IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY ON CONSUMER'S BRAND TRUST: A META-ANALYSIS STUDY FROM A COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social media marketing is an important part of business operations in the modern era. Social media provides businesses with the ability to engage with broader and more diverse customers than the technology before it. Therefore, it is important to examine the impact of trust as an important part of the relationship between firms and customers.

Purpose: This study aims to interpret and summarize the impact of social media marketing activity on brand trust through a meta-analysis of previous studies..

Design/methodology/approach: The researcher will employ meta-analysis to examine the impact of media marketing on customer trust. Meta-regression is employed to examine potential moderators that can influence the relationship.

Findings/results: The meta-analysis result shows that there is a significant positive relationship between social media marketing activity and brand trust. Moderator analysis also shows that IT reliance in the industry may moderate this relationship, the specificity of IT utilization and its role in the business may cause this effect.

Conclusion: The enhanced communication between brands and consumers that happens through social media can help brands develop a trusting relationship. Easier and more direct communication with customers allows brands to directly respond and address complaints or customer ideas more frequently. This feature of social media can help brands develop a more trustworthy image. Furthermore, the variety of utilization and importance of social media marketing's role in building trust may vary depending on the business context.

Originality/value: This research summarizes the result of previous research regarding trust in social media. Several moderating variables are examined to explain the phenomenon.

Keywords: social media, digital marketing, marketing communication, brand trust, meta-analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Social media can be defined as an internet-based mass communication channel where users can present themselves and interact with others, with value derived from interaction between user and user-generated content (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Social media as a concept is deeply rooted in the ideology and technology of Web 2.0 (Boyd, 2015). In the early 2000s, social media gain widespread popularity through websites such as Friendster and Myspace. Since then, social media usage has become more common in everyday life. Users share, interact, and engage with various content on social media.

The rise of social media also brought changes in business operations, especially in sales and marketing. Social media provides businesses with a way to engage with and interact with global userbase. The interactive nature of social media content can also help businesses create brand identity and brand awareness among customers. On the other hand, social media also shifts the dynamic between firms and customers. Customers are empowered through the interactive nature and content creation in social media (Li et al. 2021). With the rise of social media, customers become more important in the process of brand creation. In social media, customers can easily share and comment on brand advertisements and stories with other users. Customers can also create content about brands on social media. This interaction between customers can be more influential and persuasive compared to the firm marketing effort (Gensler et al. 2013). Therefore, it is not surprising that many firms integrate social media as an important part of their marketing effort.

Social media marketing is an activity based on customer assessment for brand-related social media use, that aims to use social media interactivity and connectedness to achieve marketing purposes (Li et al. 2021). Social media marketing is a complex activity that requires a lot of resources despite the free-to-use nature of social media(Andzulis et al. 2012). Social media marketing requires up-front research regarding suitable approaches for the firms to implement in their context. Dedicated human resources are often needed to employ social media marketing effectively. The nature of interaction in social media puts engagement and collaboration at the front. Therefore, firms must communicate in a way that gives value to the customer.

Interaction between brands and customers in social media helps build relationships between firms and customers. One of the main outcomes of this relationship is customer loyalty to the brand. Customer loyalty does not develop overnight, instead there are several antecedents of loyalty such as brand trust (Laroche et al. 2013). As such, brands must first build trust among their customers to gain their loyalty. Brands need to develop communication and interaction strategies that can garner trust from the customer.

The relationship between social media marketing activity and brand trust has been examined in past research. Many past research includes brand trust as an intermediary between marketing activity or brand relationship and brand loyalty or other concepts. Study by (Wongsansukcharoen, 2022), uses brand trust as an antecedent of brand loyalty with brand intention and reliability as a precursor of brand trust. Study by (Seo et al. 2020), use brand trust as a consequence of the spread of word of mouth. Brand trust among customers then have positive influence on brand image and brand awareness. Study by (Dam, 2020), examine the influence of brand trust on brand preference and purchase intention. Based on those previous studies, brand trust is an important antecedent to other important constructs. These previous studies also show the moderating effect of brand trust between various aspects of media content and other constructs. Therefore, it is worthwhile to study how social media marketing activity as one of the primary activities of today's businesses can influence the trust of customers. The researcher will employ meta-analysis to examine the impact of media marketing on customer trust. Meta-analysis is a quantitative method that aims to provide a summary of studies by aggregating the results of studies integrated into the research. This method is usually used when to research topic is well-explored and allows the researchers to provide an overall picture of the topic. In the case of the marketing activity-brand trust relationship, the researchers found that the topic is well explored based on previous research. By employing this method, the researchers aim to provide a summary of the impact of marketing activity on brand trust and the extent of the relationships. The variety of antecedents and moderator variables that influence this relationship provides the researchers the opportunity to examine further the results of past research and to provide a summary of important antecedents or moderator variables.

Based on the method, the researchers expect this study to provide the extent how which marketing activity can influence brand trust through statistical results. The researchers also expect that based on the several moderator variables tested, some can be proven to be influencing the relationship between marketing activity and brand trust. The result is expected to contribute to the digital marketing discourse, and can provide new insights on factors that can influence digital marketing activity.

METHODS

Meta-analysis is a quantitative method that aggregate the results of previous studies in a research domain (Paul & Barari, 2022). Meta-analysis is used to achieve statistically precise results about the strength and direction of a relationship between the moderator and variable in that research domain. To conduct a meta-analysis, previous studies that empirically measure a relationship between moderator variables using statistical methods need to be compiled first. Meta-analysis can be used to conclude conflicting findings of several research results in a research domain. Meta-analysis can also be used to investigate other moderators that can influence the effect sizes of a relationship.

To conduct a meta-analysis, the researchers need to collect quantitative studies that are suitable to answer the research question. This process includes searching for publications and selecting them based on certain criteria. Next, the researchers need to extract effect sizes and correct them to remove biases and errors. The researcher can also assign value to moderator variables that are important to analyze. Data analysis is the next step in the meta-analysis process. In this step, researchers need to choose an analysis model (random or fixed-effect) and examine the heterogeneity of the data. The processed data can then be analyzed further. Moderator analysis can be used if the researchers deem it important.

The data collection process of meta-analysis involves searching, sorting, and selecting appropriate literature to analyze. The literature used in this study is collected from various academic research portals and publishers including Google Scholar, Emerald, and Taylor-Francis journals. The search strategy used in this study involves creating search strings that can yield search results based on the research demand. This search includes social media marketing-related keywords such as "social media marketing" or "social media activities". The second keyword includes brand trust-related keywords such as "customer trust", "brand trust" or "trust". The articles screened are preferably written in the english language. The articles screened are then selected based on the following criteria: Report easily discernable correlation coefficient; Research that was published between 2019-2024; Research must include brand trust in their model; Research that obtained their data from customer; Research that focuses on firm-generated content.

By including the first criterion, the researcher aims to obtain correlation coefficient data that are standardized and can be examined easily. An easily discernable correlation coefficient also eases the data analysis process. The second criteria is included so the result can reflect the recent context regarding social media and consumer culture. The third criterion is necessary because this research measures the relationship between social media marketing and brand trust. Research that includes brand trust as a moderator of another construct can be included according to this criteria. The fourth and fifth criteria are included to focus on the topic of social media marketing as a relationship-building activity between brand and customer. The fourth and fifth criteria are included because brand relationships can develop through interaction between users through user-generated content. Based on those criteria ten articles are selected to be analyzed further. Figure 1, illustrate the study identification/ data collection process. Furthermore, Table 1 shows the selected articles and a summary of their research context.

The study data collected showcases the social media marketing of various industries. The study data were collected from various countries. Furthermore, the country is categorized based on the KOF Globalization Index. The variety of contexts provided in this can be used as a moderator effect of the social media marketing-brand trust relationship analysis.
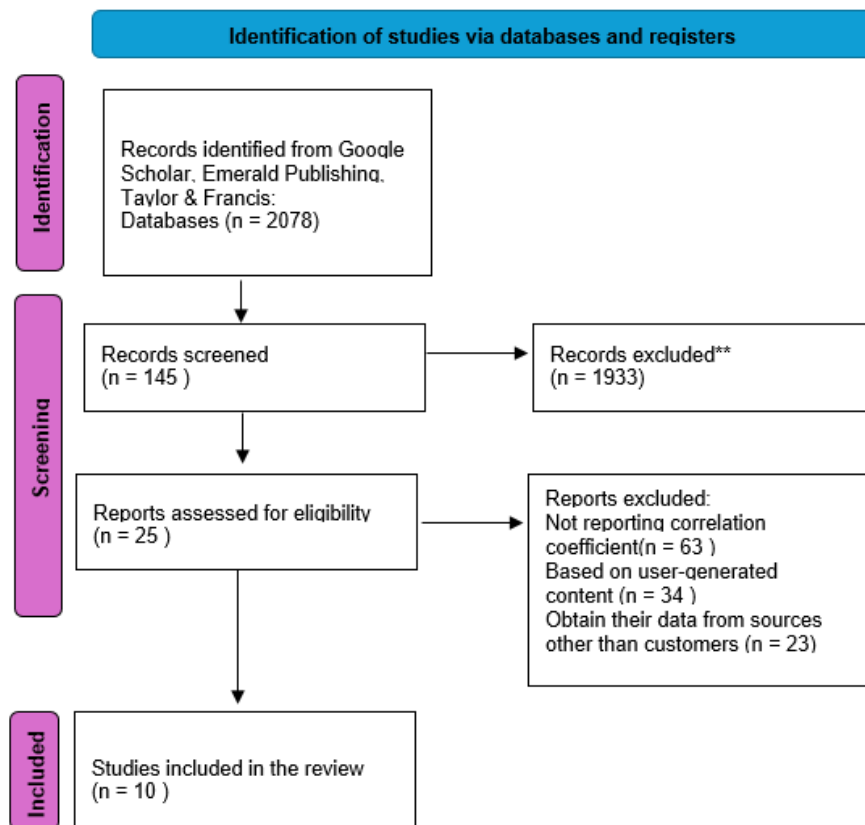
Figure 1. Study Selection process. Modified from PRISMA 2020

Table 1. Study-data Used in Meta-Analysis

Author	Year	Sample Size	Effect Sizes	Country	Industry	Globalization Index	IT Reliance
Ebrahim	2019	287	0.21	Egypt	Telecommunication services	High	Yes
Kwon et al.	2020	606	0.595	US & Korea	Consumer Services	High	No
Wei et al.	2023	521	0.507	Malaysia	Others	High	Yes
Banerji & Singh	2023	487	0.555	India	Software & Services	High	Yes
Quayson et al.	2022	377	0.695	Ghana	Finance	Low	No
Heidari et al.	2023	363	0.46	Iran	Software & Services	Low	Yes
Santoso	2023	240	0.105	Indonesia	Software & Services	High	Yes
Bilgin & Kethüda	2022	521	0.801	Turkey	Others	High	No
Gholamveisy et al.	2023	384	0.7	Iran	Finance	Low	No
Matin et al.	2020	533	0.978	Georgia	Others	High	No

The data processing step in meta-analysis involves testing for heterogeneity and determining the data processing model. To analyze data in a meta-analysis, the researcher must determine whether the fixed-effect or random-effect model is more suitable for the data analysis (Steel et al. 2021). Model selection is important in meta-analysis and will determine the result of the study. The two meta-analysis models impose several assumptions on the population in studies used as data.

The fixed-effect model assumes that the population used in the studies is the same and shares the same underlying effect sizes. The random-effect model assumes the opposites, and each study measures its unique parameter. The sources of heterogeneity in the effect size of the random-effect model are assumed to be the sampling error of each population. This research will use a random-effect model because of the variety of contexts in the studies collected.

Heterogeneity is also required to analyze the variation between previous studies and determine the appropriate moderator of this variation(Borenstein, 2023). A heterogeneity test can be used to determine the distribution of effect and the statistics that are used to convey it. The heterogeneity tests, commonly used in meta-analysis are the Q test and I^2 test. The Q test is used to detect the presence of heterogeneity in the data. The I^2 test is used to determine the percentage of variability among effect sizes used in the study. Univariate analysis is then employed as an overall analysis of the study. By using univariate analysis the strength and direction of the relationship examined can be determined.

Publication bias is an important issue in meta-analysis studies. Publication bias refers to the inflation of effect in meta-analysis caused by studies more likely to present significant results rather than non-significant results. Publication bias impacts the accuracy and reliability of meta-analysis results. In this study, Egger's regression test and Rank correlation test are employed to check the existence of publication bias. The preliminary result indicates that publication bias exists in this study. The selection model is then chosen to deal with the publication bias. Selection model use weight functions to adjust the overall effect size estimate and are usually employed as sensitivity analyses to assess the potential impact of publication bias. The corrected result is then used for analysis.

Based on previous research, the researchers hypothesize that there is a significant positive relationship between social media marketing activity and brand trust. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this research is:
H1: There is a significant positive effect of social media marketing activity on brand trust

To capture the variability of context in studies, moderator analysis is used to explain the variance among effect sizes reported. This study uses regression analysis to explain those variances. In this case, moderator variables are predictors and effect sizes are dependent variables. The potential moderator in this study is chosen based on various criteria. First, the researchers want to include the context surrounding the business as a potential moderator. Therefore, the researcher chose globalization as a measure of culture and economic environment and IT reliance as a measure of technology capabilities and utilization. Second, since there are various types of content that

are utilized in digital marketing, the researcher will add content type as a potential moderator. Last, the data collection process may influence the data gathered. The researchers chose the data collection method (offline and online) as a potential moderator. The following hypotheses are then formulated:
H2: There is a significant effect of globalization on social media marketing activity- brand trust relationship
H3: There is a significant effect of business IT reliance on social media marketing activity- brand trust relationship
H4: There is a significant effect of content type on social media marketing activity- brand trust relationship
H5: There is a significant effect of data collection method of previous studies on social media marketing activity- brand trust relationship

RESULTS

Social Media Marketing Activity and Brand Trust

The meta-analysis results show that social media marketing analysis and brand trust have a strong and positive relationship. The meta-analysis results show that the relationship has an estimated model coefficient (r) of 0.7768 at 95% Confidence Level. Meanwhile, the Q-test result has p-value of <0.0001. This result indicate the presence of heterogeneity in the data, which is not a result of within-study error. The I^2 test shows that the total heterogeneity of the meta-analysis is 99.34%, which can be categorized as very high heterogeneity. The result can be interpreted as 99.34% of the heterogeneity in the data, exists based on differences of effect sizes. The 0.35% of the variance can be attributed to random error. The result of the heterogeneity test indicates the existence of potential moderator variables contributing to the variance. This result indicates that H1 is accepted. The result of the meta-analysis can be seen in the Table 2.

Moderator Analysis

The moderator analysis using meta-regression method results can be seen in the Table 3. There are four potential moderators of the Social Media Marketing-Brand Trust relationship moderators tested using this method. Based on the result only one moderator is statistically significant based on the Q test of Moderator (QM) result. The moderator IT reliance in the industry has a p-value of 0.0124, this value is below 95% CI.

Therefore, it is the only potential moderator that can influence the effect size of Social Media Marketing-Brand Trust. Based on the result, the correlation coefficient of the IT reliance moderator is -0.7517, this result indicates a quite large negative relationship between IT reliance and and impact of social media activity on brand trust. This result indicates that H3 is accepted, while H2, H4, and H5 are rejected.

Other potential moderators are examined but proven to not be statistically significant to the study. The potential moderator globalization index refers to the KOF globalization index of a country. This index indicates the level of globalization of a country, which can translate to social globalization in this study. This result indicates that the level of social globalization, which includes culture and information flow, does not moderate the relationship social media activity -brand trust relationship. The second, potential moderator is the data collection method employed in the studies included. This potential moderator examines whether online or offline data collection processes can influence

the result of the research included in this study. The result indicates that there is no significant influence of data collection method on the relationship. Last, the type of content in digital marketing activity is examined as a potential moderator. This potential moderator examines whether advertisement content can influence the relationship. The statistically insignificant result indicates that the type of content those not influence the relationship between social media marketing and brand trust.

Based on the result of the study, it is known that social media activity has a significant positive effect on brand trust. Brand trust is an important mediator for many other variables in business such as brand loyalty and purchase intention. Brand trust can be defined as "the willingness of the average customer to rely on the ability of a brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhari & Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust can significantly influence the behaviour of customers. Therefore, building trust in customers is important for businesses to succeed.

Table 2. Meta-analysis result

Variables	Σn	K	r	SE	95% CI Low	95% CI High	I^2	Q	p-value
Social Media Marketing -Brand Trust	4319	10	0.7768	0.1890	0.4063	1.1474	99.34	1446.48	<0.0001

Σn, total sample size; K, total study samples; r, correlation coefficient; SE, standard error; 95% CI low & high, lower and upper boundaries at 95%CI; I2, Higgins and Thompson measure of heterogeneity;Q, test of homogeneity

Table 3. Meta-regression result

Variables		Σn	K	r	SE	95% CI Low	95% CI High	I^2	QM	p-value
Globalization Index		4319	10	-0.0514	0.4372	-0.9083	0.8054	99.42	0.0138	0.9603
	High	3195	7							
	Low	1124	3							
IT Reliance		4319	10	-0.7517	0.3006	-1.3408	-0.1626	98.95	6.2556	0.0124
	Yes	1898	5							
	No	2421	5							
Data Collection		4319	10	-0.6078	0.3811	0.5776	1.8273	99.22	2.5433	0.1107
	Online	3046	7							
	Offline	1273	3							
Content type		4319	10	-0.6966	0..615	-1.4052	0.0120	99.13	2.5433	0.0540
	Various	2803	7							
	Advertisement	1516	3							

Σn, total sample size; K, total study samples; r, correlation coefficient; SE, standard error; 95% CI low & high, lower and upper boundaries at 95%CI; I2, Higgins and Thompson measure of heterogeneity;QM, test of moderator

Several building blocks are important in building trust between brand customers (Singh et al. 2021). First, knowledge of the brand is important in building trust. Brand awareness can help customers position the brand in their minds. Second, authenticity is important in increasing trustworthiness and genuineness in the customer minds. Third, brand familiarity is important in generating trust. Fourth, word-of-mouth from other satisfied customers can influence a customer's relationship with a brand. Next, a positive customer experience with a brand can increase the brand's trustworthiness in their minds. Lastly, customer satisfaction can also influence the trustworthiness of the brand.

In terms of online business or e-commerce, the web-purchase experience can also influence the trust of the customers (Ha, 2004). Brands need to pay attention to security, privacy, and overall user experience of the website to appear trustworthy to the customer. Customers expect their data to be well-protected as it may contain information that can be used to harm the customer. Brands and businesses must maintain the security and privacy of customer's personal data and sensitive information. Ease of use, interactiveness, and general customer experience of the website or application also need to be evaluated constantly as they can influence customer's positive feelings toward the brand.

Trust is not only influenced by brand or company actions, customer motivations are also important in building the relationship between brand and customers. Customer motivation is important in determining the behavioral outcome of brand activity. Based on User Gratification Theory (UGT), there are three underlying motivations that can influence customer behaviors. The first motivation is remuneration, which drives customers to interact to gain promotional or other related benefits. The second motivation is social, which drives customers to seek opinions from their peers. This motivation can lead to the sharing of brand experience and opinions with their peer, spreading the positive image of the brand through word-of-mouth. In this case, trust is built through the interaction between customers. The third motivation is empowerment, which drives customers to exercise their power or impact other individuals or corporations. In the context of social media, the empowerment

motivation is important because the customer's voice is amplified. Brands are encouraged to listen more to customers and consider their responses and feedback in their activity.

As stated, many factors can influence customer brand trust. Brands need to consider those factors and communicate them to the customer. In this digital age, one of the most effective ways to communicate trustworthiness is through social media. Based on the meta-analysis, social media activity has a significant impact on brand trust. This phenomenon is well-documented in various research related to trust. This is because social media enhances the communication between brands and customers (Dolega et al. 2021). Brands can communicate directly to the target consumer market, unlike other modes of marketing and advertisement. Brands can respond directly to customers' attempts at communication, allowing direct feedback about products and exchange of ideas. The nature of the internet and social media also allows positive information about brands to spread fast and wide, even globally. The relationship between the variables can be seen in the Figure 2.

A properly managed social media can become an important branding tool for brands and companies, while mismanaged social media can harm the brand. A proper communication strategy needs to be formulated to maximize the impact of brand social media. In terms of trust building, brands need to fulfill or meet customer expectations through communication. This can be done by fulfilling the customer's motivation, such as giving away promotions and discounts, or by listening and responding to their complaints and ideas. Brand awareness is another important factor that can be more easily communicated and crafted through social media. Community building is also an important aspect that can be done through social media communication. Based on UGT, social motivation is an important motivation for customers to interact. Furthermore, word-of-mouth and user-generated content can be more effective than any firm attempt at building brand image, awareness, or trust relationship (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Social media managers and administrators can improve community-building attempts by increasing social media activity. A set of strategies regarding publication timing, frequency, and communication content can help potential customers identify with the brand community that the company tried to build (Jamil et al. 2022).
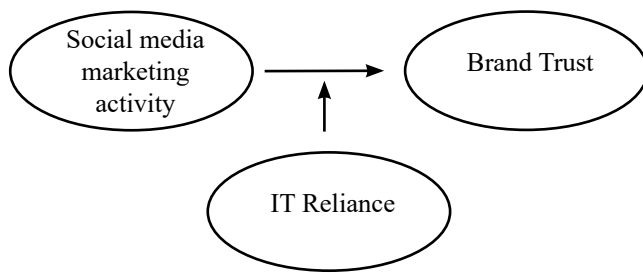
Figure 2. Relationship between variables

The meta-regression result adds a potential moderator variable that can influence the effect sizes of social media activity-brand trust relationships. This moderator variable is IT reliance in the industry. This variable indicates whether the industry context in each of the past studies examined is reliant on their IT capabilities to perform. Most industry contexts that can be categorized in the IT-reliant industries are part of the e-commerce business and categorized under Software & Services industry under GICS (Global Industry Classification Standard) definition. Based on the meta-regression result IT reliant industry generally has smaller effect sizes compared to other industries. This is indicated by a correlation coefficient of -0.7517 in the meta-regression model for industries that are IT-reliant.

The result suggests that differences in IT usage among industries can be attributed to the different business models of each industry. The IT reliant business in this study consisted of a telecommunication company and several e-commerce or digital business platforms. For example, for telecommunication services, the quality of products and services is very important in building consumer trust (Nikhashemi, et al, 2021). The consumer must experience the services and products to build more trust. Meanwhile, marketing can serve as a means to strengthen the trustworthy image that the company holds. For e-commerce or digital business platforms, marketing purpose and process is a much more complex process. Marketing for e-commerce could serve different purposes other than attracting consumers, such as gathering data for understanding its user wants and needs, which can reduce matching and policing costs of the platform. For e-commerce to operate, both users (buyer and seller) need to trust the platform and each other, which can be built through

continuous interaction with the platform. These examples, highlight the variety of digital marketing purposes for IT reliant industries. In these industries, marketing can serve as a supporting role in the trust-building process that can happen in their business models.

In contrast, the non-IT reliant industries in this study are more varied, ranging from financial services such as banks and insurance companies to consumer services such as restaurants. Trust plays an important role in how financial services conduct their business. Financial services are highly intangible with high information asymmetry and reliance on advice from professionals. Because of high perceived risks, the marketing efforts of financial services serve to sell sets of promises to the customers (van der Cruijsen, et al. 2023). Since financial services can't operate without consumer trust, the impact of trust generated through marketing is much more important compared to the telecommunication industry or e-commerce. The same can be said about the digital marketing of restaurants. Transparency in the digital marketing of the food business is important to increase trustworthiness and reduce customer purchase risk (Mohammad, 2020).

Managerial Impications

Based on those examples, the difference in business models and operations of businesses in different industries can impact the utilization and purpose of the digital marketing effort employed. It can be said that, in an industry that operates on high trustworthiness like the financial industry and consumer services industry, trust built through marketing effort is more impactful for the business. Meanwhile, industries that rely on customer experience as a source of trust can be less reliant on marketing efforts to build trust. Furthermore, businesses like e-commerce platforms need more complex ways to build trust between their users. This result indicates that building consumer trust through marketing is not a straightforward process, and industry-specific nuances can be influential. The impact of digital marketing in the more specific industrial context needs to be examined. The result also shows that businesses need to evaluate the impact and utility of digital marketing from the lens of their business model.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study aims to interpret and summarize the impact of social media marketing activity on brand trust through a meta-analysis of previous studies. The meta-analysis results show that social media marketing activity has a significant positive effect on brand trust. The result also shows, that there are possibly several moderator variables that may influence the effect sizes examined in this study. After a moderator analysis using meta-regression, it is found that IT reliance in the industry might influence the effect sizes of the meta-analysis. This result implies that the type of industry matters in determining the impact of social media activity on brand trust.

Discussion on the result also explains the mechanism of how social media activity can influence brand trust. The enhanced communication between brands and consumers that happens through social media can help brands develop a trusting relationship. Brands can communicate with their target market more easily, and develop their brand image accordingly. Easier and more direct communication with customer allows brands to directly respond and address complaints or customer ideas more frequently. This feature of social media can help brands develop a more trustworthy image. The nature of interaction between users or customers in social media can also be advantageous to brands. Word-of-mouth and user-generated content is perceived to be more trustworthy than firm-generated content. One customer's positive experience can be a powerful marketing tool for brands. Therefore, nurturing a strong community identity through social media is important.

Furthermore, IT reliance is shown to be negatively correlated with the effect size of social media marketing activity-brand trust relationship. Since the IT reliance industry used in this context is mainly e-commerce, it is suspected that the nature of business operations in the e-commerce sector may influence brand relationships. Business model and operation are suspected to be one of the influences of IT technology utilization and usage in a business. This result is highlighted by the business models of research included in this study.

Recommendations

For future research, other possible moderator variables could be examined. Potential moderator variables such as the year of study included in the meta-analysis could be analyzed. Broader inclusion of the study year can be used to determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social media marketing activity. This moderator can also denote the digital culture shift from before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Other overall analyses such as meta-analytic SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) can be employed to explain the bigger picture regarding social media marketing. Meta-analytic SEM can help explain the relationship between social media activity and brand trust on other variables such as brand loyalty and purchase intention.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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