

PAID SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING AND DIGITAL MARKETING CONTENT QUALITY AS DETERMINANTS OF E-COURSE PURCHASE DECISIONS THROUGH CUSTOMER TRUST

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Submitted:
07 June 2026

Revised:
13 June 2026

Accepted:
24 June 2026

Abstract

This study examines paid social media advertising and digital marketing content quality as determinants of e-course purchase decisions, with customer trust as a mediating variable. The research was motivated by the declining sales performance of e-courses and the increasing tendency of potential customers to abandon payment despite showing initial purchase interest. A quantitative explanatory design was employed, involving 355 e-course customers selected through simple random sampling from a population of 3,136 customers. Data were collected using an online questionnaire measured with a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Structural Equation Modeling with LISREL 8.80, and Sobel mediation testing. The results show that paid social media advertising has a positive and significant effect on customer trust and e-course purchase decisions. Digital marketing content quality also positively and significantly influences customer trust and purchase decisions. Customer trust has a significant effect on purchase decisions and mediates the relationship between both digital marketing determinants and e-course purchase decisions. These findings confirm that trust is a crucial psychological mechanism in converting digital marketing exposure into purchase behavior in the e-course market.

Keywords: *Customer Trust; Digital Marketing Content Quality; E-Course Purchase Decision; Paid Social Media Advertising; Structural Equation Modeling*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the way consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives, and make purchase decisions, particularly in service-based and digital product markets. In Indonesia, this transformation is supported by a rapidly expanding digital ecosystem. Data Reportal (2025) reported that Indonesia had 212 million internet users in early 2025, with internet penetration reaching 74.6% of the population. The country also recorded 356 million cellular mobile connections and 143 million active social media user identities, indicating that digital platforms have become an essential infrastructure for communication, promotion, and commercial transactions. This condition creates substantial opportunities for digital businesses, including education technology providers, to acquire customers through social media-based marketing activities.

The education technology (EdTech) sector is one of the most relevant industries in this digital shift. Online learning products, including e-courses, workshops, and digital bootcamps, have become increasingly important as individuals seek flexible opportunities for upskilling and reskilling. IMARC Group (2026) estimated that the Indonesian EdTech market reached USD 3.61 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach USD 10.04 billion by 2034, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 11.42% during 2026-2034. This growth is driven by digital learning adoption, government support for ICT-based education, personalized learning needs, and the increasing relevance of AI-powered educational tools. In this context, e-course providers are expected to compete not only through product quality but also through the credibility of their digital communication.

One emerging segment within the EdTech industry is content creator education. The growth of Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and other social media platforms has encouraged many individuals to view content creation as a promising career path. As a result, demand has increased for practical e-courses that teach content production, digital branding, video editing, storytelling, and monetization strategies. However, e-courses are intangible digital products. Potential customers cannot fully evaluate the quality of the learning experience before purchase. This creates information asymmetry and perceived risk, making external signals such as paid social media advertising, digital marketing content quality, social proof, and customer trust highly influential in purchase decisions. In online buying behavior, trust plays a crucial role in reducing perceived uncertainty and strengthening consumers' willingness to complete transactions (Pappas, 2016).

BuatMudah is one of the e-course providers that focuses on content creation training. Although the market opportunity is large, BuatMudah operates in a highly competitive digital education environment. Several competitors have stronger audience bases, higher engagement, and more intensive advertising activities. Table 1 summarizes the competitive situation of BuatMudah compared with selected competitors based on publicly observed Instagram and Meta Ads indicators.

Table 1. Competitive Digital Marketing Indicators of Selected E-Course Brands

Brand	Instagram Followers	Engagement Rate	Active Meta Ads
Kelas Konten Kreator Muslim	253,830	0.07%	4
DNVB	252,438	0.58%	27
Akademicreator	105,227	12.41%	170
Digital Marketing School	127,922	0.01%	28
BuatMudah	31,601	0.22%	4

Source: Public Instagram observation and Meta Ad Library analysis, Q4 2025.

Table 1 indicates that BuatMudah has the smallest follower base among the observed competitors and a relatively low engagement rate of 0.22%. This suggests that BuatMudah's digital content has not yet generated strong audience interaction. In social media marketing,

engagement is important because it reflects audience relevance, message resonance, and the ability of content to stimulate consumer response. Prior studies show that social media marketing activities influence customer behavior by shaping customer experience, brand perception, and purchase-related responses (Wibowo et al., 2021; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Furthermore, social media advertising features such as informativeness, credibility, hedonic value, and interactivity can affect customer purchase intention (Alalwan, 2018).

The gap is also visible in paid advertising intensity. Akademcreator operated 170 active Meta Ads, while BuatMudah only operated four active ads. A low number of active paid advertisements may limit audience reach, reduce testing opportunities for advertising messages, and weaken top-of-mind awareness. Paid social media advertising is no longer merely a promotional tool but also a mechanism for customer acquisition, audience segmentation, and conversion optimization. When paid advertisements are informative, credible, and relevant to consumer needs, they can generate positive attitudes and strengthen purchase-related decisions (Alalwan, 2018; Hanaysha, 2022).

In addition to paid advertising, digital marketing content quality is another critical factor in the e-course purchase process. For digital learning products, marketing content functions as a visible representation of the product itself. Consumers often use content samples, educational videos, testimonials, explanations of course benefits, and preview materials as quality signals before making a purchase. Content that is informative, attractive, entertaining, relevant, and credible can increase perceived value and trust. Lou and Yuan (2019) found that message value and credibility in social media branded content affect consumer trust. Similarly, high-quality social media marketing activities can improve customer experience and influence behavioral outcomes (Wibowo et al., 2021).

BuatMudah's internal advertising data also show that different content formats produce different sales outcomes. Video-based advertisements that show product advantages or provide previews of e-course materials tend to generate higher engagement and more sales than static promotional images. In contrast, image-based discount promotions recorded lower engagement and lower conversion. This indicates that consumers of e-course products respond more positively to content that demonstrates value and learning quality rather than content that merely emphasizes price discounts. Therefore, digital marketing content quality is a strategic determinant that should be investigated empirically.

The urgency of this study is strengthened by BuatMudah's declining sales performance. Table 2 presents the key internal business symptoms observed from May 2024 to October 2025.

Table 2. Key Business Symptoms of BuatMudah E-Course Sales Performance

Indicator	Evidence	Interpretation
Highest monthly sales	311 units in September 2024	Strong initial market response
Lowest monthly sales	50 units in September 2025	Severe sales decline
Sales contraction	83.9% from peak sales	Loss of sales momentum
Highest pending payment rate	46.74% in June 2025	High transaction abandonment
Active Meta Ads	4 ads	Limited paid acquisition intensity
Instagram engagement rate	0.22%	Weak audience interaction

Source: Internal sales data and public digital marketing observation, 2025.

Table 2 shows that BuatMudah experienced a significant decline in sales after reaching its peak in September 2024. More importantly, the increase in pending payment rate indicates that many potential customers had already shown purchase intention but did not complete payment. This phenomenon suggests that the problem is not only related to awareness or traffic but also to customer conviction and trust. In online purchasing, consumers may abandon transactions when they perceive insufficient credibility, unclear value, or risk in the product and seller (Pappas, 2016). Therefore, customer trust becomes a central mediating mechanism that can explain how marketing stimuli are converted into purchase decisions.

Previous studies have examined the influence of social media marketing and advertising on purchase intention or purchase decisions (Alalwan, 2018; Hanaysha, 2022; Yadav & Rahman, 2017). Other studies have also emphasized the role of brand trust as a mediator between social media marketing activities and online purchase behavior (Azhar et al., 2023; Hanaysha, 2022). However, limited research has specifically investigated the e-course market, particularly in the context of content creator education in Indonesia. Moreover, many studies discuss social media marketing in general, while fewer studies simultaneously examine paid social media advertising and digital marketing content quality as two distinct determinants of e-course purchase decisions through customer trust.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the effect of paid social media advertising and digital marketing content quality on e-course purchase decisions, with customer trust as a mediating variable. The specific objectives are: (1) to examine the effect of paid social media advertising on customer trust and e-course purchase decisions; (2) to examine the effect of digital marketing content quality on customer trust and e-course purchase decisions; and (3) to test the mediating role of customer trust in the relationship between digital marketing determinants and e-course purchase decisions. The proposed problem-solving plan is to develop and test an empirical model that explains how BuatMudah can improve purchase decisions by optimizing paid advertising strategy, improving content quality, and strengthening customer trust.

The findings of this study are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research extends digital consumer behavior literature by

positioning customer trust as a psychological mechanism linking digital marketing stimuli and e-course purchase decisions. Practically, this study provides data-driven insights for BuatMudah and similar e-course providers to improve advertising effectiveness, strengthen content strategy, reduce transaction abandonment, and increase sales conversion in a competitive EdTech market.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design with an explanatory and verification approach. The design was selected because the study aims to examine the causal relationships among paid social media advertising, digital marketing content quality, customer trust, and e-course purchase decisions. A quantitative approach is appropriate when research variables can be measured numerically and analyzed statistically to test hypotheses and explain relationships among constructs (Saunders et al., 2023; Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). The research was conducted at BuatMudah, an e-course provider focusing on content creation education. The research period was planned for six months, from January to June 2026, covering instrument development, pilot testing, field data collection, data analysis, and report preparation.

The target population of this study consisted of all customers who had participated in BuatMudah e-courses during the period of May 2024 to October 2025. Based on the company database, the total population was 3,136 customers.

This sample size is considered adequate for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), particularly because SEM requires sufficient observations to estimate measurement and structural parameters reliably (Hair et al., 2019; Kline & Little, 2023; Kyriazos, 2018). The sampling technique used in this study was probability sampling with a simple random sampling approach. This technique was selected because each customer in the population had an equal chance of being selected as a respondent, thereby improving representativeness and reducing selection bias.

The sampling frame was obtained from BuatMudah's customer database consisting of 3,136 customer contacts. Each customer was assigned a unique number from 1 to 3,136, and 355 respondents were selected randomly. If a selected respondent refused to participate or submitted an incomplete response, another respondent was randomly selected from the remaining sampling frame. Before answering the questionnaire, respondents were asked a screening question to ensure that they had participated in a BuatMudah e-course.

The materials and tools used in this study consisted of an online questionnaire, BuatMudah's customer database, internal sales records, public social media metrics, Meta Ad Library observations, SPSS, and LISREL 8.80. The online questionnaire was developed using a closed-ended format and distributed through relevant digital channels, including WhatsApp, email, customer communities, and BuatMudah's official social media channels. SPSS was used for preliminary data screening, descriptive statistics, validity testing, and

reliability testing, while LISREL 8.80 was used to analyze the measurement model and structural model.

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. The response categories ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Secondary data were obtained from BuatMudah’s internal records, public Instagram data, Meta Ad Library observations, and relevant literature. These secondary data were used to strengthen the background of the study and provide contextual evidence regarding BuatMudah’s digital marketing performance, sales decline, and pending payment issue.

Table 3. Likert Scale Used in the Questionnaire

Response Category	Code	Score
Strongly Agree	SA	5
Agree	A	4
Neutral	N	3
Disagree	D	2
Strongly Disagree	SD	1

Source: Data Generated, 2025

The research instrument was developed based on the operational indicators of each variable. Paid social media advertising was measured through exposure frequency, relevance, attractiveness, and interactivity. Digital marketing content quality was measured through educational value, entertainment, credibility, and creativity or uniqueness. Customer trust was measured through ability, benevolence, and integrity. E-course purchase decision was measured through product choice, brand choice, purchase timing, channel choice, and payment method.

Table 4. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Code	Indicators	Number of Valid Items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Paid Social Media Advertising	X1	Exposure frequency, relevance, attractiveness, interactivity	20	0.907
Digital Marketing Content Quality	X2	Educational value, entertainment, credibility, creativity and uniqueness	21	0.901
Customer Trust	M	Ability, benevolence, integrity	18	0.914
E-Course Purchase Decision	Y	Product choice, brand choice, purchase timing, channel choice, payment method	24	0.915

Source: Data Generated, 2025

Before the main survey was conducted, the instrument was tested through validity and reliability analysis. Item validity was examined using corrected item-total correlation. An item was considered valid when the calculated correlation value was higher than the critical r-value. Based on the pilot test, invalid items were removed from the final instrument.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha. A construct was considered reliable when the Cronbach’s Alpha value exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70. The reliability test showed that all variables had Cronbach’s Alpha values above 0.90, indicating excellent internal consistency.

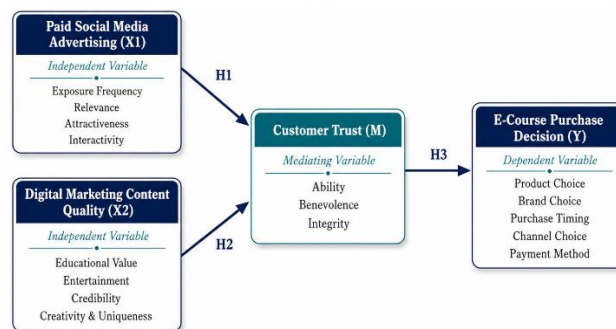


Figure 1. Research Framework

The conceptual model of this study positions paid social media advertising and digital marketing content quality as exogenous variables, customer trust as the mediating variable, and e-course purchase decision as the endogenous dependent variable. The model assumes that paid advertising and content quality influence purchase decisions both directly and indirectly through customer trust.

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to describe respondent characteristics and the distribution of responses for each research variable. Second, preliminary assumption tests were conducted, including normality, linearity, outlier detection, and multicollinearity assessment. Normality was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis values. Linearity was assessed to ensure that the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables followed a linear pattern. Multicollinearity was assessed by examining correlations among independent variables and variance inflation values. Outliers were examined to identify extreme responses that could distort model estimation.

Third, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the measurement model. The measurement model was assessed through standardized factor loadings, construct reliability, and model fit indices. Factor loadings were expected to be statistically significant and preferably above 0.50. The SEM model was evaluated using several goodness-of-fit indices, including Chi-square, RMSEA, GFI, AGFI, CFI, TLI, and NFI. A model was considered acceptable when the fit indices met the recommended thresholds commonly used in SEM analysis (Collier, 2020; Hair et al., 2019; Kline & Little, 2023).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics

The respondents in this study were BuatMudah e-course customers in 2026. A total of 355 valid responses were obtained, indicating that the minimum sample requirement was fulfilled. The respondent profile is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	201	56.6%
	Female	154	43.4%
Age	20-30 years	140	39.4%
	31-40 years	123	34.6%
	41-50 years	66	18.6%
	Above 50 years	26	7.3%
Education	Senior High School/Vocational School	54	15.2%
	Diploma	110	31.0%
	Bachelor's Degree	166	46.8%
	Master's/Doctoral Degree	25	7.0%

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher, 2026.

Table 5 shows that the majority of respondents were male, accounting for 56.6% of the total sample. In terms of age, most respondents were in the productive age groups of 20-30 years and 31-40 years, representing 39.4% and 34.6% of the sample, respectively. This indicates that BuatMudah's e-course customers are dominated by digitally active and professionally productive consumers who are likely to seek practical skills for content creation and career development. In terms of education, most respondents held a bachelor's degree, followed by diploma graduates. This profile suggests that BuatMudah's customers generally have sufficient educational background to evaluate digital learning products critically.

Descriptive Results of Research Variables

Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify the general tendency of respondent perceptions toward each research variable. The descriptive results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	Number of Valid Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Interpretation
Paid Social Media Advertising	20	76.50	4.52	63	87	Good
Digital Marketing Content Quality	21	77.51	5.85	65	91	Good
Customer Trust	18	69.28	3.76	58	79	Good

E-Course Purchase Decision	24	91.18	5.28	78	104	Good
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Source: Primary data processed by the researcher, 2026.

The descriptive findings indicate that all research variables were perceived positively by respondents. Paid social media advertising obtained a mean score of 76.50, which was higher than its theoretical mean score. This suggests that respondents generally perceived BuatMudah’s paid advertisements as visible, relevant, attractive, and interactive. The strongest item in this variable was the ability of advertisements to encourage action such as saving or sharing the advertisement, while the weakest item was the frequency of seeing the advertisement more than once a day. This indicates that BuatMudah’s paid advertisements have strong interactive potential but still require optimization in ad frequency and distribution consistency.

Digital marketing content quality obtained a mean score of 77.51. Respondents perceived BuatMudah’s content as generally educational, credible, entertaining, and creative. The strongest responses were found in the aspects of language familiarity, storytelling, and modern visual style. However, the lower score on the ability of content to clearly explain the deeper benefits of the paid e-course indicates that BuatMudah still needs to strengthen the connection between free educational content and the value proposition of its paid product. This finding is consistent with the argument that digital content marketing should not only attract attention but also build engagement, trust, and perceived value through relevant and valuable content (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Customer trust obtained a mean score of 69.28. This indicates that respondents generally trusted BuatMudah in terms of ability, benevolence, and integrity. The strongest indicator was benevolence, reflected in the perception that BuatMudah pays attention to customer learning progress. However, the lower score related to mentor professional background indicates that customers still require clearer information about instructor credibility, track record, and expertise. This is important because in online paid courses, trust is influenced not only by institutional reputation but also by perceived lecturer expertise and prior learning experience (Chen et al., 2021).

The e-course purchase decision variable obtained the highest mean score, namely 91.18. This shows that respondents generally had a strong purchase decision toward BuatMudah e-courses. The strongest indicators were purchase timing and brand choice, especially the tendency not to delay payment after receiving payment instructions and the decision to keep choosing BuatMudah despite similar offers from competitors. However, some respondents still showed hesitation regarding direct transactions through the official website or application, indicating the need to improve payment convenience, transaction assurance, and website usability.

Assumption Testing

Before SEM analysis was conducted, several prerequisite tests were performed, including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests. The results are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Summary of Assumption Testing

Test	Criteria	Result	Conclusion
Normality	Asymp. Sig. > 0.05	0.200	Normally distributed
Linearity: X1 → Y	Sig. > 0.05	0.973	Linear
Linearity: X2 → Y	Sig. > 0.05	0.339	Linear
Linearity: M → Y	Sig. > 0.05	0.061	Linear
Multicollinearity: X1 and X2 → M	VIF < 10	1.002; 1.002	No multicollinearity
Multicollinearity: X1, X2, and M → Y	VIF < 10	1.089; 1.055; 1.145	No multicollinearity
Heteroscedasticity: X1 and X2 → M	Sig. > 0.05	0.087; 0.069	No heteroscedasticity
Heteroscedasticity: X1, X2, and M → Y	Sig. > 0.05	0.655; 0.486; 0.162	No heteroscedasticity

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher, 2026.

Table 7 shows that the data fulfilled the main statistical assumptions required for further analysis. The normality test produced an Asymp. Sig. value of 0.200, which is greater than 0.05. The linearity test also confirmed that the relationships among the variables followed a linear pattern. In addition, the VIF values were far below 10, indicating that multicollinearity was not present. The heteroscedasticity test also showed significance values above 0.05, indicating that the regression residuals were homoscedastic. Therefore, the data were appropriate for structural model testing.

Measurement Model Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted to examine the validity and reliability of the constructs. The results of the measurement model are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Construct	Indicator Loading Range	Construct Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Conclusion
Paid Social Media Advertising	0.71-0.80	0.8493	0.5856	Valid and reliable
Digital Marketing Content Quality	0.78-0.81	0.8716	0.6293	Valid and reliable
Customer Trust	0.72-0.77	0.7809	0.5433	Valid and reliable
E-Course Purchase Decision	0.73-0.79	0.8675	0.5671	Valid and reliable

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher, 2026.

The CFA results show that all standardized loading factors were above 0.50. This indicates that all indicators were valid in measuring their respective latent variables. The construct reliability values were also above 0.70, and the Average Variance Extracted values

were above 0.50. Therefore, the measurement model fulfilled the validity and reliability requirements. The strongest indicators for paid social media advertising were attractiveness and interactivity, both with loading values of 0.80. The strongest indicator for digital marketing content quality was credibility, with a loading value of 0.81. Customer trust was most strongly represented by benevolence, with a loading value of 0.77. E-course purchase decision was most strongly represented by purchase timing, with a loading value of 0.79.

Goodness-of-Fit of the Structural Model

After the measurement model was confirmed, the structural model was tested using LISREL 8.80. The goodness-of-fit results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Goodness-of-Fit Index of the Structural Model

Goodness-of-Fit Index	Cut-off Value	Result	Conclusion
Degree of Freedom	Positive	75	Good fit
Chi-square	Smaller is better	85.24	Good fit
Chi-square/df	≤ 2.00	1.14	Good fit
P-value	≥ 0.05	0.19639	Good fit
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.020	Good fit
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.99	Good fit
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.99	Good fit
CFI	≥ 0.90	1.00	Good fit

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher using LISREL 8.80, 2026.

The goodness-of-fit results indicate that the structural model fits the empirical data well. The Chi-square/df value of 1.14 is below the recommended maximum value of 2.00. The RMSEA value of 0.020 indicates a very good approximation fit. The GFI, AGFI, and CFI values were also above 0.90. Therefore, the proposed model can be considered acceptable for hypothesis testing.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model tested the direct and indirect relationships among paid social media advertising, digital marketing content quality, customer trust, and e-course purchase decision. The results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standardized Coefficient	T-value	Conclusion
H1	Paid Social Media Advertising → Customer Trust	0.72	16.17	Supported
H2	Digital Marketing Content Quality → Customer Trust	0.75	14.41	Supported
H3	Paid Social Media Advertising → E-Course Purchase Decision	0.25	4.35	Supported
H4	Digital Marketing Content Quality → E-Course Purchase Decision	0.14	2.31	Supported
H5	Customer Trust → E-Course Purchase Decision	0.39	5.03	Supported
H6	Paid Social Media Advertising → Customer Trust → E-Course Purchase Decision	0.28	4.805	Supported
H7	Digital Marketing Content Quality → Customer Trust → E-Course Purchase Decision	0.29	4.751	Supported

Source: Primary data processed by the researcher, 2026.

The results show that all hypotheses were supported. Paid social media advertising had a positive and significant effect on customer trust, with a coefficient of 0.72 and a t-value of 16.17. Digital marketing content quality also had a positive and significant effect on customer trust, with a coefficient of 0.75 and a t-value of 14.41. These findings indicate that both advertising and content quality are important determinants of customer trust.

Paid social media advertising had a positive and significant direct effect on e-course purchase decision, with a coefficient of 0.25 and a t-value of 4.35. Digital marketing content quality also had a positive and significant direct effect on purchase decision, with a coefficient of 0.14 and a t-value of 2.31. Customer trust had a positive and significant effect on e-course purchase decision, with a coefficient of 0.39 and a t-value of 5.03. These findings demonstrate that customer trust is the strongest direct predictor of purchase decision among the three direct paths leading to purchase decision.

The mediation results also show that customer trust significantly mediated the effect of paid social media advertising on e-course purchase decision, with an indirect coefficient of 0.28 and a Sobel t-value of 4.805. Customer trust also significantly mediated the effect of digital marketing content quality on e-course purchase decision, with an indirect coefficient of 0.29 and a Sobel t-value of 4.751. Since both Sobel t-values were greater than 1.96, the mediation effects were statistically significant.

The final structural model can be summarized as follows.

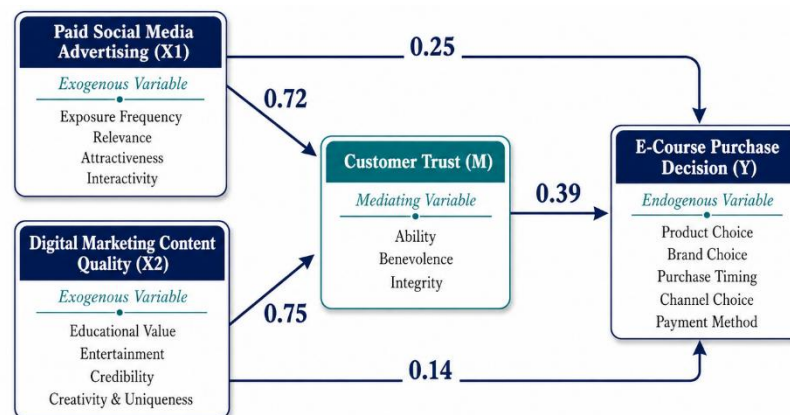


Figure 2. Final Structural Model

Discussion

The first finding shows that paid social media advertising has a positive and significant effect on customer trust. This means that the more effective BuatMudah's paid advertisements are in terms of exposure, relevance, attractiveness, and interactivity, the stronger the customer trust in the e-course brand becomes. In a social media environment, advertisements are not merely promotional messages; they function as digital signals of credibility, professionalism, and brand presence. This finding is consistent with Shareef et al. (2019), who emphasized that advertisement sources and perceived credibility contribute to advertising value and favorable consumer attitudes. Appel et al. (2020) also argued that social media provides multiple ways for marketers to reach, engage, and shape consumer perceptions. In the case of BuatMudah, paid advertisements that are visually attractive and interactive are able to reduce uncertainty and increase customer confidence.

The second finding shows that digital marketing content quality has a positive and significant effect on customer trust. This is the strongest path leading to customer trust, with a coefficient of 0.75. This result indicates that customers place high importance on the quality of content before trusting an e-course provider. For an intangible digital learning product, content functions as a preview of the product experience. Educational value, credible information, creative presentation, and entertaining delivery become signals that help customers assess whether the provider has the competence and integrity to deliver valuable learning outcomes. This finding supports Hollebeek and Macky (2019), who stated that digital content marketing is designed to foster consumer engagement, trust, and value through relevant and valuable brand-related content. It is also in line with Cheung et al. (2020), who found that perceived social media marketing elements influence consumer-brand engagement and brand knowledge.

The third finding shows that paid social media advertising has a positive and significant direct effect on e-course purchase decision. This indicates that paid advertising can directly stimulate customers to make purchase decisions. In BuatMudah's case, the

strongest elements of paid advertising were attractiveness and interactivity. Visually appealing advertisements can capture attention quickly, while interactive advertisements can encourage customers to take action, such as clicking, saving, sharing, or proceeding to the registration page. However, the direct effect of paid advertising on purchase decision was smaller than its effect on customer trust. This suggests that advertising is more effective when it first builds trust rather than merely pushing direct transactions.

The fourth finding shows that digital marketing content quality has a positive and significant direct effect on e-course purchase decision. Although the coefficient is smaller than the other direct effects, the relationship remains statistically significant. This indicates that high-quality content can directly influence purchase decisions, especially when the content demonstrates educational depth, usefulness, credibility, and relevance to the needs of content creators. This result confirms that content marketing is not only a branding instrument but also a conversion-supporting mechanism. However, the relatively modest coefficient indicates that good content alone may not be sufficient to drive purchase decisions unless it is supported by trust-building elements and a clear conversion path.

The fifth finding shows that customer trust has a positive and significant effect on e-course purchase decision. This result confirms that trust is a central psychological mechanism in the purchase of digital learning products. E-courses are intangible products; therefore, customers cannot fully evaluate their quality before payment. Trust reduces perceived risk and strengthens customers' confidence to complete transactions. Chen et al. (2021) found that trust plays a positive role in consumers' purchase intention toward online paid courses. In the *BuatMudah* context, customer trust is shaped by perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity. The strongest trust indicator was benevolence, suggesting that customers are more likely to purchase when they perceive that *BuatMudah* genuinely cares about their learning progress.

The sixth finding shows that customer trust mediates the effect of paid social media advertising on e-course purchase decision. This means that paid advertisements do not only work by directly encouraging customers to buy; they also work by first increasing customer trust. The indirect effect of 0.28 was stronger than the direct effect of 0.25, indicating that the trust pathway is highly important in converting advertisement exposure into purchase decisions. This finding has important practical implications. *BuatMudah* should not design paid advertisements merely as hard-selling promotional tools. Instead, advertisements should communicate credibility, learning outcomes, mentor expertise, testimonials, and payment security. In other words, paid advertising should be managed as a trust-building acquisition channel.

The seventh finding shows that customer trust mediates the effect of digital marketing content quality on e-course purchase decision. The indirect effect of 0.29 was also stronger than the direct effect of 0.14. This indicates that content quality has a greater influence on purchase decisions when it successfully builds trust. In the e-course market, consumers often

use free content as a sample to judge the quality of paid content. Therefore, content should not only be attractive or entertaining but also credible, useful, and aligned with the promised value of the e-course. The findings suggest that BuatMudah needs to strengthen educational-conversion content funneling, where free content provides meaningful value while clearly guiding audiences toward the benefits of the paid e-course.

Overall, the results demonstrate that customer trust is the key mediating mechanism in BuatMudah's digital marketing model. Paid social media advertising and digital marketing content quality both have significant direct effects on purchase decisions, but their effects become stronger when mediated by customer trust. This implies that BuatMudah's main marketing challenge is not only to increase reach or content production volume, but also to strengthen the psychological assurance that customers need before completing payment. This finding is particularly relevant to BuatMudah's business problem, where pending payment rates indicate hesitation at the final stage of the purchase funnel.

The practical implication of this study is that BuatMudah should implement a trust-driven digital marketing strategy. First, paid advertisements should be optimized by increasing ad frequency, improving message relevance, strengthening visual credibility, and clarifying call-to-action buttons. Second, digital marketing content should provide clearer educational value, demonstrate mentor expertise, and explicitly connect free content with the benefits of the paid e-course. Third, trust-building elements such as customer testimonials, transparent course outcomes, instructor profiles, refund guarantees, secure payment methods, and responsive customer support should be integrated into both advertisements and organic content. Fourth, BuatMudah should improve its transaction system by simplifying the purchase flow, integrating trusted payment gateways, and sending personalized reminders to reduce pending payments.

These findings contribute to digital marketing and consumer behavior literature by showing that customer trust plays a strategic role in converting digital marketing stimuli into purchase decisions in the e-course industry. The study extends the discussion of social media marketing effectiveness by separating paid social media advertising and digital marketing content quality as two distinct determinants. It also provides empirical support for the idea that in digital education services, trust is not merely an outcome of marketing but a conversion mechanism that bridges promotional exposure and final purchase behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to explain the determinants of e-course purchase decisions in the context of BuatMudah by examining paid social media advertising and digital marketing content quality as independent variables, customer trust as a mediating variable, and e-course purchase decision as the dependent variable. As stated in the Introduction, the main problem addressed in this study was the decline in BuatMudah's e-course sales and the

increasing tendency of customers to abandon payment despite having shown initial purchase interest. Therefore, this study was expected to provide an empirical explanation of how digital marketing activities can strengthen customer trust and encourage purchase decisions in the competitive e-course market.

The results show that paid social media advertising has a positive and significant effect on customer trust and e-course purchase decisions. This finding indicates that advertisements with strong exposure, relevance, attractiveness, and interactivity can increase customer confidence and stimulate purchase behavior. Digital marketing content quality also has a positive and significant effect on customer trust and e-course purchase decisions. This confirms that educational, credible, entertaining, and creative content plays an important role in helping customers evaluate the value of an intangible digital learning product before making a purchase decision.

Customer trust was also found to have a positive and significant effect on e-course purchase decisions. More importantly, customer trust significantly mediates the effect of paid social media advertising and digital marketing content quality on purchase decisions. This means that digital marketing strategies do not only influence customers directly, but also work through a psychological mechanism in which customers become more confident in the provider's ability, benevolence, and integrity. In this study, customer trust serves as a crucial bridge between digital marketing stimuli and final purchase behavior.

Overall, the findings confirm that *BuatMudah's* sales performance cannot be improved only by increasing advertising volume or producing more content. The company needs to develop a trust-driven digital marketing strategy. Paid social media advertising should be optimized through more relevant targeting, clearer value propositions, stronger visual credibility, and more effective call-to-action design. Digital marketing content should be strengthened by highlighting educational value, mentor expertise, customer testimonials, product transparency, and concrete learning outcomes. In addition, the payment process should be simplified and supported by secure digital payment methods to reduce hesitation at the final transaction stage.

For future implementation, *BuatMudah* is recommended to develop an integrated digital marketing improvement plan that combines advertising optimization, content quality enhancement, customer trust-building, and transaction system improvement. Future development may include A/B testing of paid advertisements, production of evidence-based educational content, stronger exposure of instructor credibility, alumni success stories, responsive customer support, and automated payment reminders. Future research may also extend this model by adding variables such as perceived risk, perceived value, customer experience, brand image, or repurchase intention to provide a broader understanding of digital consumer behavior in the e-course industry.

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