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MODELING THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON PURCHASE DECISIONS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Amanda Tazkia[1], Luthpiyah Juliandara[2] , Jodi Septiadi Akbar[3*]

Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Islam 45 Bekasi, Indonesia[1,2]
Politeknik Caltex Riau, Indonesia[3*]
E-mail : jodi@pcr.ac.id*

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Abstract: This study examines the influence of Content Marketing and Sales Promotion on Purchase Decisions, with Customer Satisfaction serving as a mediating variable among Grab application users in Indonesia. Amidst competitive digital service ecosystems, understanding how marketing stimuli translate into actual behavior is crucial. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected via questionnaires from 100 respondents selected through purposive sampling, who had used the service at least twice. Data analysis utilized SmartPLS software using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results reveal that Content Marketing and Sales Promotion do not exert a significant direct influence on Purchase Decisions. However, both variables significantly enhance Customer Satisfaction, which subsequently drives Purchase Decisions. Importantly, Customer Satisfaction fully mediates the relationships between marketing strategies and purchase behavior. These findings indicate that marketing efforts in ride-hailing services are most effective when they first improve customer satisfaction. Practically, Grab should prioritize enhancing user experience and promotional relevance. Theoretically, this study enriches digital service marketing literature by validating the critical role of mediation in consumer behavior models.

Keywords: Sales Promotion, Purchase Decisions, Customer Satisfaction, Content Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Online transportation has become a necessity for society, especially since COVID-19 has affected all aspects of social life. Online applications such as Grab and Gojek have developed into integrated service ecosystems, offering transportation, food ordering and delivery, as well as financial services.

The growth of app-based ride-hailing services is reflected in the increasing revenue of platforms such as Grab. A survey of more than 20,000 Indonesian users shows that seven out of ten consider online food delivery and daily-needs shopping to be routine activities after the pandemic, while nine out of ten merchants view these services as essential, accompanied by rising spending on GrabFood and GrabMart. (Grab Indonesia, 2022). Its shows significant potential in their digital services to meet customer needs and expand their market reach.

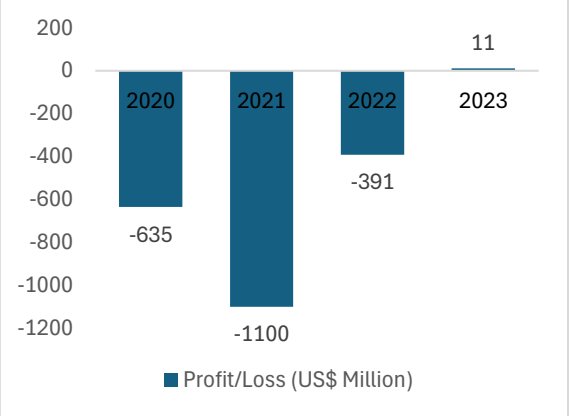


Figure 1. Grab Financial Statements
(Source: Grab, 2021-2024)

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However, behind this growth lies a dynamic that requires further attention. Although marketing strategies such as content marketing and sales promotion have been actively implemented, data indicates that their effectiveness remains inconsistent. Some of Grab's promotional offers have fallen short of customer expectations, leading to disappointment and potential declines in customer loyalty. This is supported by a preliminary survey, which shows that although 87% of respondents were attracted to promotional content, not all reported satisfaction after making a purchase.

Empirical evidence suggests that multiple factors, such as content marketing, customer satisfaction and purchase decision. Content marketing has significantly influences purchase decisions on shopee marketplace. The more volume of content marketing posted by shopee, the more it influences customer to buy the product (Rizkia et al., 2024). Another research findings remain inconsistentcy results in traditional market settings. Conventional marketing variables did not significantly influence customer satisfaction (Suhud et al., 2020). Within the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector, that promotional activities, which align with Sales Promotion, within an integrated marketing framework were linked to stronger customer loyalty (Akhyani, 2020).

Additionally, (Jasin & Firmansyah, 2023) revealed that marketing mix components exert a substantial effect on repeat purchase behavior, analogous to Purchase Decision, either directly or indirectly via customer satisfaction. Those insights highlight a research gap: while general marketing efforts are known to matter, the specific roles of Content Marketing and Sales Promotion in driving Purchase Decision, whether directly or through Customer Satisfaction, require further validation, particularly in the context of competitive digital service platforms..

Content marketing focuses on delivering relevant and valuable information to engage customers and build long-term relationships, rather than driving immediate transactions (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Sales promotion acts as tactical stimulus to encourage immediate engagement and perceived value. Within this framework, both strategies are expected to enhance customer satesfaction, which in turn has a positive impact on purchase desicions. Furthermore, customer satisfaction is frequently viewed as a key mediating variable, linking to content marketing and sales promotion to consumer loyality and longterm behavioral outcomes (Oliver, 2014). However, empirical validation remains necessary to confirm whether this mediated pathway holds true in the specific context of ride-hailing applications, where service experience may outweigh marketing stimuli.

Findings from a preliminary survey further reinforce this perspective while revealing critical inconsistencies. Although 87% of respondents found Grab's content marketing easy to understand and 87% were attracted by sales promotions, only 65% reported satisfaction after purchase (Table 1).

Table 1. Pre Survey Analysis

Variable	Key Finding	Percentage
Content Marketing	Content easy to understand	87%
Content Marketing	Influenced to try service	80%
Sales Promotion	Attracted by promotions	87%
Sales Promotion	Influenced purchase decision	93%

Customer Satisfaction	Satisfied after purchase	65%
Purchase Decision	Use price/quality criteria	93%

(Source: Pre-Survey Data, 2024)

Based on pre survey data, most of respondents (93%) disclose that promotions influenced their purchase decisions, yet 80% confirmed that content marketing led them to try the service. These findings reflect the existence of a research gap, where Content Marketing and Sales Promotion may not have a direct impact on Purchase Decisions, but instead influence them indirectly through Customer Satisfaction as a mediating variable. The discrepancy between high promotional attraction (87-93%) and lower post-purchase satisfaction (65%) suggests that marketing stimuli alone are insufficient without ensuring customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is essential to explore the interrelationships among these variables within the increasingly competitive context of online transportation services. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the influence of Content Marketing and Sales Promotion on Purchase Decisions, with Customer Satisfaction as a mediating variable, among users of the Grab application.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Content Marketing and Consumer Behavior

Content marketing is defined as a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience, rather than driving immediate transactions (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Theoretically, this concept aligns with the Hierarchy of Effects model by (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961), which posits that consumers progress through cognitive, affective, and behavioral stages before making a purchase. In this framework, content marketing supports the early cognitive and affective stages by building brand awareness and shaping attitudes, which subsequently influences the behavioral outcome of Purchase Decisions. In digital service environments like Grab, content must be both relevant and relational to satisfy customers, aiming not only to inform but to foster favorable behavioral outcomes including repeat purchases.

Sales Promotion Effectiveness

Sales Promotion is defined as a short-term marketing tool designed to stimulate immediate demand by offering temporary incentives, such as price reductions or added value, to encourage customers and distribution channel members to make prompt purchases (Lamb et al., 2023). In the context of digital service platforms like Grab, these incentives typically manifest as vouchers, discount codes, or cashback offers. Theoretically, these promotions aim to enhance perceived value, which serves as a precursor to positive customer evaluations. Rather than merely pushing product sales, effective sales promotion in the digital era should focus on building customer relationships by delivering tangible benefits that align with user expectations.

Customer Satisfaction as a Mediator

Customer Satisfaction plays a critical mediating role across various sectors within the service industry, acting as a psychological bridge between marketing stimuli and behavioral outcomes. For instance, (Khatoon et al., 2020) found that satisfaction mediates the relationship between service attributes and purchase intentions in banking. Similarly, (Hussain,

2016) and (Caruana, 2002) demonstrated that satisfaction converts positive perceptions into loyalty and repurchase behavior in airline and retail contexts. (Marzo et al., 2002) further confirmed this mediating role between cognitive evaluations and customer loyalty. Collectively, these studies establish that positive evaluations often require satisfaction to translate into actual behavior.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research design, defined as the process of acquiring knowledge through the analysis of numerical data to examine relationships among variables (Radjab & Jam'an, 2017). The research was conducted from August to September 2024, targeting Grab Indonesia customers across Indonesia who had used the service at least twice. The population consists of all Grab users in Indonesia, whose total number is unknown. Given the undefined population size and the need to ensure respondents possess relevant experience with the service features and marketing stimuli under investigation, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was applied (Sugiyono, 2015).

This approach allows the researcher to select respondents based on specific criteria, such as having used Grab services a minimum of two times to ensure data quality and contextual relevance. Following (Fraenkel et al., 2011), who recommend a minimum of 100 subjects for studies with unknown population sizes, this study successfully collected 100 valid responses for final analysis. Data sources comprise primary data obtained directly from respondents through a closed-ended questionnaire and secondary data from public sources such as the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), books, reports, and journals.

The instrument measured all variables (Content Marketing, Sales Promotion, Customer Satisfaction, and Purchase Decision) using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing respondents to express their opinions regarding their experiences with Grab services. The collected data were analyzed using SmartPLS software version 4 with the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique, which is suitable for predictive research models and complex relationships involving mediating variables. The analysis procedure included assessing the measurement model (validity and reliability) and the structural model (hypothesis testing), following established guidelines (Hair et al., 2019).

Research Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical framework and preliminary survey results, several relationships between the study variables are proposed. Prior studies (Ferdianto et al., 2023; Nabilah & Lubis, 2023) suggest that content marketing and sales promotion play significant roles in shaping customer satisfaction and purchase decisions. The pre-survey findings reinforce these assumptions, showing high percentages of respondents who perceive Grab's marketing content as clear and persuasive, and its sales promotions as attractive and influential. Moreover, customer satisfaction has been widely recognized as a key determinant of repeat purchases and brand loyalty. Guided by this literature and empirical indications, the following hypotheses are formulated to test both the direct and mediated effects among the variables under investigation.

Table 2. Research Hypothesis

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Theoretical Basis	Pre-Survey Findings	Hypothesis
Content Marketing	Purchase Decision	Ferdianto et al. (2023)	87% easy to understand, 80% tried	H1
Sales Promotion	Purchase Decision	Nabillah & Lubis (2023)	87% interested, 93% influenced	H2
Content Marketing	Customer Satisfaction	Kotler & Keller (2016)	80–83% satisfied	H3
Sales Promotion	Customer Satisfaction	Nabillah & Lubis (2023)	80–87% satisfied	H4
Customer Satisfaction	Purchase Decision	Kotler & Keller (2016)	80–93% satisfied	H5
Content Marketing → Satisfaction → Purchase	Mediation	Mediation Model	–	H6
Sales Promotion → Satisfaction → Purchase	Mediation	Mediation Model	–	H7

(Source: Literature Review and Pre-Survey Data, 2024)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The measurement model assessment confirmed that all indicators for Content Marketing, Sales Promotion, Customer Satisfaction, and Purchase Decision achieved outer loading values ≥ 0.70, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50, and Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.70 (see Table 1). These findings indicate that the instrument meets the criteria for convergent validity and reliability (Hair et al., 2019), making it statistically sound for measuring the intended constructs. Consequently, the subsequent structural analysis can be interpreted with confidence.

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Conclusion
Content Marketing (X_1)	0.577	0.950	0.943	Valid & Reliable
Sales Promotion (X_2)	0.585	0.944	0.935	Valid & Reliable
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.578	0.953	0.948	Valid & Reliable
Customer Satisfaction (Z)	0.602	0.958	0.952	Valid & Reliable

(Source: SmartPLS Output, 2024)

The structural model results revealed that Content Marketing and Sales Promotion jointly explained 67.3% of the variance in Customer Satisfaction, while Content Marketing, Sales Promotion, and Customer Satisfaction together explained 42.5% of the variance in Purchase Decision (see Table 2). Following (Chin & Marcoulides, 1998) criteria, the R^2 for Customer Satisfaction is considered substantial (>0.67), whereas the

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R^2 for Purchase Decision is moderate (>0.33). This finding indicates that while the two marketing strategies have a strong influence on customer satisfaction, purchase decisions are also shaped by factors beyond the model, such as price fairness, trust, and service experience, as highlighted in previous studies (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1996).

Table 4. R-Square Values

Endogenous Variable	R^2	R^2 Adjusted
Purchase Decision (Y)	0.443	0.425
Customer Satisfaction (Z)	0.680	0.673

(Source: SmartPLS Output, 2024)

The direct effect tests showed that Content Marketing and Sales Promotion had no significant direct impact on Purchase Decision (H1 and H2 rejected), with p-values > 0.05 (see Table 3). This contrasts with (Ferdianto et al., 2023) and (Nabilah & Lubis, 2023), who reported positive direct effects of content marketing and sales promotion on purchase decisions. The discrepancy can be explained by the research context, an app-based service (Grab), where purchase decisions may rely more on actual satisfaction experiences rather than on marketing stimuli alone. This aligns with (Khatoon et al., 2020), Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between internet service quality and customer purchase intentions.

Conversely, Content Marketing significantly and positively influenced Customer Satisfaction (H3 accepted), as did Sales Promotion (H4 accepted), with $p < 0.001$. These results align with (Kotler et al., 2022) view that relevant, consistent, and valuable information enhances positive customer perceptions toward a brand, thus increasing satisfaction. They also corroborate (Herman et al., 2023) and (Lamb et al., 2023), who found that attractive and relevant sales promotions boost perceived value, thereby improving customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, Customer Satisfaction had a significant positive effect on Purchase Decision (H5 accepted). This finding is consistent with prior studies (Kotler et al., 2022), which position customer satisfaction as a primary determinant of loyalty and repeat purchase behavior.

Table 5. Direct Effects Hypothesis Testing

Path	β	t-statistic	p-value	Result
H1: CM → PD	0.096	0.353	0.362	Not Supported
H2: SP → PD	0.174	0.974	0.165	Not Supported
H3: CM → CS	0.410	3.862	0.000	Supported
H4: SP → CS	0.465	4.406	0.000	Supported
H5: CS → PD	0.439	2.495	0.006	Supported

(Source: SmartPLS Output, 2024)

The path analysis indicated that Customer Satisfaction fully mediates the relationships between Content Marketing and Purchase Decision (H6), as well as between Sales Promotion and Purchase Decision (H7) (see Table 4). The indirect effects were significant ($p < 0.05$), while the direct effects in H1 and H2 were not, indicating full mediation (Zhao et al., 2010). In other words, marketing strategies do not directly drive purchases; instead, they enhance customer satisfaction, which in turn is the key driver of purchase decisions.

This finding is consistent with the conceptual model proposed at the outset of the study and aligns with the value-

satisfaction-behavior model (Cronin et al., 2000), which positions satisfaction as the primary link between perceived value created through marketing interactions and actual purchase behavior.

Table 6. Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Path	β	t-statistic	p-value	Result
H6: CM → CS → PD	0.180	1.835	0.033	Supported
H7: SP → CS → PD	0.204	2.387	0.009	Supported

(Source: SmartPLS Output, 2024)

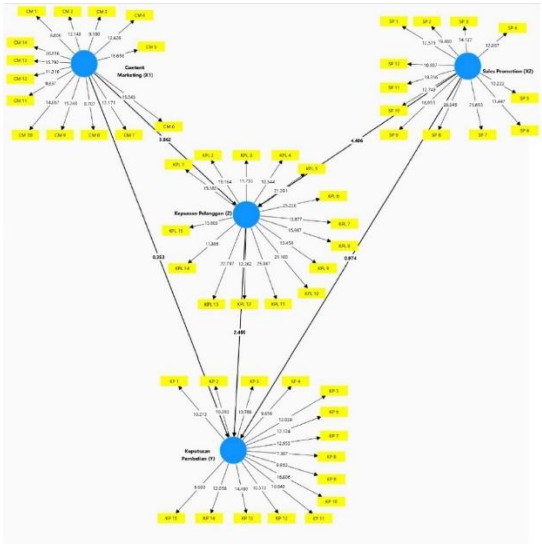


Figure 2. Structural Inner Model
(Source: SmartPLS Output Processed Data, 2024)

Based on the structural model shown above, the following model equations can be formulated:

a) Model Equation I represents the magnitude of the influence of the Content Marketing and Sales Promotion constructs on Customer Satisfaction, with the given coefficients plus the error term, which represents estimation errors or the portion unexplained by the research model: Customer Satisfaction = 3.862 X_1 + 4.406 X_2 + e_1
b) Model Equation II represents the magnitude of the influence of the Content Marketing, Sales Promotion, and Customer Satisfaction constructs on Purchase Decision, with the given coefficients for each construct plus the error term, which represents estimation errors: Purchase Decision = 0.353 X_1 + 0.974 X_2 + 2.495 Z + e_2

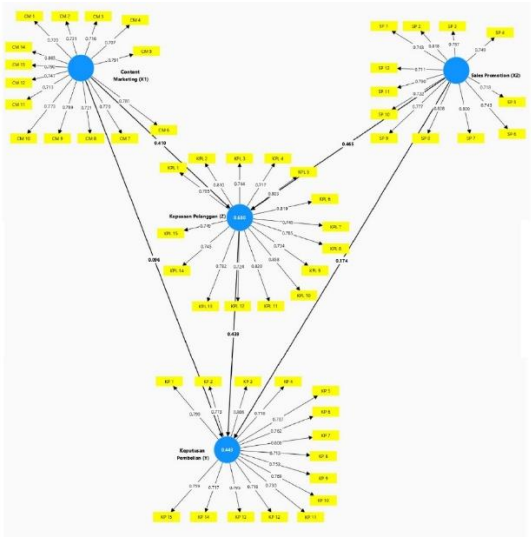


Figure 3. Structural Outer Model
(Source: SmartPLS Output Processed Data, 2024)

Based on the outer model assessment, all indicator items supporting each variable in this research model demonstrated outer loading coefficients equal to or greater than 0.70. This indicates that every indicator meets the convergent validity criteria and is suitable for further data analysis. The factor loadings for content marketing, sales promotion, purchase decision, and customer satisfaction all exceed the 0.70 threshold, confirming that the measurement items are valid and the research can proceed to the next stage of analysis.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study enriches the digital service marketing literature by demonstrating that, in the context of ride-hailing platforms, the effects of content marketing and sales promotion on purchase decisions are largely mediated by customer satisfaction. This provides empirical evidence supporting the inclusion of mediating variables in consumer behavior models for digital services, as suggested by (Kim et al., 2004).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Using a quantitative approach analyzed via Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), this study concludes that Content Marketing and Sales Promotion have positive but insignificant direct effects on Purchase Decisions. However, both variables significantly enhance Customer Satisfaction, which in turn exerts a strong positive impact on Purchase Decisions, fully mediating the relationships. This finding enriches digital service marketing literature by providing empirical evidence that in ride-hailing platforms, marketing stimuli must first convert into satisfaction to drive decisions, validating the inclusion of mediating variables in consumer behavior models for digital services.

Practically, Grab should focus on improving service experience and ensuring promotional relevance to strengthen user satisfaction. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its single-brand focus and reliance on self-reported survey data. Future research should expand the scope to include multiple ride-hailing platforms and incorporate additional variables such as trust or price fairness. Additionally, utilizing objective behavioral data is recommended to test the model's consistency and improve methodological robustness.

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