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Digital Marketing and Relationship Marketing Effects on Automotive Purchase Decisions in South Sumatra

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Abstract: This study was conducted to analyze the influence of digital marketing on purchase decisions, both directly and indirectly with the mediation variables of Relationship Marketing on prospective car buyers in South Sumatra. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) process is carried out using SmartPLS. The results empirically show that digital marketing has a strong positive effect on relationships (path coefficient = 0.978; $p < 0.001$). The impact of digital marketing on purchase decisions was 0.212 ($p < 0.001$), followed by relationship marketing with a coefficient value of 0.759 ($p < 0.001$). Relationship marketing mediates the influence of digital marketing on purchase decisions with an indirect impact of 0.742 ($P < 0.001$). The findings from this study point to something new for automotive industry professionals looking to blend digital marketing and relationships to strengthen consumer purchase decisions. This study also adds to the literature on the Mediation model in the context of marketing and sales.

Keywords: Automotive, Digital Marketing, Purchase Decisions, Relationship Marketing

Introduction

Currently, over half the world's population lives in cities, and according to estimates, by the year 2030, it is expected that about 60% of the global population would live in metropolitan areas (Kookana et al., 2020). This rapid growth in the population has mostly contributed to the speed with which all tasks are either ended or done per person, and in relation to the various work types available to each individual. Transportation facilities and other supporting infrastructure are necessary for individuals to be able to complete tasks promptly (Boakye et al., 2022). It should not be surprising that urban transportation systems are under stress due to the growing population of cities (Goetz, 2019). Okeke et al. (2020) stated this regarding transportation in cities, the system of a city with respect to transport is not only a necessity for mobilizing human activities but also a passage to the entire land uses. The remarkable

advancements in the automotive sector over the past few years are the present phenomenon that South Sumatra has experienced. This was due to an increasingly higher economic growth in the region, rising city population, and demand for better and more efficient cars from the public. Producing and selling thus require ongoing adaptation of marketing strategies in terms of material competition in the automotive marketplace, increasingly complicated and advanced involvement of digital technology into consumer purchasing behaviors (Ziegler & Abdelkafi, 2022).

The automotive sector in South Sumatra has gone through a process of significant growth and change in the past few years, which mirrors the national and global trend towards digitalization. The market of this region, which is composed of both commercial and personal car segments, is becoming more aligned with the consumer behavior shift, where, instead of making a decision based upon the traditional means, the buyers first check and probably rely more on the online platforms, digital advertisements, and social media interactions, etc. Various dealerships representing different types of vehicles trucks, passenger cars, and used have already started the process of integrating the digital marketing strategies to keep up with the competition. As an illustration, a number of local businesses are using social media channels like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, both for marketing and as a part of relationship-based marketing that aims at acquiring customers, retaining them, and establishing trust. This transformation is indicative of digital becoming the primary channel in the automotive sector and the relevance of the grounding to study consumers' purchase decisions with the synergy of digital and relationship marketing strategies (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

The automotive sector in South Sumatra bears a strong resemblance to the national and global trend of shifting towards online activities. For instance, the changing consumer behavior in digital marketing indicates the purchase of the vehicle through online has been a major influence in the local automotive market. A survey was conducted by Amalia (2024), a study was done in PT. Persada Palembang Raya, where the researcher saw present day prevailing interests of online consumers to promotions. On top of that, various car dealers in the region, ranging from sales of trucks to passenger vehicles have started to reach out to customers through social media, e-commerce marketplaces, and live-stream selling. This is a trend in the region where increasingly digital platforms are being adopted by the dealerships to draw in consumers.

Digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions. Numerous of the research findings that examine the influence of digital marketing on purchase decisions. In order to investigate the impact of digital marketing on consumer purchase decisions, Kurdi et al., (2022) used a number of applications, including social media, online advertising, email marketing, and search engine optimization websites. The findings demonstrated how important all digital marketing platforms are to customers' purchase decisions. Digital marketing such as social and mobile places heavy influences on customer buying decisions as indicated in the study of Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed (2021). Thus, the findings from the research have shown that so as to remain competitive in the contemporary business environment, organizations would have to adopt strategies to exploit the digital and technological environment of brand awareness through the digital media.

Recently, the influence of digital marketing on Indonesian consumers' purchase decisions continues to grow (Moslehpour et al., 2021; Sharabati et al., 2024). Digital marketing

elements, such as promotions, physical evidence, and prices, have been analyzed for their impact on consumer purchase decisions, especially in e-commerce platforms such as Tokopedia and Shopee, where they play a significant role in shaping customer behavior (Pires et al., 2022). Other research has also explored how social media marketing affects price perception, which in turn influences purchase decisions and consumer satisfaction, thus proving the influence of social media marketing on purchasing choices (Hasan & Sohail, 2021; Bushara et al., 2023). A strong influence has also been proven between the quality of digital marketing services and the ease of transactions, especially in the context of purchasing food through ShopeeFood in Tangerang (Susanto & Alexander, 2023).

The acceleration of digital demand is driven by the COVID-19 pandemic which has increased online transactions (Faturakhman et al., 2022). The increase in sales through e-commerce globally is influenced by big data customization factors, and the shift from traditional retail to online platforms. This shift in habits involves optimizing websites to improve consumers' online shopping experience, by using digital advertising to increase promotional activities. Despite the closure of physical stores, retailers continue to implement digital marketing strategies to maintain sales by utilizing various online platforms and social media sites, including Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, for advertising and marketing (Pinheiro & Macêdo, 2021).

Many firms now rely on digital marketing as a crucial method to advertise their products and services efficiently, particularly through social media and e-commerce platforms (Agrawal & Dhar, 2021). An Indonesian case study demonstrated how digital marketing strategies, such as advertising on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Google Ads, significantly boosted a university's brand awareness, resulting in a 155% increase in student numbers within 1.5 years (Wirany et al., 2023). Entrepreneurs, particularly those from Chinese immigrant communities in Australia and New Zealand, have utilized cross-border e-commerce platforms to connect the ecosystems of their native and host countries and secure startup funding. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online food delivery services in Brazil were transformed using digital marketing, which shifted the focus from food items to social responsibility and fighting the pandemic (Botelho et al., 2023).

Relationship marketing is very important in influencing the purchase decisions of consumers according to (Chukwu & Tom, 2020). The effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies has been shown to increase customer gratitude for their satisfaction, as well as generate positive behavioral outcomes such as repeat purchase intent and increased price tolerance (Huggins et al., 2020). Relationship marketing has gone beyond traditional marketing by incorporating elements such as trust, commitment, social bonding, empathy, and communication according to (Li et al., 2023) and relationship marketing has also contributed to customer retention and loyalty (Abdulkhalik et al., 2023). This relationship marketing strategy aims to establish strong long-term relationships with customers, increase loyalty, and can also facilitate promotion positively (Khan et al., 2022). When we talk about relationship marketing, we can say that it implies understanding and satisfying the demands of the customer and staying in touch with them to build and preserve a connection based on loyalty and trust. The automation of all client-related procedures is another aspect of customer relationship management (CRM), which is further separated into analytical, operational, and strategic categories. This can turn customer data into insights that can be utilized by companies (Mukmin et al., 2021). Relationship marketing can also affect customer retention

either directly or indirectly mediated by customer commitment, as the results of research conducted at Wegagen Bank in Addis Ababa (Desnet, 2019).

The results of the study show that digital marketing tactics, including electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and electronic trust (e-Trust), have a significant influence on consumers' intention to buy a car (Utami et al., 2023; Beyari & Garamoun, 2024). Another thing also shows that relationship marketing has a positive influence on consumer purchase decisions, emphasizing the importance of fostering strong relationships with customers (Situmorang, 2022). The findings from previous studies help to understand how these factors are interrelated is critical for car marketers in South Sumatra Province, in order to effectively utilize digital marketing tools, build relationships with consumers, and ultimately drive purchase decisions in the competitive automotive market.

This study looks at how digital marketing and relationship marketing strategies have an impact on automotive companies in South Sumatra. By combining two important components, namely, customer relationship and digital marketing in a holistic approach, this study provides deeper insights into the purchase decision-making process. By including South Sumatra in marketing and consumer behavior studies, this study adds to the academic literature. Research that focuses on the relationship between digital marketing strategies can provide useful information. By understanding how this approach affects purchase decisions, automotive companies can use more efficient methods. It can also show how a company's performance is affected by continuous innovation initiatives and the company's reputation can provide a better picture of customer behavior and success factors. Researchers can make practical suggestions to optimize marketing efforts and encourage the growth of South Sumatra's car industry by filling in these information gaps. Most of the research on purchase decisions in the automotive sector through digital marketing and customer relationships is conducted in big cities (such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan) or developed countries. Research in non-metropolitan areas such as South Sumatra is still rare, primarily related to local dynamics influencing customer preferences. Previous studies have separated the impact of customer relationship management and digital marketing on purchase decisions. Few have discussed how these elements drive buying decisions, especially in the automotive industry. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of consumer purchasing behavior in the South Sumatra car industry as a result of the relationship between relational and digital marketing. By understanding these dynamics, we can create a more targeted marketing strategy to improve local business performance. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will provide new information and strategic advice to help businesses stay competitive in a highly competitive market.

This study will explain how digital marketing adoption works in areas with limited access to technology. This will expand digital marketing theory. Currently, digital marketing theory is more based on the context of big cities or developed countries that have established digital technology infrastructure. This study aims to theoretically understand how digital marketing strategies can be implemented in areas such as South Sumatra, which is developing digital infrastructure. In addition, this study offers a theoretical framework that integrates digital marketing components (such as personalized advertising on the Internet and user-generated content) with customer relationships (such as personal interactions, trust, and loyalty). This framework explains how these two components influence automotive purchase decisions simultaneously.

Theoretical foundation of this study is reinforced by using Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Relationship Marketing Theory as the main viewpoint so to speak. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) informs us that individual behavior is a product of behavioral intentions which are, in turn, influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. When we talk about digital marketing, customers' purchase intentions are the result of their trust in the online platform, their interpretation of the promotional content, and their social circle's influence. In the same way, Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) deals with the establishment of long-term, trust-based relations between businesses and customers. Trust, commitment, and communication are the main components of this theory, which are also extremely important in converting digital engagement into continuous purchase behavior. In this research, relationship marketing is considered a mediating factor that links the impact of digital marketing on purchase decisions. By bringing together these two theoretical frameworks, the study aspires to provide a fuller picture of consumer behavior in the digital age, particularly in the automotive sector in South Sumatra. Theoretical positioning not only amplifies the academic contribution of the study but also reaffirms its findings through well-established business and marketing literature.

This research aims to connect the conceptual and practical digital marketing gaps of the marketing era by demonstrating the interdependence and mutual enhancement of the digital and relationship marketing tactics. Digital marketing grants access to a larger number of customers and greater participation, while relationship marketing guarantees the durability, faith, and intensity of the interactions. The study examines their combined impact on consumer decisions, particularly in the automotive industry of South Sumatra, thus contributing to a more unified view of marketing strategies in developing markets. Furthermore, the research connects the two dimensions within the structural modeling framework where no such literature exists and provides both theoretical rigor and practical insights for marketers.

Literature Review

Consumer Behavior Theory

In order to reinforce the theoretical foundation of the research, the concepts of the Consumer Behavior Theory are incorporated. According to this theory, consumers decide how to spend their resources time, money, and effort on the purchasing and consuming of goods and services (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). The decision-making process generally consists of five stages: recognizing a problem, seeking information, comparing different options, making a purchase, and finally, behaving after the purchase. In the digital era, the process of decision-making is more and more influenced by online touchpoints such as digital ads, e-WOM, and social media influencers, which change the consumers' information seeking and decision-making methods (Mrisha & Xixiang, 2024; Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020).

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

On the other hand, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1991) is presented as an additional theoretical ground. TPB suggests that the intention of an individual to act is the closest predictor of the actual behavior, which is affected by three aspects: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In

the case of digital marketing, these factors can be seen in consumer perception of online content, peer or digital community influence, and consumer trust in online shopping. The application of TPB in this study aims to elaborate on the role of digital marketing in shaping the purchase intentions and decisions, especially when the impact of trust and relationship factors is considered (Aancy et al., 2023; Harrigan et al., 2021).

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is a creative strategy that offers a new way for businesses to run their operations (Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022). This includes advertising carried out on various devices, such as computers, tablets, and mobile phones, through websites, apps, emails, and social networks (Almestarihi et al., 2024). In recent years, the rapid rise in social media has changed consumer behavior and Internet technology (Abdullah & Ampauleng, 2024). Digital marketing is a type of direct marketing in which vendors use information technology to reach consumers (Keke, 2022). Digital marketing utilizes online communication strategies to oversee a company's online visibility across platforms, such as websites, social media, and mobile applications (Martadikusumah & Indrawati, 2024). An updated definition of digital marketing is 'any number of promotional activities aimed at promoting and selling a company's services, brands, or products to consumers through the use of digital technology and online channels' (Yoon, 2024).

Purchase Decision

The series of steps consumers undertake before finalizing a purchase is referred to as the consumer decision-making process (Minh et al., 2023). Factors such as personal, promotional, product, social, and website characteristics all play a role in influence buying decisions (Patro, 2023). Consumer purchase decisions represent an alternative approach to problem-solving that involves concrete follow-up actions. Several options are available, and the act of purchasing can trigger the decision-making process. This indicates that the decision to buy is one of the phases that consumers navigate during the purchasing process (Li et al., 2023). The term purchase decision encompasses the actions of consumers across the product lifecycle, from discovery and acquisition to usage, assessment, and eventual purchase (Santy & Andriani, 2023). Purchase decisions are characterized as the process through which consumers determine which items to purchase, where to make purchases, and the process of completing the purchase. All consumer purchases stem from needs, desires, or a combination of both (Wibowo et al., 2024).

Relationship Marketing

A pivotal shift in marketing theory and practice involves the creation, development, and maintenance of successful online relational exchanges, often referred to as relationship marketing (Ghandour et al., 2023). The primary aim of relationship marketing is to enhance performance through identification, cultivation, sustenance, and, when necessary, the conclusion of meaningful relationships (Zegullaj et al., 2023). The way brands and companies manage their interactions with customers not only shapes perceptions but also significantly influences the desire to sustain and expand customer relationships (de Souza Odaguiiri Enes et al., 2023). Articulating the economic impacts of relationship marketing, especially the dominant logic of services, poses a challenge. Conceptually, however, relationship marketing has extensive implications, such as heightened customer loyalty and direct financial benefits

derived from value creation (Atinc & Taneja, 2023). Therefore, to nurture effective long-term customer relationships, it is essential to engage in relationship marketing. This strategy involves fostering trust in customers and creating positive emotions through mutually satisfying interactions and personal connections. Ultimately, relationship marketing seeks to solidify bonds between marketing managers, customers, and suppliers, establish dependable long-term relationships, and enhance company profits (Ju, 2024).

Hypothesis Development

Theoretical Foundation and Hypothesis Development

In order to formulate the research hypotheses, the present study merges the theoretical frameworks and the empirical evidence from previous studies. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) has described the way in which consumers' behavioral intentions are swayed by three factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control. In the domain of digital marketing, these components can be viewed as consumers' trust in online platforms, attitudes towards promotional content, and social proof. On the other hand, Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) asserts that trust and commitment are the main pillars of customer relationships that last over time, which is, in turn, the main force that pulls or pushes consumer behavior and eventually purchase decisions. Recent empirical research corroborate these theoretical assumptions. For instance, Kurdi et al. (2022) and Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed (2021) reported that digital channels including social media, email marketing, and SEO had a direct and significant impact on customers' intention to buy. Similarly, the studies of Ramadan et al. (2018) and Hidayat & Idrus (2023) gave a strong emphasis to the mediating role of relationship marketing in the purchasing process. The present research, based on these findings, proposes the following hypotheses to assess the direct and indirect effects of digital marketing on purchase decisions in the South Sumatra automotive sector.

Digital Marketing on Relationship Marketing

How relationship marketing has changed because digital marketing has been discussed in a number of academic studies. Digital marketing strategies that have been proven to improve customer interaction with customers include content marketing, email, and social media. Digital marketing provides interactive and customized experiences that are crucial for building and maintaining strong customer relationships (Mukhtar et al., 2023). In the digital age, it is exceedingly important to merge digital marketing strategies with relationship-based marketing approaches. As it is, numerous businesses as well as their clientele have taken most of the communication processes online, especially in social networks, buying and selling portals, and other internet-based activities (Csordás et al., 2022; Luo, 2021). This shift brings many challenges and opportunities for the company. Leveraging technology that enables tracking, collecting, and analyzing customer behavior on the internet allows businesses to manage customer interactions holistically. Some reputable companies and institutions, however, have stopped using digital tools due to concerns about data privacy and security. This shows that businesses must wisely navigate the digital landscape to cultivate customer relationships. Relationship marketing is crucial in the digital age, as seen by the significant shift in how companies engage with their clientele brought about by the digital revolution. Building relationships with customers through the internet requires a thorough

understanding of the changing digital world. It also requires strategies to effectively utilize available technologies (Steinhoff et al., 2019; Steinhoff & Palmatier, 2021).

H1: Digital Marketing affects Relationship Marketing.

Digital Marketing on Purchase Decision

How digital marketing affects customer end purchases across different industries and regions has been researched in a number of studies. Digital marketing channels such as SEO, social media, phone marketing, and email greatly influence buyer behavior during purchase. By providing relevant information, building profitable brand associations, and providing convenient and seamless transactions, digital marketing has been proven to influence customer buyer choices. Digital marketing also allows businesses to engage with customers in real-time and reach a wider market, lowering costs and improving marketing efficiency (Hamdani et al., 2022). Specific studies in regions such as Jordan, Egypt, India, Thailand, and Georgia show that customers in these regions are more likely to use digital marketing (Mahmoud Al Azzam et al., 2021; Sukaini, 2022; Sikharulidze & Tsikhiseli, 2023).

H2: Digital Marketing affects Purchase Decision.

Relationship Marketing on Purchase Decision

Two papers published in the journal contain relevant studies on relationship marketing and purchase decisions. The first article titled “Relationship Marketing and Insurance Customer Purchase Decisions in Lagos State, Nigeria” examines the relationship marketing effects on the purchase of insurance services by the policyholders in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings highlighted in the article state that relationship marketing aspects such as customer awareness, customer trust, customer perceived service quality, product innovation, and customer satisfaction affect the purchase of insurance by potential customers (Hidayat & Idrus, 2023). The second article entitled ‘The Effect of Relationship Marketing on Purchase Decisions and Its Impact on Customer Satisfaction’ examines how relationship marketing promotions affect customer satisfaction and the propensity to purchase products. The findings from this research demonstrate how relationship marketing is critical in enhancing the happiness of the consumers by altering the decision to buy products (Ramadan et al., 2018).

H3: Relationship Marketing affects Purchase Decision.

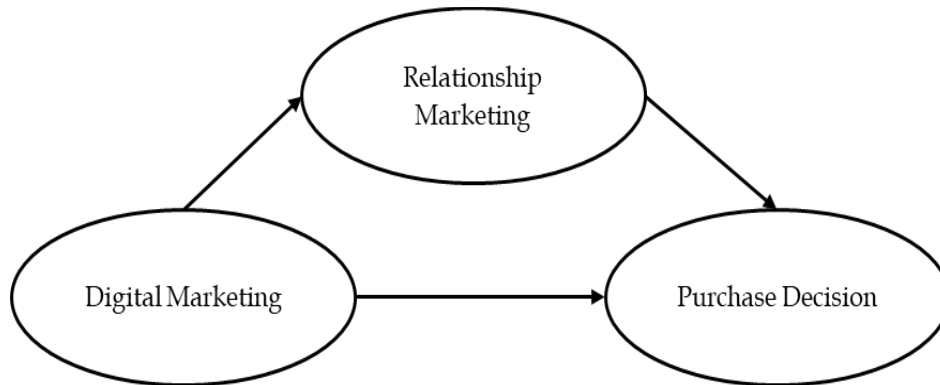
Relationship Marketing Mediates the Effects of Digital Marketing on Consumer Decision-Making

Relationship marketing strategies are essential factors for consumer purchase decisions (Kanapathipillai & Kumaran, 2022). These strategies, which are intended to build contacts, can even cushion against the effects of digital promotion on the ultimate buying choices of customers. For example, social networks are very important for a customer’s decision-making process. Self-purchase perception is particularly affected within the range of perceptions about oneself as an individual post a purchase. Another factor that greatly affects consumers in relation to purchasing is the level of content. In any case, the role of e-commerce in influencing final buyer behavior differs with regions and within institutions or age groups. Therefore, it is necessary for organizations to formulate a holistic approach that also encompasses demand and supply, market segments and their characteristics as well as market strategies of social media marketing (Potjanajaruwit, 2023; Zhang, 2023).

H4: Relationship marketing acts as a mediator between digital marketing and purchase decision-making.

In relation to the hypotheses expressed in this study, the concept of research framework is illustrated (Figure 1).

Figure 1. **Framework Concept**



Methods

The sample for this study consisted of 308 automotive marketers, in this case, car sellers, in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Similar to previous studies conducted by (Kanapathipillai & Kumaran, 2022) in Malaysia, a sample size at least five times the number of indicators ensures population representation (Hair et al., 2019). With the 15 indicators in the study, a minimum sample of 75 individuals was required.

This study used quantitative surveys as a research tactic as part of its methodology. Between 2023 and 2024, the researchers gathered survey responses. Using simple random sampling techniques, automotive business marketers in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia, were sent self-managed survey questionnaires through Google Forms. The form was distributed via WhatsApp and 308 responses were generated. Data testing with the PLS-SEM Method can handle formative and reflective measurement models and is suitable when the minimum sample size is 200 (Hair & Alamer, 2022). When referring to the car market in the article above, the researcher focused on South Sumatra of Indonesia. The independent variable in this study was digital marketing, while the dependent variable was the buying decision and relationship marketing was the intervening variable.

The questionnaire utilized a 5-point response continuum with anchors of “strongly disagree (1)” and “strongly agree (5)”. Out of the 308 sample respondents involved in the study, a total of 274 (89%) were found to be males while 34 (11%) were females. The highest number of respondents had the highest educational attainment of a bachelor’s degree (S1) 177 (57%); 76 (25%) were high school/vocational graduates; and 55 (18%) were Diploma (D3) graduates. Based on the age classification, 254 (82%), or the majority of responders, were in the 25–35 age range. On the other hand, the age group with the fewest responses, seven (2%), was between 46 and 55, while 47 (15%) of the respondents were between 36 and 45. With 1–5 years of experience as car salespeople, 169 (55%) of the respondents had the

longest service records (18). Subsequently, it was 6 – 10 years (55), less than 1 year (34), 11 – 15 years (33) and above 15 years.

Table 1. **Respondent Characteristic**

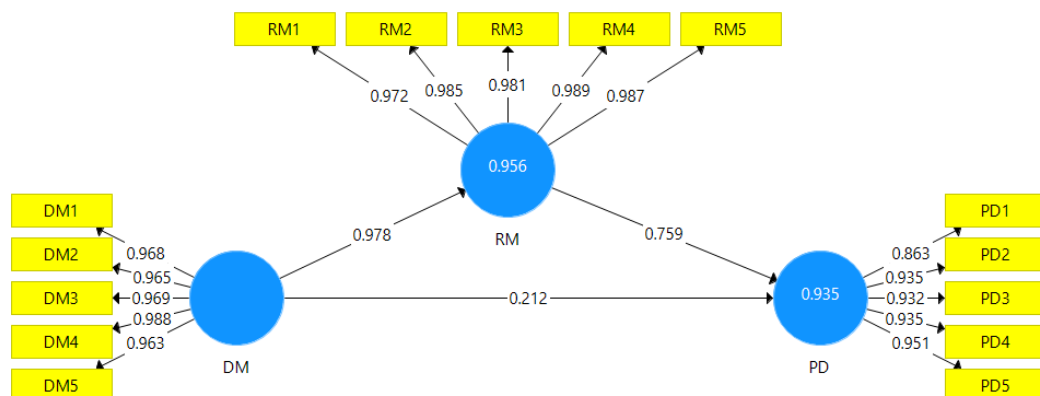
Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	274	89
	Female	34	11
Education Level	High School	76	25
	Diploma	55	18
	Bachelor's	177	57
	Master's	0	0
Age	20-25	0	0
	26-35	254	82
	36-45	47	15
	46-55	7	2
Salesperson tenure	< 1 year	34	11
	1 – 5 years	169	55
	6 – 10 years	54	18
	11- 15 years	33	11
	> 15 years	18	6

In general, as the Table 1 indicates, most of the participants were men aged 25 to 35 years with a bachelor's degree (S1) and had worked for one to five years as car salesmen. This study used an outer loading value of at least 0.7 (Latan & Ghozali, 2015). The research instrument was based on the literature and was adapted from (Kanapathipillai & Kumaran, 2022). Each variable had five indicators, forming a total of 15 indicators from the three variables. After excluding an indicator with a value below 0.7, the measurement instrument was finalized.

Findings

The measurement model was evaluated using convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability. Figure 2 shows the convergent validity test results.

Figure 2. **Calculate Results – SmartPLS**



It turns out that this research methodology harnesses external model analysis, also referred to as measurement models, in testing the validity and reliability of a model against specific

benchmarks. Factor loading indicates the level of convergent validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) shows the level of discriminant validity and Composite reliability indicates the reliability of the composite. Further information is presented in Table 2.

Figure 2 shows the results of the convergent validity test, which shows that each indicator has a loading factor that exceeds 0.7, which indicates the validity with the set standard (>0.7). Meanwhile, the evaluation results of Table 2 show that all indicators of each variable meet the validity criteria with an AVE value of more than 0.50 each. In addition, the reliability analysis of the composite showed that the reliability of the composite for all constructions was more than 0.70, which indicates that the consistency and stability (Hair et al., 2021). Therefore, this measuring tool has proven to be reliable and valid for measuring research variables.

Table 2. **Discriminant Validity and Composite Reliability Test Results**

		Composite Reliability		Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
DM	> 0.70	0.988	> 0.50	0.942
RM		0.967		0.854
PD		0.993		0.966

Structural Model Evaluating

The Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique, which is a variance-based approach in the SEM framework, was used in this study to authenticate the conceptual model. The main emphasis of the PLS is the ability to make accurate predictions. To ensure the suitability of the proposed model, a number of evaluation metrics are added as part of the validation process. The metrics used are R square, Q square, and SRMR, in accordance with the guidelines proposed by (Hair et al., 2019). The data shows that digital marketing variables influence purchase decisions by 94% (R squared = 0.935) and relationship marketing by 96% (R squared = 0.956). We can say that the model is predictively relevant because the Q number squared for relationship marketing is 0.913 and the purchase decision is 0.786 far from zero. The partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling route analysis yielded an SRMR value of 0.088, which indicates a strong match.

To ensure coherence between the research problem, objectives, and hypotheses, this study builds its framework on the integration of digital marketing and relationship marketing theories, supported by consumer behavior principles. The central issue addressed is how businesses in developing regions, specifically in South Sumatra can leverage digital and relational strategies to influence consumer purchasing decisions effectively. The research objective is to examine the direct impact of digital marketing on purchasing decisions, and the indirect impact through relationship marketing as a mediating variable. Accordingly, the hypotheses were developed to reflect these causal relationships. By employing a quantitative approach and PLS-SEM analysis, the study is designed to test this conceptual model with statistical rigor and practical relevance. This theoretical grounding supports the following hypothesis testing results.

Results of Hypothesis Testing

In this study, four cause-and-effect relationships were proposed. Statistical analysis confirmed that three rejected one another. Hypothesis testing was based on statistical T-values and P-values using SmartPLS 3.2.9 software through the Bootstrapping method. To be considered a positive beta coefficient, a T-statistic value higher than 1.96 and a P-value lower than 0.05 (5%) are required (Hair et al., 2019). The details of the hypothesis test are presented in the following Table 3 below.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing results

		Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Conclusion
Direct	DM -> RM	0.978	344.192	0.000	Accepted
	DM -> PD	0.212	3.693	0.000	Accepted
	RM -> PD	0.759	13.015	0.000	Accepted
Indirect	DM -> RM -> PD	0.742	13.061	0.000	Accepted

Source: Research Data Processed by Smart PLS (2024)

Our data suggests that digital marketing has a substantial impact on relationship marketing. It can be seen from the significance value below 0.05, and t-statistics above 1.96 and have a positive direction. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was accepted.

Our findings show that online advertising significantly influences consumers' final purchase decisions. Its positive direction was evident from the t-statistics being greater than 1.96, and the significance value was less than 0.05. Therefore, we accept hypothesis 2.

In line with our research, relationship marketing mainly alters how customers arrive at the ultimate purchase decision. The significance value is so low that it is less than 0.05 and a t-statistic computation returns a figure more than 1.96. Therefore, this points to an increase. Therefore, we accept Hypothesis 3.

Our findings show that path analysis has a positive value, as evidenced by a significance value below 0.05 and a t-statistic above 1.96. This shows that relationship marketing is a significant mediator in connecting digital marketing with the purchase decisions of customers who buy cars in South Sumatra Province. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was accepted.

The study's outcomes add weight to the theoretical assumptions derived from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Relationship Marketing Theory. The positive impact of digital marketing on relationship marketing (H1) provides evidence for Mukhtar et al. (2023), who contend that the use of digital marketing that is both interactive and personalized will boost trust and thus lead to long-term commitment. In the same way, the effect of digital marketing on purchasing decisions (H2) is seen to be in line with the research of Al-Azzam & Al-Mizeed (2021), verifying that online advertising, SEO, and social media together play a major role in increasing consumer intent in the case of markets that are just taking off.

Also, the strong mediating effect of relationship marketing (H4) mirrors the findings of Steinhoff and Palmatier (2021), who argue that in digital contexts, the mechanisms for building relationships like loyalty programs, personalized communication, and trust turn digital exposure into actual purchase behavior. Theoretical implications consists of a wider

use of TPB in the process of developing digital ecosystems, and the refinement of relationship marketing theory in the process of online settings. On the other hand, the study recommends that companies in South Sumatra should not only focus on digital reach but also invest in trust-building tools like follow-up engagement, after-sales service, and personalized communication to convert interest into sales.

Digital Marketing on Relationship Marketing

Sales strategies using digital marketing have a significant effect on relationship marketing in South Sumatra, with a small P value of 0.05, and a large T-statistic value of 1.96 (Ghozali, 2018). This has a positive influence, as seen from the original sample value of 0.978. According to research, relationship marketing in South Sumatra is significantly impacted by the use of digital marketing strategies. These results align with those of Steinhoff et al. (2019), who emphasize the importance of online interactions between businesses and customers. In addition, additional research conducted by Steinhoff and Palmatier (2020a) looks at how technology plays a role in relationship marketing. This study shows that, as seen in Indonesian industry, technology plays an important role in facilitating the relationship between businesses and their customers (Kustiningsih et al., 2022). By emphasizing how well digital marketing can be on relationship marketing, the study aligns with and reinforces previous findings. Companies can build and maintain relationships with their target audiences, drive engagement, and communicate by using digital platforms and tools. An example is a study on how local Fintech startup Flip builds digital engagement through various PR activities on various platforms (Widyantriana et al., 2022). Digital marketing permits the companies to access the clients via different online means like social media, websites, or even emails hence gives chances for interaction and messages customized for each client.

In addition to this, employing technology in relationship marketing helps businesses obtain crucial information concerning the behavior, preferences, and needs of customers. By using this data, companies can strengthen the overall customer relationship by tailoring marketing efforts, offers, and customized experiences. This is in line with research that looks at how MonsterMAC's marketing strategy relies on Google Analytics and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) (Assalmi et al., 2023).

To use digital marketing successfully in relationship marketing, it is crucial to become familiar with your intended audience, their preferences, and the best digital platforms to engage with them. As shown in research conducted by Abdurokhim & Askarno (2019), companies must invest in technology infrastructure, digital skills development, and data analytics capabilities if they want to optimize their digital marketing efforts and build significant customer relationships.

These findings demonstrate the necessity of utilizing digital media and technology to enhance marketing performance, build customer loyalty, and facilitate engagement. Customer care digital strategies enable organizations to collect important behavioral data and offer tailored services to the clients. Ultimately, it will encourage good customer behavior such as advocacy and repeat purchases.

Digital Marketing on Purchase Decision

With a low p value of 0.05 and a large T statistical value of 1.96, statistical analysis shows that the impact of digital marketing on purchase decisions in South Sumatra is very large (Ghozali, 2018). The initial sample value of 0.212 shows a positive influence. The results show that digital marketing tactics greatly influence relationship marketing in South Sumatra. This finding is in line with the previous investigation conducted by Azzam et al. (2021), Sukaini (2022), and Hamdani et al. (2022), which examines the influence of digital marketing on consumer purchase decisions in the automotive industry in Iraq. This is also similar to research by Sikharulidze and Tsikhiseli (2023) which states that in the Georgian market, data shows that digital marketing, especially those conducted through platforms such as social media, email, and mobile platforms, significantly influences consumer decisions about what they buy.

Relationship Marketing on Purchase Decision

With a small P value of 0.05 and a large T statistical value of 1.96, it is clear that the impact of relationship marketing on purchase decisions is very large in South Sumatra (Ghozali, 2018). The original sample value of 0.673 indicates that this influence has a positive impact. The results of a more in-depth study show that digital marketing as a sales strategy significantly affects relationship marketing in South Sumatra. The results of this study are in line with previous research conducted by Ramadhan et al. (2018) and Hidayat & Idrus (2023).

According to the study conducted by Ramadan et al. (2018), on 'The Effect of Relationship Marketing on Consumers' Informal Purchase Decision in Tunjungan Plaza, Surabaya. The connection between the buyer and the seller is one of the force that determines the various preferences of the consumers in regard to the purchase of goods. In such situations, relationship marketing strategies aid in the establishment of trust, commitment and emotional ties between the third party and the buyers. This contributes towards customer purchase decisions. Another study conducted by Hidayat and Idrus (2023) states that RM influences relationship marketing on how bank customers buy goods. The research further supports the notion that relationship marketing, when implemented effectively, can strengthen customers' ties with their banks, enhance customer retention, and persuade customers to buy specific banking products or services. Such figures confirm that relationship marketing is an important factor when it comes to the decision process of a client. In South Sumatra for instance, it has been established that relationships marketing strategy had a further reach with the adoption of digital approaches to marketing. In digital marketing, companies utilize social networks, e-commerce, and other forms of technology in order to communicate, develop strong bonds with customers, and sway their purchasing behavior towards specific products. It is important to mention, however, that these results are relevant only to the automotive sector in South Sumatra.

Thus, these results should be applied with caution. Further research can be designed in different constraints and regions to understand how digital marketing is related to relationship marketing. Moreover, qualitative studies through in-depth interviews with customers, and also tracking customers over time can be very helpful in understanding how the two marketing concepts inquest digital marketing and relationship marketing play a role in customer purchasing.

The Mediating Role of Relationship Marketing in the Relationship between Digital Marketing and Purchase Decisions

The statistical data revealed that the P values were below 0.05, and the T values were above 1.96, showing a positive direction at 0.514. This suggests that relationship marketing serves as an intermediary between digital marketing and purchasing choices. The findings of this analysis are in line with research conducted by Kanapathipillai & Kumaran (2022), which tested the Malaysian automotive industry. Studies have shown that relationship marketing has the ability to regulate the relationship between digital marketing and consumer purchase decisions. In this case, relationship marketing serves to connect the effects of digital marketing with customer purchase decisions.

In addition, similar results were found in Dastane's (2020) study "The Influence of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Behavior", which looked at how Malaysian customers make online purchases. The study shows that there is little influence of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) on the relationship between consumer behavior and social media marketing. This suggests that elements other than relationship marketing can play a greater mediating role in online purchasing behavior.

When it comes to online advertising, this research raises important issues regarding the components that influence the customer's final purchase decision. Modern consumers, thanks to the age of the internet, can access much more information, in comparison to the past – at least in terms of the goods and services that are available to them. Notably, when it comes down to making a purchase, the factors that are product quality, price and convenience of shopping online are of utmost importance. As it happens, relationship marketing techniques are very effective in the modification of customer consumption posture. Connecting with customers on a personal level, allows companies to enjoy the benefit of loyalty and even support from these customers in the future. However, it is observed that digital marketing communications have little or no direct effect on the actual buying behavior of most consumers. Yet, RM provides an important understanding in yet another way, the direct effect of relationship marketing on the purchase decision process.

Consequently, the importance of these results is in the overall perception of digital and relationship marketing as a process that needs to work in tandem. These strategies complement each other increasing the attachment of the consumers then translating to favorable purchasing behavior in the current market. Nevertheless, this study is not without weaknesses as it has its limitations especially regarding the automobile industry in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia. An analysis of the correlation between digital marketing and customer expenditure via a relationship marketing platform. Consequently, generalization of these findings must be approached with caution, and additional study is required to investigate their ramifications across various industries and geographic areas.

Future research should incorporate new variables, particularly the impact of demographic demographics on the interaction between digital marketing, relationship marketing, and purchase decisions. This is anticipated to yield a more profound comprehension of the interplay between digital marketing and relationship marketing in Sumatra Province, Indonesia, for the foreseeable future. Consequently, generalization of these findings must be approached with caution, and additional study is required to investigate their ramifications across various industries and geographic areas.

The results not only validate the statistical connections suggested in the model but also support important marketing theories. The significant mediating role of relationship marketing is in line with Morgan and Hunt's (1994) Commitment-Trust Theory, which underpins trust and commitment as the key factors in influencing customers' actions. Similarly, the impact of digital marketing channels on the intent to behave corresponds with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior, where the factors of perceived control and social influence determine the purchasing intention. Practically, the findings imply that automotive companies operating in developing markets should not consider digital and relationship strategies as two separate fronts, but rather combine them: using digital platforms to draw up customer involvement and applying relationship building techniques to keep and change the leads of the customer engagement process. This dual-strategy approach is particularly suited to areas like South Sumatra, where infrastructure is developing and customer loyalty must be cultivated through hybrid marketing practices.

From a theoretical point of view, the validation and extension of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) in the under-researched context of emerging economies is a major contribution of this study. It underlines the mediating role of relationship marketing in enhancing the impact of digital marketing on purchase decisions, thus providing evidence for the connection of these theories in a digital consumer environment. The mediating perspective might be a stepping stone for future conceptual refinement in digital-relationship marketing interaction models.

The practical implications of this research are obvious for the automotive industry and marketers targeting consumers in developing digital regions like South Sumatra. The results indicate that the use of digital marketing tools (for instance, social media, online promotions, and electronic word-of-mouth) is most effective when they are accompanied by the strategies of creating trust, loyalty, and long-term customer relationships. Managers will not be able to stop at the digital outreach aspect but will need to double their efforts in relationship-building to unlock maximum consumer conversion and retention. This combined approach will not only help in the design of efficient and loyalty-driven digital marketing plans but also in maintaining them especially in the midst of competition and limited resources.

Conclusion

The findings from the research reveal that digital marketing influences consumers buying products in both direct and indirect form. This emphasises the need for automotive firms in the region to operate both digital and relationship marketing strategies in order to enhance customer purchase decision making. This study examines how mediation models can be applied in the field of sales and marketing, adding to the existing theoretical literature on the subject. These results show that when consumers decide to buy something through the mediation of the first, relationship marketing influences their choices. This shows how important it is to combine digital marketing and relationship marketing. This research has many benefits for practitioners. Automotive companies must conduct digital marketing through social media and e-commerce platforms, including promotions, tangible evidence, and pricing. They should also strive to build strong customer relationships, which can increase loyalty through increased trust, dedication, and social bonding. Ultimately, this study emphasizes how the South Sumatra automotive industry can benefit from the incorporation

of digital and relationship marketing strategies to influence consumer purchase decisions. The results improve our understanding of the relationship between different marketing strategies and how they affect customer actions, both theoretically and practically.

The research findings contribute to the marketing field with an empirical demonstration of the relationship marketing's mediating role in digital marketing contexts, leading to an update of the existing marketing models. On the other hand, it gives strategic recommendations to automotive companies that want to develop coherent digital campaigns and long-term relationships with customers thus facilitating the efficiency of their digital transformation.

From a theoretical perspective, the paper progresses the debate by putting forward the point that digital strategies which are backed by relational mechanisms-associated with trust and loyalty- showing the way to the forming of behavioral intentions and purchase outcomes. The authors of the paper also emphasized the digital limitation and relational depth in altering existing models considerably. Management will find it useful that the digital platforms and relationship-building strategies such as personalized communication, follow-ups, and loyalty programs should be developed in tandem in order to extract lasting customer value from digital exposure.

To the contrary, this research has the limitation of its geographical focus, self-reported data use, and cross-sectional design which makes the results less applicable across different industries or regions. Even though the limitations exist, the study still provides a strong framework for researchers and practitioners to navigate the digital and relational marketing ways together influencing consumer behavior, especially in developing economies. Future research should progress along these lines by putting the model in different settings, looking into other variables, and using longitudinal research designs to monitor changes in digital behavior over time.

Future studies should use qualitative or longitudinal methods, examine different areas or industries, and include demographic and technology preparedness factors. Examining the impact of cutting-edge technologies like AI, AR, and ML could help improve knowledge of how relational and digital tactics affect customer choice over time. In the conclusion, this study emphasizes the necessity of a cohesive marketing strategy that combines technology and human interaction to provide long-term client value.

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