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### Brand Trust Mediation Between Digital Branding, Social Media Engagement, And Perceived Value on OFD Purchase Intention

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#### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the effects of digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value on purchase intention, and it investigates the mediating role of brand trust among online food delivery (OFD) consumers in Pekalongan, Indonesia. Using an explanatory quantitative design, data were collected through an online questionnaire from 100 active OFD users selected through purposive sampling. The data were analysed using multiple linear regression, path analysis, and the Sobel test. The results show that digital branding ( $\beta = 0.299$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ), social media engagement ( $\beta = 0.230$ ;  $p = 0.040$ ), and perceived value ( $\beta = 0.498$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) significantly enhance brand trust. However, digital branding and social media engagement do not directly influence purchase intention, whereas perceived value ( $\beta = 0.220$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ) and brand trust ( $\beta = 0.480$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) have significant positive effects. Mediation analysis further shows that brand trust fully mediates the effects of digital branding and social media engagement on purchase intention and partially mediates the effect of perceived value. These findings highlight brand trust as an important psychological mechanism converting digital marketing stimuli into purchase intention, while perceived value remains relevant through both direct and indirect pathways. The study extends OFD consumer behaviour research to a secondary-city context. It suggests that OFD providers should integrate credible digital branding and responsive social media engagement with consistent value delivery to strengthen consumer purchase intention.*

#### INTRODUCTION

Online food delivery (OFD) platforms have become an integral part of contemporary food consumption by combining restaurant access, digital payment, promotional incentives, and delivery services within a single application. However, the expansion of OFD services has also intensified competition among platforms, exposing consumers to multiple alternatives and reducing the ability of promotional activities alone to secure purchase intention. In such a competitive environment, attracting users is no longer sufficient; OFD platforms must understand the factors that convert digital marketing exposure into consumers' willingness to purchase. This challenge is particularly relevant in emerging local markets such as Pekalongan, where consumers can easily compare platforms based on promotional attractiveness, service interaction, perceived economic value, and platform credibility. Accordingly, understanding the

determinants of purchase intention is essential to explain how OFD providers can sustain consumer preference amid increasingly interchangeable digital service alternatives.

Three marketing-related factors are particularly relevant to OFD purchase intention: digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value. Digital branding enables platforms to communicate a distinctive and credible identity across digital touchpoints, helping consumers differentiate one service provider from another in a highly competitive environment (Kannan & Li, 2017). Social media engagement facilitates interactive communication between brands and consumers and can strengthen consumer involvement through responsive dialogue, user participation, and brand-related interactions (Godey et al., 2016; Tajvidi et al., 2020). Meanwhile, perceived value reflects consumers' assessment of whether the benefits obtained from a service justify the monetary and non-monetary sacrifices involved (Konuk, 2019). In the OFD context, these evaluations may include price fairness, promotional benefits, time efficiency, service quality, and overall transaction convenience. Together, these factors represent visual, relational, and utilitarian mechanisms through which OFD platforms seek to stimulate consumer purchase intention.

Despite their theoretical relevance, prior studies do not provide entirely consistent evidence on whether these marketing stimuli translate directly into purchase intention. Social media advertising and brand-related digital interactions have been reported to stimulate consumers' purchasing responses in several digital contexts (Alalwan, 2018; McClure & Seock, 2020). However, more recent evidence suggests that consumer engagement with digital brand activities does not always translate directly into purchase intention and may operate through intermediate psychological mechanisms. For example, social media engagement has been shown to influence purchase intention through brand-related psychological mechanisms. At the same time, research in food-delivery applications also demonstrates the importance of brand trust in shaping purchasing responses. Similarly, studies of fresh-food e-commerce platforms indicate that perceived value strengthens purchase intention both directly and indirectly through brand trust. These findings suggest that digital marketing exposure and perceived utility may on their own be insufficient to generate purchase intention when consumers remain uncertain about the credibility and reliability of the platform. Accordingly, brand trust may provide an important explanatory mechanism linking digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value with purchase intention.

Nevertheless, an important gap remains. Existing studies have generally examined digital marketing, consumer engagement, perceived value, or brand trust in separate models or in broader e-commerce settings. In contrast, limited evidence has simultaneously examined digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value as distinct antecedents of purchase intention through brand trust in the OFD context. This limitation is particularly relevant for secondary-city markets such as Pekalongan, where consumer purchasing behaviour may differ from that observed in large metropolitan markets because OFD competition interacts with local purchasing power, restaurant characteristics, promotional sensitivity, and digitally mediated trust. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies in integrating three complementary consumer stimuli — digital brand identity, social interaction, and perceived utilitarian value — within a single mediation framework that positions brand trust as the mechanism through which these stimuli may be translated into purchase intention among OFD consumers in Pekalongan.

Based on this gap, this study examines the effects of digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value on OFD purchase intention. It investigates whether brand

trust mediates these relationships among consumers in Pekalongan. The study contributes to the digital marketing and consumer behaviour literature by clarifying whether marketing-related stimuli influence purchase intention directly or require brand trust to develop before translating into purchasing responses. Empirically, the study extends the discussion of OFD consumer behaviour to a secondary-city context in Indonesia. From a managerial perspective, it offers evidence on whether OFD providers should prioritise digital visibility, consumer interaction, value delivery, or trust-building strategies to strengthen purchase intention.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **Digital Branding**

Digital branding is conceptualised as a strategic marketing framework used by modern enterprises to construct, manage, and transmit their core identity within the online environment (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017; Kannan & Li, 2017). Grounded in the digital marketing framework, this concept goes beyond traditional advertising by focusing on the continuous orchestration of brand value through digital touchpoints to support enterprise growth and customer awareness (Ariyanti & Imron, 2023). In the context of online platforms, effective digital branding operates as a psychological signal of quality and professional competence (Garg & Bakshi, 2024). Its operational indicators include visual design attractiveness, logo typography, and the professional representation of the application interface, all strategically designed to capture consumer attention in a highly competitive digital market.

### **Social Media Engagement**

Social media engagement refers to interactive, dialogic marketing activities that create a direct connection between service providers and their consumer base, aiming to build brand awareness, image, and communal loyalty (Bilgin, 2018). Anchored in consumer engagement theory, this construct holds that a persistent and responsive brand presence in cyberspace is a prerequisite for surviving in consumers' preferential memory (Gavilanes et al., 2018; Godey et al., 2016). Active engagement can reduce information uncertainty by fostering a transparent digital environment (Dessart et al., 2015). The main indicators of social media engagement are the intensity of two-way communication, real-time responsiveness to consumer complaints, and active engagement with customer reviews to stimulate value co-creation.

### **Perceived Value**

Perceived value is defined as the consumer's overall cognitive evaluation of the utility of a product or service, formulated by comparing the received benefits against the sacrifices incurred (Konuk, 2019). This variable is grounded in the means-end chain model (Zeithaml, 1988), which holds that rational consumers systematically weigh economic and functional advantages before committing to a transaction. Within the online food delivery (OFD) industry, superior perceived value is critical to customer loyalty amid disruptive competition (Enjelika et al., 2023). The indicators used to measure perceived value are transactional time efficiency, perceived food quality and hygiene, and price fairness, including the rationality of promotional algorithms and delivery subsidies.

### **Brand Trust**

Brand trust acts as a fundamental psychological mechanism that reduces the inherent risks and information asymmetry common to contactless digital transactions (Gefen et al., 2003; Nguyen-Viet et al., 2024). It represents the subjective expectation that a company has the integrity, benevolence, and competence to credibly fulfil its service promises in an online environment (Garg & Bakshi, 2024). Prior studies indicate that the absence of robust brand trust

often triggers consumer scepticism and can neutralise the efficacy of other promotional components (Sio et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2022). The structural indicators of brand trust are institutional integrity, digital system reliability, and ethical corporate competence.

### **Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention represents the cognitive and affective transition from mere consumer interest to planned transactional behaviour within the e-commerce environment (McClure & Seock, 2020). It serves as a useful indicator of a firm's capability to convert marketing stimuli into actual financial transactions. Theoretical studies establish that purchase intention is driven by both rational evaluations of service utility and positive affective brand associations (Alalwan, 2018; Chen et al., 2020). The specific indicators for this endogenous variable include affective interest in the service, an explicit desire to complete a planned purchase, and persistent transactional commitment despite the presence of competitor alternatives.

### **Hypotheses Development**

**Digital Branding and Brand Trust:** The visibility of marketing messages containing high utility value, supported by professional visual credibility, significantly accelerates the growth of consumer confidence (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In a contactless ecosystem, the professional orchestration of digital branding acts as a key guarantee of a company's operational credibility (Kannan & Li, 2017).

**H1:** Digital branding has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.

**Social Media Engagement and Brand Trust:** Social media engagement through value co-creation facilitates transparent, dialogic information exchange, which helps build a foundation of communal belief (Tajvidi et al., 2020). Interactive communication can reduce digital uncertainty, positioning the brand as reliable in consumers' eyes.

**H2:** Social media engagement has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.

**Perceived Value and Brand Trust:** When an application's infrastructure consistently delivers superior perceived value, user resistance to digital risks diminishes, thereby strengthening the platform's credibility (Enjelika et al., 2023; Konuk, 2019). Rational evaluations of price fairness and service quality directly contribute to a sense of security and trust in the provider.

**H3:** Perceived value has a positive and significant effect on brand trust.

**Direct Effects on Purchase Intention:** Attractive visual features and digital identity are theoretically positioned to capture consumer attention and directly stimulate the desire to purchase (Alalwan, 2018). At the same time, strong engagement with a brand's social media pages reliably predicts the transition towards a planned purchase (McClure & Seock, 2020). Furthermore, a superior cost-to-benefit ratio directly stimulates shopping enthusiasm and shapes loyalty preferences (Enjelika et al., 2023; Zeithaml, 1988).

**H4:** Digital branding has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

**H5:** Social media engagement has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

**H6:** Perceived value has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

**The Role of Brand Trust:** Brand trust operates independently of algorithmic promotions, serving as a primary driver of purchase intention by dampening the ambiguity of consumption behaviour (Chen et al., 2020; Sio et al., 2022). Moreover, because online transactions lack physical interaction, brand trust is hypothesised to act as a crucial mediating mechanism that bridges digital stimuli and perceived value with actual financial commitments (Tan et al., 2022).

**H7:** Brand trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention.

**H8:** Brand trust significantly mediates the relationship between digital branding, social media engagement, perceived value, and purchase intention.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine the direct and indirect relationships among digital branding, social media engagement, perceived value, brand trust, and purchase intention. The study was conducted in Pekalongan, Indonesia, during the first quarter of 2026. The target population consisted of consumers who had experience using online food delivery (OFD) services. Because a complete sampling frame of OFD users in Pekalongan was unavailable, the study used non-probability purposive sampling. Respondents were eligible to participate if they were at least 17 years old and had completed at least two OFD transactions in the preceding three months. These criteria ensured that respondents had sufficiently recent experience to evaluate the digital marketing activities, perceived value, brand trust, and purchase intention associated with OFD services. A total of 100 eligible responses were obtained.

Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire measured five constructs: digital branding, social media engagement, perceived value, brand trust, and purchase intention. Prior to hypothesis testing, item validity was assessed using Pearson product-moment correlations, while internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. The regression models were then examined for normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity to ensure the assumptions underlying the statistical analyses were adequately met.

The hypotheses were tested using multiple linear regression and path analysis in IBM SPSS Statistics. Two regression equations were estimated. The first examined the effects of digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value on brand trust. Meanwhile, the second estimated their effects on purchase intention after incorporating brand trust as the mediating variable. Direct effects were evaluated using standardised regression coefficients and their corresponding significance levels. The explanatory power of each model was assessed using the adjusted coefficient of determination (adjusted  $R^2$ ), while the  $F$ -test assessed the simultaneous significance of the predictors.

Regression-based path analysis was selected because the objective of this study was to estimate the direct and indirect relationships among observed composite scores rather than to estimate a latent-variable measurement model. Given the predetermined model, the use of composite construct scores, and the sample of 100 respondents, regression-based mediation analysis offers a parsimonious approach for testing the proposed relationships. Accordingly, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was not employed because the present study did not aim to estimate latent measurement and structural models simultaneously. Nevertheless, future studies with larger samples may employ covariance-based SEM or PLS-SEM to assess measurement properties and structural relationships simultaneously and to evaluate the robustness of the present findings.

The mediating role of brand trust was further examined using the Sobel test, which evaluates whether the indirect effect transmitted through the mediator differs significantly from zero. A mediation effect was considered statistically significant when the absolute Sobel  $Z$ -value exceeded 1.96 at the 5% significance level. Mediation was interpreted by considering both the significance of the indirect pathway and the remaining direct effect after incorporating

brand trust into the model. Accordingly, an insignificant direct effect accompanied by a significant indirect effect was interpreted as full mediation, whereas simultaneous significant direct and indirect effects indicated partial mediation.

The following regression equations represented the empirical model:

$$M = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e_1$$

$$Y = \alpha_2 + \beta_4 X_1 + \beta_5 X_2 + \beta_6 X_3 + \beta_7 M + e_2$$

where  $X_1$  represents digital branding,  $X_2$  represents social media engagement,  $X_3$  represents perceived value,  $M$  represents brand trust, and  $Y$  represents purchase intention. The coefficients  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  denote the constant and regression coefficients, respectively, while  $e$  represents the residual error term.

Because the study used a cross-sectional quantitative survey, it did not incorporate interviews or observations as additional data-collection techniques. The study therefore does not claim methodological triangulation. To reduce potential response-quality concerns, participation was restricted to respondents with recent OFD transaction experience. Nevertheless, the use of self-reported cross-sectional data and non-probability sampling limits the external validity of the findings. Future research may combine surveys with interviews or behavioural transaction data and use probability or multi-regional sampling to improve triangulation and generalisability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Respondent Profile and Descriptive Statistics

The empirical data were collected from a purposively selected sample of 100 respondents in Pekalongan City. The demographic profile and behavioural characteristics of the sample matched the predefined criteria: active OFD consumers aged 17 years and above who had completed at least two transactions within the last three months. Descriptive statistical evaluation of the respondents' answers revealed that the general perception of the OFD platforms' digital marketing efforts and service utility was broadly positive, establishing a sound empirical basis for the subsequent multivariate analyses.

### Instrument Validity and Reliability Tests

Prior to the path analysis, the measurement instruments were evaluated for validity and internal consistency. The validity test used the Pearson product-moment correlation, while the reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

**Table 1 Summary of Instrument Testing Results**

| Variables                         | <i>r</i> -Value Range | Cronbach's Alpha | Conclusion         |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Digital Branding ( $X_1$ )        | 0.684 - 0.804         | 0.786            | Valid and Reliable |
| Social Media Engagement ( $X_2$ ) | 0.682 - 0.852         | 0.790            | Valid and Reliable |
| Perceived Value ( $X_3$ )         | 0.700 - 0.821         | 0.820            | Valid and Reliable |
| Brand Trust ( $M$ )               | 0.689 - 0.810         | 0.794            | Valid and Reliable |
| Purchase Intention ( $Y$ )        | 0.633 - 0.825         | 0.781            | Valid and Reliable |

*Source: Primary Data Processing via IBM SPSS (2026)*

**Interpretation and Implications of Instrument Testing:** The statistical output presented in Table 1 demonstrates that all questionnaire items are statistically valid, evidenced by the Pearson correlation values exceeding the critical  $r$ -table threshold of 0.1966 ( $n = 100$ , 5% significance level), with the  $r$ -values ranging from 0.633 to 0.852. The reliability test also confirms strong internal consistency across all constructs, as every variable achieved a Cronbach's alpha coefficient well above the critical threshold of 0.60. Perceived value recorded

the highest reliability score (0.820), suggesting that respondents interpreted and evaluated the utilitarian aspects of the OFD services consistently. Theoretically, this suggests that the measurement scales accurately capture the latent constructs of interest. Practically, the strong reliability suggests that the data fed into the causal model contain relatively little measurement error.

### Classical Assumption Tests

The fulfilment of classical assumptions is an essential prerequisite before interpreting the structural equations.

1. **Normality Test:** The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the residual values in both regression equations are normally distributed. This is confirmed by the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) probabilities of 0.200 for the first equation and 0.125 for the second equation, both exceeding the 0.05 significance level.
2. **Multicollinearity Test:** The evaluation showed no evidence of severe correlation among the independent variables. All predictors recorded tolerance values above 0.10, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores well below the critical limit of 10.00.
3. **Heteroscedasticity Test:** The scatterplot evaluation displayed no systematic pattern, with data points spreading randomly above and below zero. The model can therefore be considered free from heteroscedasticity.

### Model Testing (Goodness of Fit and Determinant Coefficients)

The simultaneous significance evaluation (*F*-Test) shows that both regression models fit the empirical data well. The first regression model shows that digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value simultaneously affect brand trust ( $F = 124.154$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). A similar pattern emerges in the second equation ( $F = 171.284$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming the simultaneous effect of all exogenous variables on purchase intention.

Furthermore, the adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.789 in the first equation indicates that the three predictor variables explain 78.9% of the variability in brand trust. The second equation recorded an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.873, indicating that the integration of the independent variables and the mediator explains 87.3% of the variance in consumer purchase intention.

### Hypothesis Testing (Path Analysis and Direct Effects)

The partial hypothesis testing via the *t*-test within the path analysis framework reveals a mixed pattern of significant and non-significant paths.

**Table 2 Significance of Partial Effects and Structural Path Evaluation**

| Structural Path (Direct Effects) | $\beta$ Coef. | <i>t</i> -Value | <i>p</i> -Value | Decision |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|
|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|

|                                              |       |       |         |          |
|----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|---------|----------|
| Digital Branding → Brand Trust               | 0.299 | 3.252 | 0.002   | Accepted |
| Social Media Engagement → Brand Trust        | 0.230 | 2.079 | 0.040   | Accepted |
| Perceived Value → Brand Trust                | 0.498 | 5.938 | < 0.001 | Accepted |
| Digital Branding → Purchase Intention        | 0.080 | 1.179 | 0.241   | Rejected |
| Social Media Engagement → Purchase Intention | 0.143 | 1.817 | 0.072   | Rejected |
| Perceived Value → Purchase Intention         | 0.220 | 3.217 | 0.002   | Accepted |
| Brand Trust → Purchase Intention             | 0.480 | 6.741 | < 0.001 | Accepted |

Source: Primary Data Processing via IBM SPSS (2026)

**Interpretation and Implications of Direct Effects:** Table 2 points to a clear behavioural pattern among OFD consumers. Digital branding ( $p = 0.002$ ) and social media engagement ( $p = 0.040$ ) significantly strengthen brand trust. However, when evaluated as direct predictors of purchase intention, both variables lose statistical significance ( $p = 0.241$  and  $p = 0.072$ ,

respectively), leading to the rejection of H4 and H5. Conversely, perceived value remains a consistent predictor, significantly influencing both brand trust ( $p < 0.001$ ) and purchase intention ( $p = 0.002$ ). Brand trust emerges as the strongest predictor of purchase intention, with the largest beta coefficient (0.480;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Theoretically, these results challenge the assumption that visual appeal or social media interactivity alone can translate directly into sales in a contactless environment. Instead, the pattern is consistent with the technology acceptance and risk mitigation literatures, which position rational economic utility (perceived value) as the more direct driver of purchase intention. At the same time, other marketing stimuli appear to require an intermediate trust-building process. Managerially, this implies that OFD providers should not rely on aesthetic promotion; they should also ensure that consumers perceive their core service pricing and quality as good value to support timely purchasing decisions.

### **Mediation Effects Testing (Sobel Test)**

Given the central role played by brand trust and the rejection of several direct paths, the analysis proceeded to examine the mediation effects using the Sobel method.

**Table 3 Mediation Effects Testing via Sobel Test**

| Structural Mediation Path                            | Z-Value | Critical Z | Mediation Type    | Decision |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------|-------------------|----------|
| Digital Branding → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention  | 2.93    | 1.96       | Full Mediation    | Accepted |
| Social Media Eng. → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention | 2.00    | 1.96       | Full Mediation    | Accepted |
| Perceived Value → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention   | 4.46    | 1.96       | Partial Mediation | Accepted |

*Source: Output of Sobel Calculation (2026)*

**Interpretation and Implications of Mediation Effects:** Table 3 confirms that brand trust significantly channels the impact of all three exogenous variables on purchase intention, leading to the acceptance of H8. The Sobel calculations produced Z-values of 2.93, 2.00, and 4.46 — all above the critical threshold of 1.96. Because the direct effects of digital branding and social media engagement were rendered non-significant after incorporating the mediator, brand trust fully mediates these two pathways. Meanwhile, because perceived value retains a strong direct impact alongside the mediated path, its relationship is classified as partial mediation.

These findings support the broader argument that brand trust functions as a key psychological filter in e-commerce settings. They are consistent with Samiono and Pratiwi (2024) and Sio et al. (2022), who argued that extensive promotional activity leaves little lasting commercial impact when the underlying trust is absent. Managerially, this suggests that OFD platforms would benefit from treating a brand trust index as a key performance indicator (KPI) alongside, rather than secondary to, monthly customer-acquisition metrics.

### **In-Depth Discussion per Hypothesis and Structural Pathway**

**The Full Mediation of Digital Branding (H1, H4, and H8):** The empirical findings show that digital branding exerts a direct influence that is rendered non-significant on purchase intention. Yet, it has a clear positive effect through the full mediation mechanism of brand trust. This pattern suggests that rational consumers in a contactless environment do not readily make purchase decisions based only on the visual appeal of a design or brand logo. Instead, they buy once the professionalism of these digital assets has first built cognitive confidence. Theoretically, this finding is consistent with the digital marketing system framework (Kannan & Li, 2017), which holds that identity orchestration in cyberspace signals a business entity's credibility. This aligns with previous studies (Ariyanti & Imron, 2023; Garg & Bakshi, 2024) documenting that visual image strategy determines the sense of security that supports purchase

intention. Practically, this suggests that OFD service providers should consistently design application interface layouts, visual campaigns, and logo typography that project operational resilience and professionalism and help reduce user scepticism.

**The Full Mediation of Social Media Engagement (H2, H5, and H8):** The results likewise show that social media engagement relies on the full mediation mechanism of brand trust to stimulate customer purchase intention. This suggests that dialogic interactivity, appreciation of reviews, and extensive two-way communication on social networking platforms do not generate sales on their own. Rather, they build emotional bonds and transparency that foster user confidence. Conceptually, this supports consumer engagement theory (Dessart et al., 2015), which positions communal interaction as a key factor reducing information uncertainty in cyberspace. This aligns with the conclusions of Tajvidi et al. (2020) and Godey et al. (2016), who emphasise that the intensity of communication responses helps build a brand reputation that converts online audiences into potential customers. Consequently, OFD managers should shift from one-way promotional messaging to a more proactive, responsive approach, such as addressing complaints promptly and transparently in real time and initiating conversations relevant to local trends and concerns.

**The Partial Mediation of Perceived Value (H3, H6, and H8):** Perceived value is the only exogenous variable that exerts the strongest direct influence on purchase intention while further strengthening its impact through the partial mediation route of brand trust. This suggests that the consumers' rational assessment of time efficiency, dish quality, and the fairness of algorithmic pricing promotions are pragmatic determinants capable of shaping purchase intentions directly. Nonetheless, the presence of brand trust further reinforces this decision. This finding is consistent with the relevance of the means-end chain value model (Zeithaml, 1988), which holds that total utility perception is constantly evaluated based on monetary sacrifices against received compensations. This study broadly replicates and extends the findings of Konuk (2019) and Enjelika et al. (2023), suggesting that superior economic benefits consistently shape customer loyalty preferences amid disruptive delivery service competition. In practice, OFD companies should continually review the rationality of their delivery subsidy algorithms and maintain the standardisation of partner restaurant hygiene, ensuring the cost-to-benefit ratio perceived by local consumers does not decline over time.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value significantly strengthen brand trust among OFD consumers in Pekalongan. However, their effects on purchase intention follow different mechanisms. Digital branding and social media engagement do not directly influence purchase intention, whereas perceived value has a significant direct effect. Brand trust significantly increases purchase intention and fully mediates the effects of digital branding and social media engagement, while partially mediating the effect of perceived value. These findings indicate that digital marketing activities do not necessarily translate directly into consumers' willingness to purchase; for digital branding and social media engagement in particular, their effects become meaningful once they build consumer trust. Perceived value, in contrast, operates through both a direct utilitarian pathway and an indirect trust-based pathway.

Theoretically, the findings clarify the role of brand trust as a mediating mechanism connecting digital marketing stimuli with behavioural intention in the OFD context. Rather than treating digital branding, social media engagement, and perceived value as equivalent direct

predictors of purchase intention, this study shows that their pathways differ. The full mediation observed for digital branding and social media engagement suggests that identity- and interaction-based marketing stimuli primarily contribute to purchase intention by strengthening trust. In contrast, perceived value retains an independent direct influence. This distinction contributes to a more nuanced understanding of consumer decision-making in digitally mediated food-delivery services.

Managerially, the findings suggest several practical strategies for OFD providers operating in Pekalongan. First, digital branding should emphasise consistency, credibility, and service reliability rather than visual attractiveness alone. Second, social media management should prioritise responsive complaint handling, transparent communication, and credible engagement with customer reviews to strengthen trust. Third, platforms should maintain consumers' perceived value through transparent delivery fees, reasonable pricing, relevant promotions, reliable delivery performance, and consistent service quality among partner restaurants. Integrating these strategies is likely more effective than relying mainly on short-term promotional campaigns because consumers appear to evaluate both the economic value of the transaction and the credibility of the service provider before forming purchase intention.

This study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design captures consumer perceptions at a single point in time. In addition, the purposive sample of 100 OFD users in Pekalongan limits the generalisability of the findings to other geographical contexts. The use of self-reported questionnaire data also does not capture actual purchasing behaviour, and the model does not incorporate potentially relevant factors such as partner restaurant quality, delivery fees, delivery time, platform policies, usability, or competitive promotional offers. Future research should therefore use larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal or mixed-method designs, and additional service- and platform-related variables. Future studies may also employ SEM or PLS-SEM to simultaneously assess measurement and structural relationships and examine whether the mediating role of brand trust remains robust across different OFD platforms and geographical markets.

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