectly through trust-related psychological responses (Cheng et al., 2024; Gefen et al., 2003). The present dataset supports this pattern, with a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.250$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that e-trust partially mediates the relationship between e-marketing and e-business performance. Figure 1 presents the research framework illustrating the relationships among e-marketing, e-trust, and e-business performance. The establishment of trust through e-marketing is critical in developing an effective and positive relationship with existing customers, as well as building business (Trusov et al., 2009). Literature indicates the importance of both e-marketing and e-trust and its effect results on online business results. To empirically test these relationships in an Indonesian context, we have used methodology outline in the following section. The findings suggest that empirically examining how e-marketing and e-trust interact to shape e-business performance among Indonesian entrepreneurs was relevant and warranted, leading to the application described next.

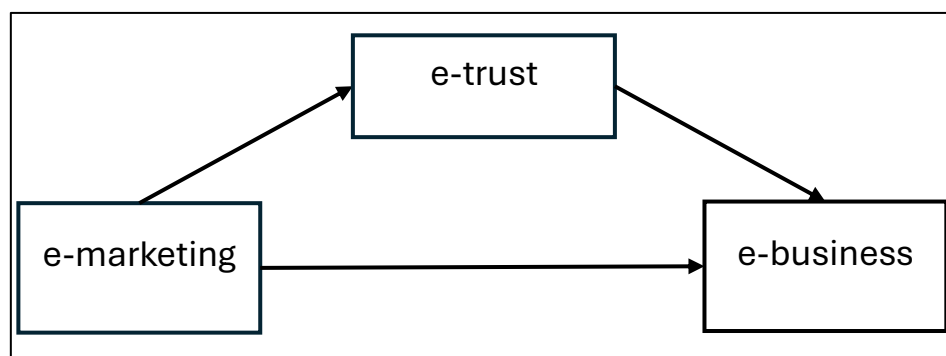


Figure 1. Research framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationships among e-marketing, e-trust, and e-business performance among Indonesian online entrepreneurs. A structural equation modelling approach was used to evaluate both the direct and indirect effects across the three constructs. This design was selected because it allows for the simultaneous assessment of latent variables and the predictive strength of the structural model, which is suitable when investigating behavioural phenomena within digital commerce.

Participants and Sampling Procedures

Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the respondents and reflects the diversity of age, experience, and platform usage among the entrepreneurs surveyed. A total of 203 respondents participated in the study. All participants represented micro and small entrepreneurs operating within the Indonesian digital marketplace. Respondents were eligible if they had managed an online business for a minimum of several months and conducted their activities through established digital platforms.

The demographic distribution revealed a balanced representation across several characteristics. The sample consisted of 45.3 percent male respondents and 54.7 percent female respondents. The largest age group comprised individuals aged 21 to 30 years (39.4 percent), followed by those below 20 years old (23.2 percent). Business experience varied, with most entrepreneurs reporting less than five years of operation. Specifically, 37.4 percent had operated for less than one year, while 38.4 percent had between one and five years of experience. Only 7.9 percent had been in business for more than ten years.

Participants operated across multiple online platforms, including WhatsApp (32.5 percent), Instagram (24.6 percent), online food delivery services (20.2 percent), e-commerce marketplaces (14.3 percent), and Facebook (8.4 percent). This diversity reflects the varied technological adoption patterns among Indonesian entrepreneurs and supports the generalisability of the findings within similar contexts.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographics (n = 203 respondents)

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	92	45.3%
Female	111	54.7%
Age Group		
Below 20 years old	47	23.2%
21 – 30 years old	80	39.4%
31 – 40 years old	31	15.3%
41 – 50 years old	29	14.2%
Above 50 years old	16	7.9%
Length of Business		
Below 1 year	76	37.4%
1 – 5 years	78	38.4%
5 – 10 years	33	16.3%
Above 10 years	16	7.9%
Platform E-Business		
E-Commerce	29	14.3%

Facebook	17	8.4%
Online Food Delivery	41	20.2%
Instagram	50	24.6%
WhatsApp	66	32.5%

Analysis

Measurement Model Assessment

Convergent Validity and Internal Consistency

Table 2 summarises the validity and reliability results for all measurement constructs, including factor loadings and internal consistency indicators. Convergent validity was established based on the factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted for each construct. All item loadings exceeded the acceptable minimum of 0.65, with e-business items ranging from 0.752 to 0.828, e-marketing items from 0.693 to 0.788, and e-trust items from 0.653 to 0.793. These results demonstrate strong item reliability.

Internal consistency was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Cronbach's alpha values were 0.841 for e-business, 0.802 for e-marketing, and 0.763 for e-trust, all above the recommended cut-off value of 0.70. Composite reliability values ranged from 0.840 to 0.887, further supporting internal consistency. The average variance extracted values were 0.611 for e-business, 0.558 for e-marketing, and 0.514 for e-trust. Since all exceeded 0.50, the constructs demonstrated adequate convergent validity.

Table 2. Validity and reliability

Measurement Items	Loading Factor VIF	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
E-Business EB1 – EB5	0.752 – 0.828 1.644 – 1.971	0.841	0.887	0.611
E-Marketing EM1 – EM5	0.693 – 0.788 1.400 – 1.753	0.802	0.863	0.558
E-Trust ET1 – ET5	0.653 – 0.793 1.387 – 1.696	0.763	0.840	0.514

Discriminant Validity

Table 3 reports the discriminant validity assessment using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratios as shown in Table 3. The square roots of the AVE values were higher than the inter-construct correlations, indicating that each construct was empirically distinct. Additionally, HTMT values remained below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming that the constructs measured unique theoretical concepts without excessive overlap. To support interpretation of the measurement and structural results, the model diagrams are provided below. Figure 2 presents the inner model path diagram showing the structural relationships tested in the analysis and Figure 3 provides the outer model path diagram depicting the indicator loadings for all constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant validity

Construct	E-Business	E-Marketing	E-Trust
E-Business	0.782		

E-Marketing	0.642 <i>0.773</i>	0.747	
E-Trust	0.647 <i>0.798</i>	0.616 <i>0.771</i>	0.717

Note. Values on the diagonal represent the square roots of the AVE.

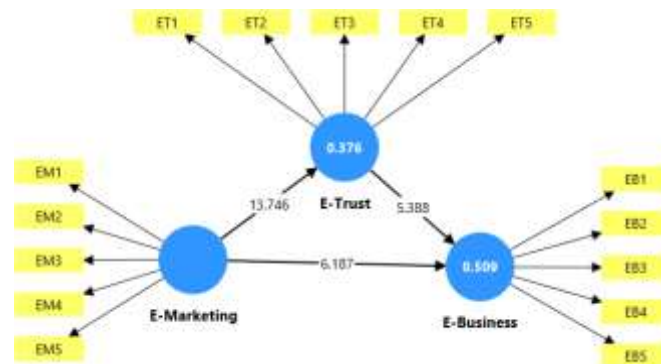


Figure 2. Inner model path diagram

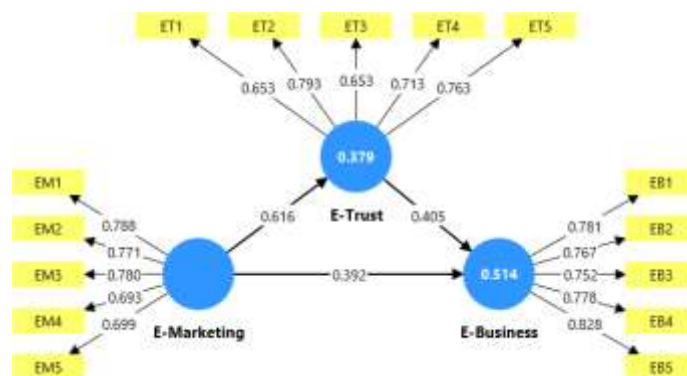


Figure 3. Outer Model Path Diagram

Assessment of Collinearity

Variance inflation factor scores ranged from 1.387 to 1.971 across all items and constructs. These values fall well below the threshold of 5, indicating no concerns regarding multicollinearity in the measurement model. This confirms that the indicators contributed independently to their respective constructs.

Structural Model Assessment

Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Table 4 displays the hypothesis testing results, including path coefficients, T-statistics, and significance levels. Following the confirmation of the measurement model, the structural relationships among the constructs were evaluated to test the proposed hypotheses. The structural model was assessed through the examination of path coefficients, T-statistics, and p-values derived from a bootstrapping procedure. All four hypotheses were supported. E-marketing exerted a significant positive effect on e-trust ($\beta = 0.616$, $T = 13.746$, $p < 0.001$). E-marketing also had a significant direct effect on e-business performance ($\beta = 0.392$, $T = 6.187$, $p < 0.001$). E-trust was found to positively influence e-business performance ($\beta = 0.405$, $T = 5.388$, $p < 0.001$). The mediation analysis confirmed that e-trust partially mediated the

relationship between e-marketing and e-business performance, with a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.250$, $T = 5.196$, $p < 0.001$)

These results indicate that both e-marketing and e-trust play critical roles in improving e-business outcomes, and that trust enhances the overall impact of digital marketing activities.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	β	T-Statistic (> 1.96)	P-Value (< 0.05)	Supported
H1: E-Marketing \rightarrow E-Trust	0.616	13.746	0.000	Yes
H2: E-Marketing \rightarrow E-Business	0.392	6.187	0.000	Yes
H3: E-Trust \rightarrow E-Business	0.405	5.388	0.000	Yes
H4: E-Marketing \rightarrow E-Trust \rightarrow E-Business	0.250	5.196	0.000	Yes

Coefficient of Determination (R-Square)

Table 5 shows the coefficient of Determination (R-square), effect size (F-square), and predictive relevance (Q-square) values for the structural model components. The coefficient of determination for e-business performance was 0.509. This indicates that e-marketing and e-trust together explained approximately 51 percent of the variance in e-business outcomes, which is considered a moderate level of predictive power. The R-square value for e-trust was 0.376, suggesting that e-marketing accounted for nearly 38 percent of the variation in trust levels among online entrepreneurs' customers

Effect Size (F-Square)

Effect size calculations demonstrated that e-marketing had a moderate effect on e-business performance (F-square = 0.197). E-trust also displayed a moderate effect on e-business performance (F-square = 0.210). The strongest effect was observed from e-marketing to e-trust (F-square = 0.612), which signifies a substantial contribution of marketing activities to building trust in the digital context. These results reinforce the importance of e-marketing practices in shaping customer trust and subsequent business performance.

Predictive Relevance (Q-Square)

Predictive relevance was assessed using the Stone-Geisser Q-square values. E-business performance achieved a Q-square value of 0.400, while e-trust obtained a value of 0.364. Both exceed zero, indicating that the structural model possesses satisfactory predictive relevance and can accurately estimate the observed data patterns for the endogenous constructs.

Table 5. F-square, R-square, and Q-square results

Path	F-Square	Results	R-Square	Q-Square
E-Marketing \rightarrow E-Business	0.197	Moderate	0.509	0.400
E-Trust \rightarrow E-Business	0.210	Moderate		
E-Marketing \rightarrow E-Trust	0.612	Strong	0.376	0.364

The results from both the measurement and structural models provide a robust foundation for interpreting the implications of these findings within the broader theoretical and practical landscape.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence for the significant role of e-marketing and e-trust in shaping e-business performance among Indonesian online entrepreneurs. The strong influence of e-marketing on e-trust indicates that consistent and strategic digital communication is essential for building consumer confidence. This aligns with literature showing that social media engagement, transparency, and responsiveness increase customer assurance and reduce uncertainty in online transactions (Kim, Jin, & Swinney, 2009; Yadav & Rahman, 2018).

The significant direct relationship between e-marketing and e-business outcomes suggests that digital marketing contributes not only to visibility but also to broader performance indicators. Entrepreneurs who actively manage their digital presence appear better equipped to attract customers, maintain engagement, and enhance operational continuity. This supports studies indicating that digital marketing expands market reach and strengthens competitive capacity, particularly for micro and small enterprises with limited physical resources (Yousaf et al., 2018; Marso, 2022).

The effect of e-trust on e-business performance is similarly strong. Trust remains a foundational element in online commerce, especially in contexts characterized by information asymmetry and the absence of physical interaction (Rizan et al., 2020). The positive influence of e-trust suggests that consumers are more willing to transact when they perceive the seller as credible and dependable. This reinforces existing research demonstrating that trust reduces perceived risk and encourages repeat purchasing behavior (Gefen et al., 2003; Aslam et al., 2019).

The mediation analysis highlights the importance of trust as a mechanism through which e-marketing exerts its influence on business outcomes. The partial mediation suggests that e-marketing strengthens business performance both directly, through enhanced customer outreach, and indirectly, through the trust that marketing interactions help cultivate. This dual pathway underscores the need for entrepreneurs to adopt communication strategies that go beyond promotional messaging to include authentic and trust-building engagement with customers (Hride et al., 2021; Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2009).

The predictive accuracy of the model, indicated by the R-square and Q-square values, reflects that e-marketing and e-trust together provide meaningful insights into the performance of online businesses. The moderate explanatory power underscores the multifaceted nature of digital commerce, where additional variables such as platform algorithms, consumer behavior trends, and operational resources may also influence outcomes (Aslam et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the model demonstrates robustness in explaining key performance dynamics within the Indonesian digital marketplace.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships among e-marketing, e-trust, and e-business performance and revealed that both e-marketing and e-trust significantly improve business outcomes for Indonesian online entrepreneurs. The results show that marketing activities strengthen trust and that both elements contribute to enhanced business performance. The mediation effect confirms that trust plays a critical role in translating marketing efforts into tangible performance benefits.

These findings highlight the need for entrepreneurs to prioritise digital marketing strategies that foster authentic and meaningful engagement with customers. Establishing trust should be viewed as an integral component of online business development rather than a secondary outcome. Entrepreneurs can benefit from adopting transparent communication practices, timely customer service, and consistent branding that reinforces reliability. The study contributes to the growing body of research on digital entrepreneurship in emerging economies by offering empirical evidence on the mechanisms that support successful online business operations. It also provides practical insights for practitioners and policymakers seeking to strengthen digital capacity among micro and small enterprises. This study advances current knowledge by providing empirical evidence of how e-trust mediates the influence of digital marketing activities on online business outcomes in an emerging market context. Future research may consider incorporating additional variables such as digital literacy, platform dependency, competitive intensity, and customer engagement styles to develop a more comprehensive understanding of performance outcomes. Comparative studies across regions or industries could also reveal context-specific strategies that enhance digital business growth.

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