

## DIGITAL CONTENT STRATEGY: HOW SOCIAL PROOF INFLUENCES PURCHASING DECISIONS

Ade Perdana Siregar<sup>1)</sup>, Wahyu Juari Setiawan<sup>2)</sup>

<sup>1,2)</sup> Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia

Corresponding author: ade.perdana@unja.ac.id

### Abstract

*The growth of the creative industry in Indonesia has become a pillar in the economy, this phenomenon has illustrated that human resources have the potential to be ready for competitiveness towards foreign countries. Marketing through online media has become an idol for business actors, in addition to being very easy to use, it is supported by small promotional costs. Managing information content on social media is very important, in addition to creating attraction, it also fosters consumer trust to choose to transact to buy a product. The objectives of this study are (1) To examine the influence of smart digital content marketing on purchasing decisions; (2) To examine the influence of smart digital content marketing on social proof; (3) To examine the influence of social proof on purchasing decisions; (4) To examine the role of social proof in mediating the influence of smart digital content marketing on purchasing decisions. The data analysis method used is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) measurement using SmartPLS software. The results of the analysis show that Smart Digital Content Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decisions. In addition, Social Proof also has a significant effect on Purchasing Decisions and mediates the relationship between Smart Digital Content Marketing and Purchasing Decisions. This finding confirms the importance of the presence of social proof as a reinforcement of the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies in driving consumer purchasing decisions.*

**Keywords:** Digital Content Marketing, Social Proof

### Introduction

The creative industry is an industry that focuses on creativity and innovation in products, both goods and services. The growth of the creative industry in Indonesia has become a pillar in the economy, this phenomenon has illustrated that human resources have the potential to be ready for competitiveness towards foreign countries. The creative industry is an industry that is the result of creativity, skills and talents of a person who can realize prosperity and open up employment opportunities (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, 2009; p.5). Based on survey data from the Indonesian Creative Economy Agency (2019), Jambi Province has 351 creative industry business actors.

The phenomenon that occurred in Jambi Province, namely creative industry business actors in 2019, the photography and culinary sectors dominated the total number of business actors, namely photography sector business actors by 42.17% and followed by culinary sector business actors by 20.51%. This shows that photography greatly supports the development of digital technology, where content in publications on online media really needs photography services, in addition to being followed by the culinary sector which shows that the culinary sector with its diverse products is a product that is full of innovation and creativity in developing its products.

The phenomenon that occurred in Jambi Province in the fourth quarter of 2019, consumer perception in Jambi Province is more towards the food sector. This can be seen that food ingredients, food and finished food and beverages are at the highest index. Culinary businesses in product creation are very diverse, so innovation and creativity are very much the foundation for business growth, in addition to marketing products, special strategies are needed in order to form a wide marketing network.

The growth of the digital era has made a positive contribution to business actors in carrying out their business activities, especially in efforts to expand the marketing network. Marketing through online media is an idol for business actors, in addition to being very easy to use, it is supported by small promotion costs. The Creative Economy Agency (2019), stated that social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others) are the highest source of e-commerce information, namely 53.4%, while the next media in providing information is television advertising, namely 41.7%. Social media has become a habit for someone to get information, this is an opportunity for business actors to carry out product promotion activities.

Managing information content on social media is very important, in addition to creating attraction, it also fosters consumer trust to choose to transact to buy a product. The most appropriate strategy in reaching consumers widely and experiencing very rapid development is a strategy that focuses on digital content marketing (Elkin; 2017). Digital content marketing is the main basis for someone to assess a product on social media. The content displayed on social media in the form of interesting photos and videos, responses from celebrities, attractive offers and responses from sellers fosters consumer trust in deciding to buy goods and become loyal consumers.

Marketing strategies carried out with digital content marketing and supported by measuring social proof on the product content being marketed are expected to be the basis for consumers in buying a product. Creating an attraction for consumers is not the main factor in buying a product. In online transactions, consumers also need confidence that the product is in accordance with their expectations. Before buying a product, consumers choose from various product alternatives and see social proof from consumer experiences. The diversity of culinary products forces business actors to always innovate and increase their creativity, both in creating products and in terms of marketing. Culinary products, packaging and appearance are the first impression for consumers in choosing a product and as an effort to strengthen confidence in buying food products, most consumers look at the transaction history of the product or what can be called social proof.

## **Literature Review**

### **Smart Digital Content Marketing**

Consumer behavior has shifted in choosing to buy an item. Searching for alternatives in purchasing goods, more dominant to search for information through online media, so creating an attraction in providing product information through social media is very important. According to Kucuk and Krishnamurthy (2007), it is stated that the creation of engagement between consumers comes from the attraction of content marketing. Digital content marketing is an effort made to provide information on products with the aim of attracting consumers through interesting content. The most appropriate strategy in reaching consumers widely and experiencing very rapid development is a strategy that focuses on digital content marketing (Elkin; 2017). According to Karr (2016), in applying a content marketing strategy there are several dimensions that must be considered, namely: (1) reader cognition; (2) sharing motivation; (3) persuasion; (4) decision making; (5) factors. The increasingly widespread development of the digital era has created increasingly strong marketing competition on digital media. Research conducted by Hayu (2019) has put forward a new formula for digital content marketing, namely smart digital content marketing.

This model explains that the dimensions are: (1) media optimization, efforts to optimize the appearance of photos or videos as attractively as possible; (2) influencer endorsement, using celebrity services to provide comments on products will be an attraction for consumers; (3) provide attractive offers, display attractive promotions such as discounts, bonuses or free shipping; (4) provide feedback, open opportunities for consumers to provide feedback on products; (5) customer relationships, conducting scheduled interactions with consumers with examples of providing birthday greetings from email automatically or reminding consumers of important moments that are memorable for consumers. This dimension is related to measuring the purchasing decisions of culinary products in consumers, the more rapid the culinary business is, the more selective consumers are in choosing from various product alternatives. Business actors should have a good marketing strategy in promoting their products so that they always become superior products among their competitors.

### **Social Proof**

Social proof is a psychological concept where individuals tend to imitate the actions of others in certain situations, especially when they feel uncertain in making decisions (Cialdini, 2001). In the context of digital marketing, social proof refers to the influence of consumer reviews, product ratings, testimonials, number of followers, or other forms of social interaction on the perceptions and behaviors of potential buyers (Park et al., 2007).

Several studies have shown that social proof can be a mediating variable in the relationship between digital marketing strategies and purchasing decisions. For example, a study by Filieri et al. (2015) found that online reviews can strengthen the influence of marketing content on purchase intentions by forming perceptions of quality and trustworthiness. Furthermore, Kim and Park (2013) emphasized that the existence of social proof increases the perception of the reliability of digital information, thereby strengthening the impact of marketing campaigns on consumer behavior.

The development of technologies such as AI and personalization algorithms, digital marketing is now more adaptive and interactive. In this context, social proof is not only a complement, but an integral component that validates marketing content. Personalized content but accompanied by positive reviews and social interactions tends to have a higher influence on purchasing decisions (Chen et al., 2020).

### **Purchasing Decisions**

Purchasing decisions are the final stage in the consumer behavior process where individuals choose to purchase a product or service after going through an alternative evaluation process (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This decision is influenced by various factors, both internal such as needs and perceptions, and external such as information, social influence, and marketing strategies. According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010), purchasing decisions not only include the act of buying, but also the psychological processes that precede it, such as problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, and post-purchase.

Along with the development of technology and digitalization, consumer purchasing behavior has undergone a significant shift. Consumers now rely more on information from the internet before making decisions, such as reading user reviews, watching promotional content on social media, or comparing

products online (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Research by Pavlou (2003) shows that trust in digital platforms and risk perception are important factors in online purchasing decisions. In addition, elements such as personalized marketing, user-generated content, and social proof strengthen purchase intentions and actual conversions in the digital environment.

### Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research method, which aims to explain the influence of the Smart Digital Content Marketing variable on Purchasing Decisions, with Social Proof as a mediating variable. Data analysis was carried out using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) through SmartPLS software.

The sampling technique used was non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method. The number of samples was determined using the minimum sample size approach from Hair et al. (2017) for SEM-PLS, which is a minimum of 10 times the number of indicators in the variable with the most indicators.

### Results and Discussion

Before conducting structural analysis, an outer model test was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the construct. The test results showed that all indicators had loading factor values  $> 0.7$ , AVE (Average Variance Extracted)  $> 0.5$ , and Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values  $> 0.7$ . Thus, the instrument used met the requirements of convergent validity and reliability. The results can be seen in the following table

**Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity**

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Purchasing Decisions	0.879	0.974	0.903	0.593
Smart Digital Content Marketing	0.955	0.959	0.962	0.739
Social Proof	0.947	0.956	0.956	0.730

Source: processed data, 2025

Analysis of the relationship between variables was carried out through bootstrapping on SmartPLS. The results of testing the relationship between variables can be seen in the following table:

**Table 2. Outer Weight**

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV)	P Values	Results
Smart Digital Content Marketing -> Purchasing Decisions	0.542	0.543	0.089	6.102	0.005	Accepted
Smart Digital Content Marketing -> Social Proof	0.924	0.920	0.031	29.487	0.000	Accepted
Social Proof -> Purchasing Decisions	0.427	0.423	0.085	5.020	0.000	Accepted
Smart Digital Content Marketing -> Social Proof -> Purchasing Decisions	0.394	0.389	0.079	4.997	0.000	Accepted

Source: processed data, 2025

The results of the study show that Smart Digital Content Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decisions. This indicates that the smarter and more relevant the digital content presented by the company, the more likely consumers are to make a purchase. This finding is in line with Kotler & Keller (2016), which states that a good digital marketing strategy can directly influence consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. Adapting content to the needs and interests of the target audience has proven effective in attracting attention, building interest, and encouraging action. In the digital context, speed, creativity, and connectedness are important elements of content called "smart" (Pulizzi, 2014).

This study also found that Smart Digital Content Marketing has a significant effect on Social Proof. This means that interesting and interactive digital content encourages social engagement, such as positive comments, consumer reviews, the number of likes or shares, and testimonials on social media. This result is supported by Aral & Walker (2011), who explained that good content can stimulate social participation and strengthen forms of social proof that influence other people's decisions. In other words, the more effective the content displayed, the more likely the audience is to provide social responses, which ultimately creates social proof for other potential buyers.

Further findings show that Social Proof has a positive and significant effect on Purchasing Decisions. These results strengthen Cialdini's (2001) theory regarding the principle of social proof, namely that individuals tend to follow the decisions or actions of others, especially in situations of uncertainty. In a digital context, social proof such as user reviews, ratings, recommendations from friends or influencers can increase the perception of trust and reduce risk in decision making. This study is also consistent with Kim and Park (2013), who found that social proof can increase trust and strengthen purchase intentions in e-commerce and social media environments.

Social Proof in this study is proven to significantly mediate the relationship between Smart Digital Content Marketing and Purchase Decisions. This means that in addition to having a direct influence on purchasing decisions, a smart digital content strategy also influences these decisions indirectly through increasing social proof. This finding shows that the effect of digital content does not stop at consumers' direct perceptions of the product, but also forms social perceptions that influence others. This strengthens the argument that social proof acts as a catalyst in strengthening the impact of digital marketing on purchase conversions (Filiery et al., 2015).

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the data analysis and discussion that have been carried out, the following conclusions can be drawn: smart digital content marketing has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, this means that the smarter and more relevant the digital content strategy used by the company, the higher the likelihood of consumers making a purchase. Informative, interactive, and personal content can form a positive perception of a product or brand. Smart digital content marketing has a positive and significant effect on social proof, this shows that effective digital content encourages the formation of social proof such as consumer reviews, recommendations, or other social interactions that can influence other potential buyers. Social proof has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions, the higher the social proof received or observed by consumers, the greater the tendency of consumers to trust the product and decide to buy. Social proof mediates the relationship between smart digital content marketing and purchasing decisions, this means that the influence of smart digital content marketing on purchasing decisions does not only occur directly, but also indirectly through social proof. Social proof strengthens the impact of digital content on consumer beliefs and decisions.

### **References**

- Apejoye, Influence of Celebrity Endorsement of Advertisement on Students' Purchase Intention. *J Mass Communicat Journalism* 3:152 (2013)
- Amblee, and T. Bui, Harnessing the influence of social proof in online shopping: The effect of electronic word of mouth on sales of digital microproducts, *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 16, 2, 91–113 (2012)
- Assiouras, O. Ozgen & G. Skourtis, The impact of corporate social responsibility in food industry in product-harm crises. *British Food Journal*, 115(1, SI), 108–123 (2013)
- Asur, B. A. Huberman, G. Szabo, and C. Wang, Trends in social media - persistence and decay. In 5th International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and SocialMedia, (2012).
- Badan Ekonomi Kreatif (2019), Infografis Sebaran Pelaku Ekonomi Kreatif, Badan Ekonomi Kreatif Indonesia,
- Badan Pusat Statistik (2020), Indeks Tendensi Konsumen Provinsi Jambi Triwulan IV-2019, BPS Provinsi Jambi
- Badan Pusat Statistik (2018), Profil Industri Mikro Kecil Provinsi Jambi 2018, BPS Provinsi Jambi
- Bicks, Becky (2016), "All You Need to Know About Content Marketing vs. Traditional Marketing," at: <https://ozcontent.com/blog/content-marketing-vs-traditional-marketing/>, Accessed date: 3 April 2018.
- Chen, Y., Fay, S., & Wang, Q. (2020). The Role of Social Proof in Digital Content Marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 5
- Chen, H. Xu, & A.B. Whinston, Moderated online communities and quality of user-generated content, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 28, 2, pp. 237-268 (2011)
- Cialdini, R. B. (2001). *Influence: Science and Practice*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Devumi (2016). Retrieved from <https://devumi.com/social-proof-in-digital-success/>
- Dzisah and C.E. Ocloo, Celebrity Endorsement and Consumer Buying Behaviour; Enhancing the Promotion Function of Marketing in the Central Business Area of Accra, Ghana. *European Journal of Business and Management*. Vol.5, No.25, 2013 (2013)
- Elkin, Tobi (2017), "Global Content Marketing Revenues Poised for 14% Growth in 2017," at: <https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/305786/global-content-marketing-revenues-poised-for-14-g.html>, Accessed date: 18 January 2018.
- Engel, F James. 2010. *Perilaku Konsumen*. Jakarta: Binarupa Aksara.
- Filiery, R., Alguezaui, S., & McLeay, F. (2015). Why do travelers trust TripAdvisor? Antecedents of trust towards consumer-generated media and its influence on recommendation adoption and word of mouth. *Tourism Management*, 51.

- Firdayanti, R. (2012). Persepsi Risiko Melakukan E-Commerce dengan Kepercayaan Konsumen dalam Membeli Produk Fashion Online. *Journal of Social and Industrial Psychology*, 2-4
- Ghozali, Imam. 2005. *Aplikasi Analisis Multivariate dengan Program SPSS*. Semarang : UNDIP
- Ghozali, Imam. 2009. *Aplikasi Analisis Multivariate dengan Program SPSS*. Semarang : Badan Penerbit Universitas Diponegoro.
- Hayu, Rina Suthia 2019, Smart Digital Content Marketing, Strategi Membidik Konsumen Millennial Indonesia, *Jurnal Manajemen dan Kewirausahaan* 2019, 61-69
- Hendratta, Y. K., Purbandari, T., & Mujilan. (2013). Pengaruh Structural Assurance dan Perceived Reputation terhadap Trust Pengguna Internet di Sistem E-commerce. *Jurnal Riset Manajemen dan Akuntansi*, 82
- Holliman, Geraint and Jennifer Rowley (2014), "Business to Business Digital Content Marketing: Marketers' Perceptions of Best Practice," *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 8, 4, 269–93.
- Karr, D. (2016). "How To Map Your Content To Unpredictable Customer Journeys. *Meltwater Outside Insight*
- Kim, D. J., Ferrin, D. L., dan Rao, H. R. (2008). A Trust-based Consumer Decisionmaking Model in Electronic Commerce: The Role of Trust, Perceived Risk, and Their Antecedents. *Decision Support Systems*, 544-564.
- Kim, J., & Park, H. (2013). Effects of various characteristics of social commerce (s-commerce) on consumers' trust and trust performance. *International Journal of Information Management*, 33(2).
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing Management* (15th ed.). Pearson.
- Kucuk, S. U., & Krishnamurty, S. (2007, Februari). An Analysis of Consumer Power On The Internet. *Technovation*, 27, 47 – 56.
- Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6).
- Meskarani, F., Ismail, Z., dan Shanmugam, B. (2013). Online Purchase Intention: Effects of Trust and Security Perception. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*. Vol. 7(6): 307-315.
- Nielsen. (2014). E-commerce: evolution or revolution in the fast-moving consumer goods world? Retrieved from [http://ir.nielsen.com/files/doc\\_financials/Nielsen-Global-E-commerce-Report-August-2014.pdf](http://ir.nielsen.com/files/doc_financials/Nielsen-Global-E-commerce-Report-August-2014.pdf).
- Norizan Kassim, Mor Asiah Abdullah. 2010. *The Effect of perceived service quality deminsions on customer satisfaction, trust and loyalty in e-commerce settings : A cross cultural analysis, Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistic*, vol 22 issue 3 pp 351-371
- Park, C., Lee, T. M., & Han, I. (2007). The Effect of On-line Consumer Reviews on Consumer Purchasing Intention. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 34.
- Pavlou, P. A. (2003). Consumer Acceptance of Electronic Commerce: Integrating Trust and Risk with The Technology Acceptance Model. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*. Vol 7(3), hal 101-134.
- Putri NM, Rahyuda H. 2017. Pengaruh tingkat financial literacy dan faktor sosiodemografi terhadap perilaku keputusan investasi individu. *E-jurnal Ekonomi dan Bisnis Universitas Udayana*. 6(9): 3407-3434.
- Rahim, R. Aravinthan & N.S. Hooi, Man dupes online shoppers. *The Star*, pp. 40 (2015, October 2)
- Rao, H.R. Greve and G.F. Davis, Fool's gold: Social proof in the initiation and abandonment of coverage by Wall Street analysts. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46, 3 (2001), 502–526 (2001)
- Sarwono, Jonathan. 2011. *Metode Riset Skripsi; Pendekatan Kuantitatif Menggunakan Prosedur SPSS*. Jakarta: Media Komputindo.
- Schiffman, L. G., & Kanuk, L. L. (2010). *Consumer Behavior*. Pearson Education.
- Setiadi, Nugroho J. 2010. *Perilaku Konsumen*. Jakarta: Kencana
- Thackeray, B.L Neiger, A.K. Smith & S.B. Van Wagenen, Adoption and use of social media among public health departments. *BMC Public Health* 12:242 (2012)
- Tsitsi, et. al., "The Adoption of Social Media Marketing in South African Banks", *European Business Review*, Vol. 25:4 (2013), hal. 366.