

Digital Marketing Capability and Strategic Agility in Entrepreneurial SMEs: Explaining Marketing Performance through Customer Engagement and Brand Trust

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has intensified the pressure on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to convert digital capability into measurable marketing outcomes. However, prior studies report inconsistent findings regarding the capability–performance relationship, suggesting that organizational capability alone may be insufficient to generate superior Performance. This study explains how Digital Marketing Capability and Strategic Agility translate into marketing performance through customer-based mechanisms. Using a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected from 168 digital-based SMEs and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. The findings demonstrate that Digital Marketing Capability and Strategic Agility significantly enhance marketing performance, both directly and through indirect pathways. Customer Engagement reveals a central role in transforming digital capability into relational value, while Brand Trust strengthens the conversion of engagement into performance outcomes. The study also confirms a significant serial mediation effect, indicating that marketing capability creates value when organizations successfully orchestrate customer interaction and trust simultaneously. These findings advance a capability behavior performance perspective by explaining the process through which internal capabilities are translated into market outcomes. The study further provides strategic insight for SMEs to align digital capability development with customer relationship management in increasingly dynamic digital markets.

Keywords: digital marketing capability, strategic agility, customer engagement, brand trust, marketing performance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has increased competitive pressure on micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to convert digital investments into measurable market outcomes. In the modern business environment, MSMEs are increasingly required to integrate marketing strategies with digital technologies to strengthen competitiveness, expand market reach, and develop customer-oriented business processes. Modern MSME marketing strategies require businesses to move beyond traditional promotional activities by developing adaptive marketing management practices, strengthening market positioning, and utilizing digital channels to create sustainable competitive value in an increasingly dynamic business environment (Yulita, 2026). Digital marketing has become an important approach for MSMEs because it enables businesses to communicate with customers more efficiently, improve market accessibility, and build stronger relationships with consumers through various digital channels (Hadi & Zakiah, 2021; Putri & Nurhadi, 2023). However, although many MSMEs have adopted digital platforms to expand market reach and improve customer interaction, previous studies have still shown inconsistent

results regarding the relationship between digital capabilities and company performance (Adomako et al., 2023; Heredia et al., 2022). This inconsistency indicates that owning digital capabilities alone is not necessarily enough to produce superior marketing performance. In many cases, MSMEs experience strategic misalignment, which occurs when technology adoption exceeds the organization's ability to manage customer relationships, market responses, and strategic adaptation effectively. Therefore, the main challenge today is no longer only whether MSMEs adopt digital technology, but how digital capabilities can be transformed into customer-based value creation.

From a capability-based perspective, Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) represents an organization's ability to integrate digital platforms, content management, analytics, and customer interactions into marketing activities to create competitive value (Wongsansukcharoen & Thaweepaiboonwong, 2023). For MSMEs, digital marketing capability is not merely reflected by the availability of digital platforms but also by the ability to utilize digital resources strategically, manage customer communication, and transform digital activities into sustainable market value (Hadi & Zakiah, 2021; Putri & Nurhadi, 2023). This perspective aligns with the broader understanding of modern MSME marketing, where digital transformation requires organizations to combine technological utilization with effective marketing management and customer value creation (Yulita, 2026). However, current literature increasingly confirms that the contribution of capability to performance is influenced by organizational processes and relational mechanisms rather than solely by direct ownership of resources (Davies et al., 2023). This issue becomes increasingly relevant in the digital market, where customer interaction, engagement, and trust play crucial roles in determining market outcomes. Many MSMEs have implemented various digital marketing tools, but they still face difficulties in converting digital presence into sustainable customer relationships and improved marketing performance. This condition suggests that the capability-performance relationship requires a more process-oriented explanation, particularly regarding how internal capabilities are transformed into relational outcomes and customer behavior.

This study argues that Customer Engagement and Brand Trust represent two important mechanisms that explain how digital capabilities create marketing value. Customer Engagement reflects customers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with a brand and has become increasingly important in digitally mediated interactions (Lim & Rasul, 2022). Through meaningful digital interactions, organizations can encourage customer participation, strengthen relationships, and create opportunities for value co-creation. Meanwhile, Brand Trust represents a relational outcome that strengthens customer confidence and influences purchasing decisions in digital environments characterized by uncertainty (Wallace et al., 2021). In this context, engagement and trust should not be viewed as independent mechanisms, but rather as sequential relational processes that explain how organizations transform digital interactions into marketing performance. Although previous studies have examined the relationship between digital capability and performance, many studies remain dominated by direct-effect explanations and provide limited understanding of the relational mechanisms underlying value creation.

In addition to Digital Marketing Capability, this study integrates Strategic Agility as a complementary organizational capability that strengthens responses to market dynamics. Strategic Agility reflects an organization's ability to detect environmental changes, rapidly reconfigure strategic priorities, and adapt marketing actions according to changing customer expectations (Atanassova et al., 2025). In a digital business environment characterized by rapid technological developments and changing consumer behavior, agility becomes an essential capability to ensure alignment between organizational resources and market demands. MSMEs with stronger strategic agility are expected to respond more effectively to market turbulence, adjust their marketing strategies, and maintain performance effectiveness under uncertain conditions. Therefore, the integration of Digital Marketing Capability and Strategic Agility

provides a more comprehensive understanding of how MSMEs utilize internal capabilities to achieve superior marketing outcomes.

Although interest in digital transformation and MSME performance continues to increase, several important research gaps remain. First, empirical findings regarding the influence of digital capability on performance remain inconsistent across different research contexts. Some studies demonstrate positive effects of digital capabilities on business outcomes, while others suggest that capability alone does not guarantee superior performance without appropriate organizational processes and market adaptation mechanisms (Heredia et al., 2022; Davies et al., 2023). Second, previous research has largely emphasized variance-based explanations that focus on whether digital capabilities influence performance, but provides limited explanation regarding how these capabilities are converted into customer-based value. Third, limited research has investigated the sequential role of Customer Engagement and Brand Trust in explaining the mechanism through which digital capabilities contribute to marketing performance, particularly in the context of MSMEs operating in emerging digital markets. Consequently, existing literature still provides an incomplete understanding of how internal capabilities are transformed into sustainable customer-based competitive advantage.

To address these gaps, this study develops a mechanism-based framework explaining how Digital Marketing Capability and Strategic Agility influence MSME marketing performance through Customer Engagement and Brand Trust. Specifically, Customer Engagement is positioned as an activation mechanism that transforms digital capabilities into customer interactions and relational involvement. Subsequently, Brand Trust functions as a conversion mechanism that transforms relational value into marketing outcomes by strengthening customer confidence and long-term relationships. By integrating capability-based theory and customer behavior perspectives, this study shifts the discussion from merely possessing digital resources toward understanding the process of value orchestration in digital marketing environments. Therefore, this research contributes by providing a process-based explanation of MSME marketing performance and expanding understanding of how digital capabilities create value through customer engagement, trust formation, and strategic adaptability in increasingly dynamic markets.

1.1 Theoretical Review

Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) represents an organization's ability to integrate digital technology, content management, data analytics, and customer interaction into marketing activities to create market value. From the perspective of *the Resource-Based View*, capability is seen as a strategic asset that allows organizations to build a competitive advantage when they are difficult to replicate and are able to generate relevant value for customers (Wongsansukcharoen & Thaweepaiboonwong, 2023). Therefore, DMC is not only related to the use of digital technology, but also reflects the organization's ability to orchestrate digital resources into customer-based value.

In the context of digital marketing, capability effectiveness is highly dependent on an organization's ability to connect technology with market responsiveness and customer interaction. DMC enables organizations to create more personalized communication, expand customer reach, and improve the quality of customer interaction through content capability, social media capability, and analytics capability (Cadden et al., 2023). The integration of capabilities is an important foundation in creating relational value in an increasingly interactive digital market.

However, various studies show that digital capabilities do not automatically result in superior Performance (Heredia et al., 2022). The effectiveness of capabilities is often influenced by the implementation gap, orchestration capabilities, and the suitability of organizational strategies in responding to market dynamics (Kamble et al., 2023). In this context, DMC is more accurately understood as an enabler that unlocks opportunities for value creation. At the same

time, the realization of marketing outcomes depends on how those capabilities translate into customer interactions and responses.

Strategic Agility reflects an organization's ability to respond quickly to market changes through sensing, strategic reconfiguration, and adaptive decision-making. From the perspective of *Dynamic Capability Theory*, agility is seen as an organization's ability to integrate and reconfigure resources to stay in tune with changing business environments (Atanassova et al., 2025). Therefore, agility does not simply reflect operational flexibility but also demonstrates the organization's capacity to maintain strategic responsiveness in the midst of market uncertainty.

In a highly dynamic digital environment, digital capabilities alone are often not enough to produce superior Performance if the organization is unable to adapt its strategy to changing customer behavior and technological developments. Strategic Agility acts as a complementary capability that allows organizations to translate digital capabilities into strategic actions that are responsive and relevant to market dynamics. This capability strengthens the organization's ability to make rapid adjustments to changes in customer preferences, competitive turbulence, and market uncertainty.

Thus, Strategic Agility becomes an adaptive mechanism that strengthens the effectiveness of capability deployment in the context of digital marketing. Organizations that have high agility tend to be better able to maintain marketing effectiveness because they can align capabilities with changing market needs.

Customer Engagement reflects customer engagement that involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of interactions with brands. In the context of digital marketing, engagement is not only understood as a customer response but as a relational activation process that connects digital interaction with customer value creation (Lim & Rasul, 2022). This perspective places customers as active participants in the value co-creation process, not just recipients of marketing messages.

Intensive digital interactions enable organizations to build customer participation through interactive communication, relevant content, and an integrated customer experience. Engagement then develops into a behavioral mechanism that strengthens the relationship between the customer and the organization. The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement dimensions show that customer engagement is not only related to the frequency of interactions but also reflects the quality of customer connection to the brand (Roy et al., 2023).

In the context of digital MSMEs, engagement is an important path that explains how capability translates into relational value. The higher the quality of digital interactions an organization builds, the more likely customers are to develop engagements that drive loyalty, participation, and long-term relationships with brands.

Brand Trust represents a customer's belief in the reliability, credibility, and integrity of the brand in meeting customer expectations. In a digital market characterized by uncertainty, trust is a psychological conversion mechanism that reduces perceived risk and strengthens customer purchase confidence (Wallace et al., 2021). Therefore, trust not only functions as a relational outcome but also as an important foundation in maintaining customer relationships in a sustainable manner.

High engagement does not necessarily result in marketing outcomes if customers have not developed trust in the brand. Digital interactions can increase customer engagement, but trust determines whether those relational interactions translate into loyalty, purchasing decisions, and long-term commitment. In this context, trust functions as an uncertainty reduction mechanism that strengthens the effectiveness of customer relationships in generating market value.

Thus, Brand Trust becomes a relational outcome that connects customer interaction with marketing performance. Organizations that are able to build trust through quality consistency, information transparency, and communication credibility tend to have a greater ability to maintain customer loyalty and improve marketing performance.

Marketing performance reflects an organization's ability to achieve market outcomes through the effectiveness of marketing strategies and customer relationship management. In the context of digital MSMEs, Performance is not only understood as a result of capability ownership but as a consequence of the organization's ability to orchestrate capabilities simultaneously, customer interactions, and market responses.

Studies have shown that marketing performance is influenced by how organizations translate capabilities into customer-based value through relational processes and adaptive responsiveness (Davies et al., 2023). Therefore, Performance is more accurately understood as an outcome of capability orchestration rather than just a direct result of the use of technology or internal resources.

This approach broadens the understanding of marketing performance by placing customers as the primary mechanism in the value creation process. In a highly interactive digital environment, marketing success is greatly influenced by the organization's ability to build engagement, trust, and relational continuity in an ongoing manner.

The relationship between Digital Marketing Capability and marketing performance can be understood through the process of how capability translates into customer response and relational value. Digital capabilities allow organizations to create more personalized, responsive, and relevant interactions, thereby increasing customer engagement in digital marketing activities (Lim & Rasul, 2022). In this context, Customer Engagement serves as an activation mechanism that explains how internal capabilities begin to generate customer behavioral responses through customer participation, interaction, and engagement with the brand.

Customer engagement then evolves into Brand Trust when digital interactions consistently result in positive and credible experiences. Wallace et al., (2021) explain that trust is formed when customers perceive the organization as being able to meet expectations and reduce uncertainty in marketing relationships. Therefore, engagement is more appropriately positioned as a relational initiation process, while trust functions as a conversion mechanism that translates the quality of relationships into purchase trust and customer loyalty. The order of engagement → trust becomes more logical than trust → engagement because customers generally build trust after experiencing meaningful interactions and engagements with brands.

Various studies show that the contribution of capability to Performance depends on the organizational process of converting capabilities into customer-based value (Heredia et al., 2022; Kamble et al., 2023) affirm that capability creates value when an organization is able to effectively integrate internal processes with customer responses. Within this framework, Strategic Agility strengthens the effectiveness of capability deployment through sensing, reconfiguration, and adaptive responsiveness to market dynamics (Atanassova et al., 2025). Thus, this research model adopts a capability → behavior → performance approach that places Customer Engagement and Brand Trust as relational processes that explain how organizational capabilities translate into marketing performance. This approach emphasizes that marketing value creation is the result of orchestration capability, adaptive responsiveness, and customer relationship management that are integrated with each other.

1.2 Hypothesis Development

Digital capabilities are increasingly seen as a strategic resource that enables organizations to create value through customer interactions and adaptive market responses. However, its contribution to marketing performance depends on the organization's ability to translate capabilities into customer response and relational value (Davies et al., 2023; Heredia et al., 2022). Therefore, this study adopts the perspective of capability → behavior → performance, where customer engagement and brand trust explain how digital capability and strategic agility produce marketing outcomes.

Digital Marketing Capability strengthens an organization's ability to create responsive and relevant customer interactions through the integration of digital technology, content capability, and analytics capability. This capability helps organizations build customer-based value while

increasing market responsiveness in a competitive digital environment (Heredia et al., 2022; Wongsansukcharoen & Thaweepaiboonwong, 2023). Organizations with stronger digital capabilities tend to be more effective at optimizing marketing activities and expanding market reach. Therefore:

Strategic Agility allows organizations to quickly adjust marketing strategies through sensing, adaptive decision-making, and strategic reconfiguration. In a dynamic business environment, agility strengthens an organization's ability to respond to changes in customer preferences and market turbulence more flexibly (Atanassova et al., 2025). This ability increases strategic responsiveness so that organizations are better able to maintain marketing effectiveness in the midst of rapid market changes. Therefore:

Digital Marketing Capability enables organizations to build more interactive, personalized, and customer-oriented communication through digital platforms. Responsive digital interactions strengthen customer participation and improve the quality of customer engagement with brands (Lim & Rasul, 2022; Terho et al., 2022). When organizations are able to manage digital interactions effectively, customers are more likely to show higher cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Therefore:

Customer Engagement creates relational closeness through a consistent and meaningful interaction experience. High customer engagement helps organizations build a positive perception of brand reliability and credibility, thereby strengthening the trust formation process (Wallace et al., 2021). In the digital context, customers generally develop trust after experiencing relevant and valuable interactions with brands. Therefore:

Brand Trust plays an important role in reducing perceived risk and increasing customer purchase confidence in a digital environment full of uncertainty. A high level of trust drives customer loyalty and strengthens relational continuity, which ultimately improves the effectiveness of an organization's marketing (Wallace et al., 2021). Organizations that are able to maintain customer trust tend to have more stable and sustainable marketing performance. Therefore:

The contribution of Digital Marketing Capability to marketing performance depends on the organization's ability to transform internal capabilities into active and sustainable customer response. Digital capabilities strengthen customer interaction through more personalized and interactive communication, which then increases customer engagement as a form of relational activation (Lim & Rasul, 2022). Heredia et al., (2022) emphasize that capability generates value when an organization is able to connect internal resources with customer responses effectively. In this context, engagement is an important pathway that explains how digital capabilities translate into marketing outcomes. Therefore:

Customer engagement doesn't always result in marketing outcomes if customers haven't developed trust in the brand. Engagement strengthens relational interaction and customer closeness, while trust determines whether the relationship develops into loyalty and purchase confidence (Wallace et al., 2021). In other words, trust serves as a conversion mechanism that translates the quality of customer relationships into market behavior that benefits the organization. The higher the level of customer trust, the greater the contribution of engagement to marketing performance. Therefore:

Digital Marketing Capability creates marketing value through a relational process that gradually develops from customer engagement to brand trust. Digital capabilities allow organizations to build customer engagement through responsive and customer-oriented communication, while trust thrives when customers experience consistent and credible interactions. The order of engagement → trust becomes more logical because trust is generally formed after customers experience engagement and relational interaction with the brand. Kamble et al., (2023) and Davies et al., (2023) show that capability produces market outcomes when organizations are able to effectively orchestrate the customer relationship process. Therefore,

based on the development of this hypothesis, this study proposes a conceptual model as presented in Figure 1.

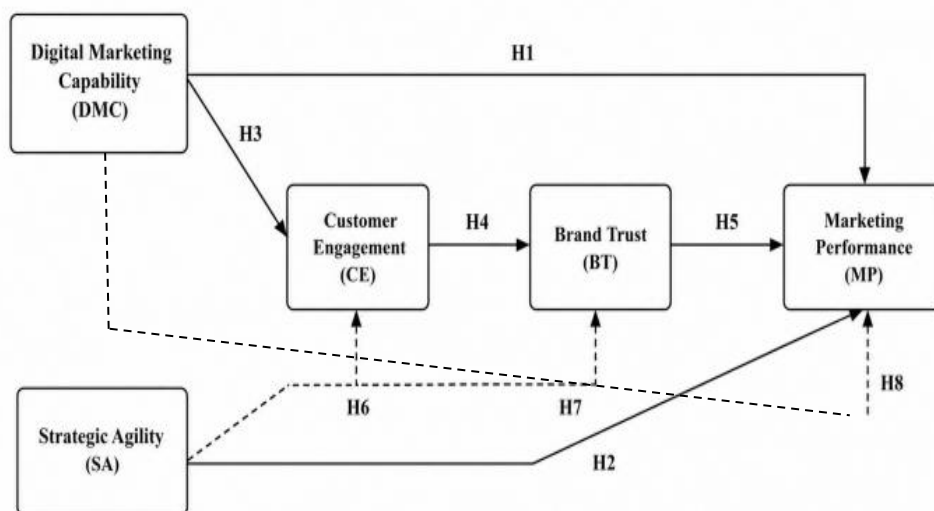


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Model

2. METHOD

This study adopts an explanatory quantitative approach. This design was chosen because the research focuses on explaining how Digital Marketing Capability and Strategic Agility translate into marketing performance through Customer Engagement and Brand Trust as the main relational mechanism. The explanatory approach is considered relevant to test causal relationships in capability-based models and customer behavior in the context of digital MSMEs (Kim & Jin, 2024).

The research model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This approach is suitable for models that are prediction-oriented, involve chained mediating relationships, and contain complex multidimensional latent constructs (Hair, 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2023). In addition, PLS-SEM allows simultaneous evaluation of direct and indirect relationships in an exploratory and mechanism-based capability-performance model.

The research population includes MSMEs that actively utilize digital platforms in marketing activities and customer interaction. The focus on digital MSMEs is relevant because organizations in this context face high pressure to integrate digital capabilities with market responsiveness in a dynamic business environment (Kim & Jin, 2024b).

Samples were determined using purposive sampling to ensure respondents had theoretical relevance to the research model. Respondents were selected based on three main criteria: (1) owners or managers of MSMEs, (2) actively using digital marketing in business activities, and (3) having been running a business for at least one year. These criteria ensure that respondents have adequate experience in managing customer interaction and digital capabilities that are relevant to capability-based frameworks.

A total of 168 respondents were used in this study. This number is considered adequate for PLS-SEM because it meets the minimum sample size recommendation in models with moderate complexity and multiple mediated relationships (Hair, 2022; Jie et al., 2025).

The research data were obtained through a survey using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The distribution of questionnaires is carried out online through Google Forms and offline to MSME actors to increase the reach of respondents and reduce limited digital access in several MSME sectors.

Prior to the main deployment, the instrument is tested through limited pilot testing to ensure item clarity and construct suitability. This procedure helps to improve content validity and reduce potential misunderstandings of measurement items.

Digital Marketing Capability is measured through an organization's ability to manage digital interaction, content capability, and analytics capability to support customer responsiveness and market interaction. This construct reflects the organization's ability to orchestrate digital resources into customer-based value.

Strategic Agility represents the ability to sense, respond, and adapt strategically in the face of market changes. This construct is positioned as an adaptive capability that allows organizations to perform strategic reconfiguration quickly in a dynamic business environment.

Customer Engagement is measured as a multidimensional construct that includes the customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement with the brand. This construct describes the relational activation process that arises through intensive digital interaction (Nadeem et al., 2025).

Brand Trust is operationalized through reliability, credibility, and customer trust in the brand. In the digital context, trust is seen as a relational outcome that strengthens purchase confidence and relational continuity.

Marketing Performance is measured using market outcome, customer outcome, and growth-related performance indicators, including increased sales, market expansion, and customer satisfaction as a consequence of capability orchestration and customer relationship management.

Because the study used self-reported cross-sectional data, the potential for common method bias needs to be anticipated through procedural and statistical remedies. Procedurally, the study applied respondent anonymity, item randomization, and reduction of evaluative apprehension to minimize response bias.

Statistically, Harman's single-factor test shows that there is no single dominant factor that explains the majority of data variance, so common method variance is not a serious problem. In addition, the full collinearity assessment showed that the entire value of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was below the threshold of 3.3, which indicates that the model is relatively free from common method bias and multicollinearity issues (Kock & Studies, 2015).

Data analysis was carried out using SmartPLS to evaluate measurement models and structural models simultaneously. PLS-SEM was chosen because it is suitable for prediction-oriented research and mediation mechanism testing in capability-performance-based complex models (Hair, 2022).

The evaluation of the outer model includes convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability through loading factor, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability, and HTMT ratio (Sarstedt et al., 2023). This stage ensures that the entire construct has adequate measurement quality. Internal model evaluation is carried out through testing: (a) Path Coefficient, R-Square, Q-Square, and Predictive Relevance.

The hypothesis relationship was tested using a bootstrapping procedure to obtain a robust parameter estimate and test the significance of direct effects and indirect effects simultaneously. This approach allows the identification of how capabilities translate into marketing performance through customer engagement and brand trust as relational mechanisms.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The characteristics of respondents show that the majority of MSMEs come from the culinary and fashion sectors, two sectors that are highly dependent on the intensity of customer interaction and the speed of digital market response. The dominance of this sector indicates that organizations with high levels of customer engagement tend to be more active in utilizing digital marketing to maintain market visibility, expand customer reach, and strengthen relational

continuity in an increasingly competitive business environment. The high use of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Shopee, and WhatsApp Business also shows that digital presence for MSMEs is no longer just a promotional tool, but has developed into an infrastructure for customer interaction orchestration and relational value creation.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	71	42.3%
	Female	97	57.7%
Business Sector	Culinary	70	41.7%
	Fashion	47	28.0%

The trend of using multiple platforms shows that MSMEs are increasingly managing digital marketing through ecosystem-based interaction rather than single-channel communication. This condition increases the chances of creating engagement because customers experience more intense and repetitive interactions. However, cross-platform complexity also increases the challenges of communication coordination, customer experience consistency, and organizational responsiveness. In this context, the effectiveness of Digital Marketing Capability seems to be increasingly determined by the organization's ability to integrate interaction quality across various digital touchpoints consistently.

3.1 Data Analyst Method

In this study, the data analysis method used is *structural equation modeling-partial least squares* (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS software. In its development, SEM is divided into two types, namely *covariance-based* SEM (CB-SEM) and *variance-based* SEM or *partial least squares* (SEM-PLS). CB-SEM, developed in the 1970s, was pioneered by Karl Joreskog as the developer of the Lisrel software. Meanwhile, SEM-PLS was developed after CB-SEM and was pioneered by Herman Wold (academic advisor Karl Joreskog).

SEM-PLS can work efficiently with small sample sizes and complex models. In addition, the assumption of data distribution in SEM-PLS is relatively looser than that of CB-SEM. Estimation with CB-SEM requires a series of assumptions that must be met, such as data normality in a multivariate manner, minimum sample size, homogeneity, and so on. The results of the two estimates are not much different so that SEM-PLS can be a good proxy for CB-SEM. SEM-PLS can still generate estimates even for small sample sizes and deviations from the assumption of multivariate normality.

SEM-PLS can therefore be seen as a nonparametric approach to CB-SEM. In addition, when the assumptions of CB-SEM are not met, SEM-PLS can be the right method for testing a theory. If the data meet the CB-SEM assumptions appropriately, such as minimum sample size and normal distribution, then select CB-SEM. If it doesn't meet, select SEM-PLS. SEM-PLS is a nonparametric approach; it can work well even for extreme abnormal data.

3.2 Evaluation of Outer Models (*Measurement Models*): Validity and Reliability Testing

Evaluation of the measurement model is carried out to ensure that each indicator is able to represent a latent construct that is measured validly and reliably. In the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, the measurement model testing includes outer loading values, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. The indicator is declared valid if it has an outer loading value of > 0.70 , while the construct is declared reliable if Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values exceed 0.70. In addition, the validity of the convergence is considered to be fulfilled if the average variance extracted (AVE) value > 0.50 . The results of the evaluation of the measurement model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Evaluation of Measurement Model: Outer Loading, Construct Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Variable	Indicator Items	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Trust (BT)	BT1	0.932	0.962	0.969	0.840
	BT2	0.937			
	BT3	0.921			
	BT4	0.916			
	BT5	0.894			
	BT6	0.897			
Customer Engagement (CE)	CE1	0.942	0.968	0.974	0.862
	CE2	0.948			
	CE3	0.944			
	CE4	0.942			
	CE5	0.947			
	CE6	0.842			
Digital Marketing Capability (DMC)	DMC1	0.940	0.970	0.975	0.869
	DMC2	0.944			
	DMC3	0.945			
	DMC4	0.942			
	DMC5	0.941			
	DMC6	0.880			
Marketing Performance (MP)	MP1	0.940	0.975	0.980	0.891
	MP2	0.941			
	MP3	0.949			
	MP4	0.931			
	MP5	0.955			
	MP6	0.947			
Strategic Agility (SA)	SA1	0.938	0.958	0.966	0.827
	SA2	0.934			
	SA3	0.939			
	SA4	0.928			
	SA5	0.857			
	SA6	0.856			

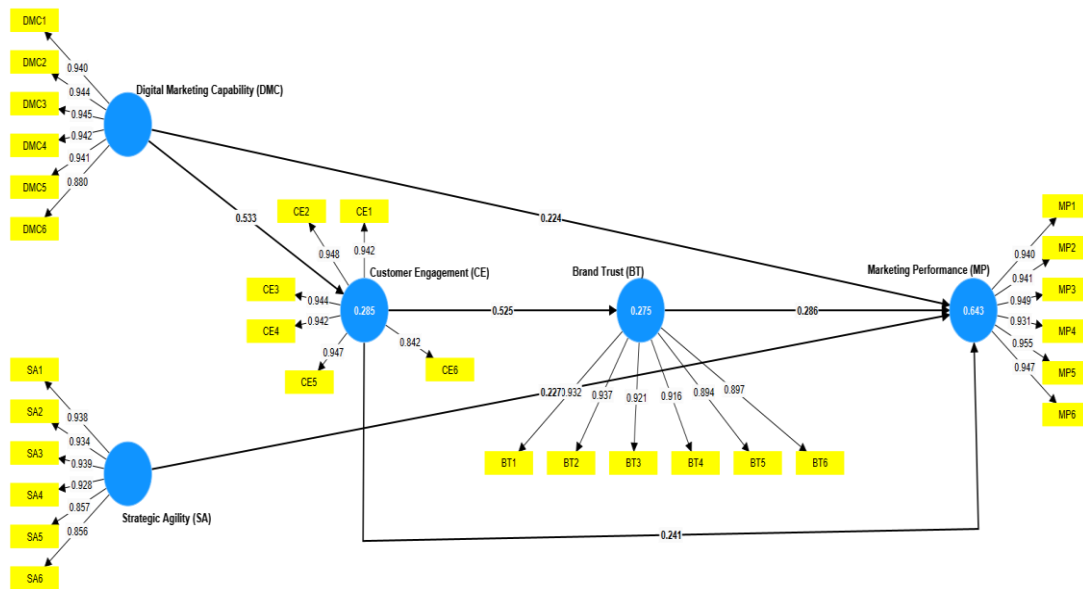


Figure 2. Validity Testing

Based on Table 2 and Figure 2, all indicators in each construct show an outer loading value above the threshold of 0.70. This indicates that each indicator has a strong contribution in reflecting the latent construct it is measuring. In the Brand Trust construct, the outer loading value is in the range of 0.894 to 0.937, which indicates that all indicators BT1 to BT6 have an excellent level of indicator validity. Similarly, the Customer Engagement construct has an outer loading value between 0.842 and 0.948, so all indicators CE1 to CE6 can be declared valid in representing the construct.

Furthermore, the Digital Marketing Capability construct shows an outer loading value in the range of 0.880 to 0.945. These findings show that the DMC1 to DMC6 indicators are able to adequately explain the construct of Digital Marketing Capability. In the Marketing Performance construct, all indicators have a very high outer loading value, which is between 0.931 and 0.955. This value indicates that the MP1 to MP6 indicators have excellent measurement power against the Marketing Performance construct. Meanwhile, the Strategic Agility construct also showed results that met the criteria, with an outer loading value ranging from 0.856 to 0.939, so that all indicators from SA1 to SA6 could be maintained in the model.

In terms of internal reliability, the entire construct has a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70. The highest value of Cronbach's alpha is indicated by the Marketing Performance construct of 0.975, while the lowest value is indicated by the Strategic Agility construct of 0.958. However, all of these values are well above the minimum required criteria, so it can be concluded that the research instruments have excellent internal consistency. Similar results were also seen in the composite reliability value, which ranged from 0.966 to 0.980. The composite reliability value confirms that the entire construct has high reliability and is suitable for use in advanced analysis.

In addition, the average variance extracted value in all constructs has also exceeded the minimum limit of 0.50. Konstruk Brand Trust has an AVE value of 0.840, Customer Engagement of 0.862, Digital Marketing Capability of 0.869, Marketing Performance of 0.891, and Strategic Agility of 0.827. These results show that each construct is able to explain more than 50% of the variance of its indicators. Thus, the convergent validity of all constructs in this research model has been met.

Overall, the results of the evaluation of the measurement model show that all indicators have adequate indicator validity, while the entire construct has met the criteria of internal reliability and convergent validity. Therefore, the measurement model in this study can be

declared valid and reliable, so it is suitable for use for the next stage of analysis, namely structural model testing.

Once the convergent validity and reliability of the construct are declared to meet the criteria, the next stage is to evaluate the discriminant validity to ensure that each construct in the model has adequate empirical differences from the other constructs. In this study, the validity of the discriminant was tested using the Fornell and Larcker criteria, namely by comparing the square root value of AVE in the diagonal position with the correlation value between constructs. The results of the discriminatory validity test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Testing: Fornell & Larcker

	Brand Trust (BT)	Customer Engagement (CE)	Digital Marketing Capability (DMC)	Marketing Performance (MP)	Strategic Agility (SA)
Brand Trust (BT)	0.916				
Customer Engagement (CE)	0.525	0.928			
Digital Marketing Capability (DMC)	0.564	0.533	0.932		
Marketing Performance (MP)	0.664	0.653	0.645	0.944	
Strategic Agility (SA)	0.551	0.625	0.578	0.665	0.910

Description: The value in the diagonal position is the square root of AVE

Based on Table 3, the square root value of AVE in each construct shown in the diagonal position has a higher value compared to the correlation between other constructs. Konstrukt Brand Trust has an AVE square root value of 0.916, which is higher than its correlation with Customer Engagement of 0.525, Digital Marketing Capability of 0.564, Marketing Performance of 0.664, and Strategic Agility of 0.551. This shows that the Brand Trust construct has a stronger ability to explain its own indicators than it does with other constructs.

Furthermore, the Customer Engagement construct shows the square root value of AVE of 0.928. This value is greater than the correlation with Brand Trust of 0.525, Digital Marketing Capability of 0.533, Marketing Performance of 0.653, and Strategic Agility of 0.625. Thus, the Customer Engagement construct can be declared to have good discriminant validity. The Digital Marketing Capability construct also shows an AVE square root value of 0.932, which is higher than all its correlation values with other constructs, which range from 0.533 to 0.645.

In the Marketing Performance construct, the square root value of AVE of 0.944 is also higher than the correlation value with Brand Trust of 0.664, Customer Engagement of 0.653, Digital Marketing Capability of 0.645, and Strategic Agility of 0.665. Although the highest correlation in the table is found in the relationship between Marketing Performance and Strategic Agility of 0.665, it remains below the square root value of the AVE of each construct. This indicates that the two constructs still have adequate conceptual and empirical differences.

Meanwhile, the Strategic Agility construct has a square root value of AVE of 0.910, which is greater than its correlation with Brand Trust of 0.551, Customer Engagement of 0.625, Digital Marketing Capability of 0.578, and Marketing Performance of 0.665. These findings show that Strategic Agility is able to represent the variance of its own indicators more dominantly than the variance divided by other constructs.

Overall, the results of Fornell and Larcker's tests show that all constructs in this study have met the criteria for discriminant validity. In other words, each latent construct has different measurement characteristics and does not overlap excessively with the others. Therefore, the measurement model can be declared to have adequate discriminant validity and is feasible to proceed to the structural model testing stage.

In addition to using the Fornell and Larcker criteria, discriminant validity was also evaluated through the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) approach. HTMT testing is done to provide a more rigorous assessment of the extent to which latent constructs in models are completely different from each other. In general, the validity of the discriminator is stated to be met if the HTMT value is below the threshold of 0.85 or 0.90. The results of the discriminant validity test based on the HTMT criteria are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Testing: HTMT

	Brand Trust (BT)	Customer Engagement (CE)	Digital Marketing Capability (DMC)	Marketing Performance (MP)
Customer Engagement (CE)	0.536			
Digital Marketing Capability (DMC)	0.584	0.540		
Marketing Performance (MP)	0.683	0.664	0.662	
Strategic Agility (SA)	0.573	0.655	0.594	0.683

Based on Table 4, all HTMT values between constructs were below the recommended threshold, either using the conservative criterion of 0.85 or the tolerance criterion of 0.90. The HTMT value between Brand Trust and Customer Engagement is 0.536, Brand Trust and Digital Marketing Capability is 0.584, and Brand Trust and Marketing Performance is 0.683. These values show that the Brand Trust construct has an adequate empirical difference with other constructs in the research model.

Furthermore, the relationship between Customer Engagement and Digital Marketing Capability showed an HTMT value of 0.540, while the relationship between Customer Engagement and Marketing Performance was 0.664, and with Strategic Agility was 0.655. All of these values are still well below the maximum threshold, so it can be stated that Customer Engagement does not experience discriminatory validity issues with other constructs.

In the Digital Marketing Capability construct, the HTMT value with Marketing Performance is 0.662, while with Strategic Agility is 0.594. These findings indicate that Digital Marketing Capability has different conceptual and empirical characteristics from Marketing Performance and Strategic Agility. Thus, the indicators used to measure Digital Marketing Capability do not show excessive overlap with other constructs.

Meanwhile, the HTMT value between Marketing Performance and Strategic Agility is 0.683. Although this value is among the highest values in the table, it remains below the 0.85 threshold. This suggests that the two constructs are still empirically distinguishable, although they have a relatively stronger conceptual relationship than some other construct pairs.

Overall, the HTMT test results show that the entire relationship between constructs has values below the maximum required criteria. Thus, the validity of the discrimination in this research model has been met. These results reinforce the findings of Fornell and Larcker's previous tests, that each latent construct in the model has adequate conceptual and empirical uniqueness and is suitable for use in subsequent structural analyses.

3.4 Structural Model Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing

After all constructs in the measurement model are declared to meet the criteria of validity and reliability, the next stage is to evaluate the structural model. This evaluation aims to test the relationships between latent constructs and assess the model's ability to explain and predict endogenous variables. The test was carried out by paying attention to the value of the path coefficient, T-statistics, P-values, R-square, Q-square, and the fit model. The results of the structural model test are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Test Results of Path Coefficient, R-Square, Q-Square, and Model Fit

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P value s	R- Square s	Q- Square s	Model Fit (SRMR)
Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) -> Customer Engagement (CE)	0.533	0.533	0.078	6.801	0.000	0.285	0.232	
Customer Engagement (CE) -> Brand Trust (BT)	0.525	0.527	0.083	6.290	0.000	0.275	0.227	
Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) -> Marketing Performance (MP)	0.224	0.213	0.097	2.303	0.021			
Strategic Agility (SA) -> Marketing Performance (MP)	0.227	0.228	0.109	2.073	0.038	0.643	0.565	
Brand Trust (BT) -> Marketing Performance (MP)	0.286	0.295	0.095	3.013	0.003			0.062
Customer Engagement (CE) -> Marketing Performance (MP)	0.241	0.234	0.100	2.407	0.016			
Customer Engagement (CE) -> Brand Trust (BT)	0.150	0.158	0.066	2.290	0.022			
Brand Trust (BT) -> Marketing Performance (MP)								
Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) -> Customer Engagement (CE)	0.080	0.085	0.038	2.098	0.036			

Brand Trust (BT) -> Marketing Performanc e (MP) Customer Engagement (CE) -> Brand Trust (BT) -> Marketing Performanc e (MP) Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) -> Customer Engagement (CE) -> Marketing Performanc e (MP)					
	0.150	0.158	0.066	2.290	0.022
	0.129	0.127	0.062	2.086	0.037

Based on Table 5, the results of the structural model test show that all direct relationships between constructs have a positive and significant influence direction. Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) has a positive effect on Customer Engagement (CE), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.533. The effect is significant because the T-statistical value of 6.801 is greater than 1.96 and the P-values of 0.000 are smaller than 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that states that Digital Marketing Capability has a positive effect on Customer Engagement is accepted.

Furthermore, Customer Engagement (CE) was proven to have a positive effect on Brand Trust (BT), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.525. The T-values of 6.290 are greater than 1.96, and the P-values of 0.000 are smaller than 0.05, so the influence is significant. Therefore, the hypothesis that Customer Engagement has a positive effect on Brand Trust is accepted.

Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) also has a positive effect on Marketing Performance (MP), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.224. The T-values of 2.303 are greater than 1.96 and the P-values of 0.021 are smaller than 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that states that Digital Marketing Capability has a positive effect on Marketing Performance is accepted.

Strategic Agility (SA) had a positive effect on Marketing Performance (MP), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.227. The T-values of 2.073 are greater than 1.96, and the P-values of 0.038 are less than 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that Strategic Agility has a positive effect on Marketing Performance is accepted.

Brand Trust (BT) had a positive effect on Marketing Performance (MP), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.286. The effect was significant because the T-statistical value of 3.013 was greater than 1.96, and the P-values of 0.003 were smaller than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis that states that Brand Trust has a positive effect on Marketing Performance is accepted.

Customer Engagement (CE) also has a positive influence on Marketing Performance (MP), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.241. The T-value of 2.407 is greater than 1.96, and the P-value of 0.016 is smaller than 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that Customer Engagement has a positive effect on Marketing Performance is accepted.

The results of the indirect influence test also showed significant findings. Customer Engagement (CE) has a positive effect on Marketing Performance (MP) through Brand Trust (BT), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.150. The T-values of 2.290 are greater than 1.96 and

the P-values of 0.022 are smaller than 0.05. This shows that Brand Trust plays a mediator in the relationship between Customer Engagement and Marketing Performance. Thus, the mediation hypothesis is declared accepted.

In addition, Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) has a positive effect on Marketing Performance (MP) through Customer Engagement (CE) and Brand Trust (BT), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.080. The T-values of 2.098 are greater than 1.96, and the P-values of 0.036 are less than 0.05. These results indicate the influence of chain mediation, where Digital Marketing Capability can increase Customer Engagement, then strengthen Brand Trust, and ultimately encourage increased Marketing Performance. Thus, the chain mediation hypothesis is declared accepted.

Digital Marketing Capability (DMC) has also been proven to have a positive effect on Marketing Performance (MP) through Customer Engagement (CE), with an original sample coefficient value of 0.129. The T-values of 2.086 are greater than 1.96, and the P-values of 0.037 are smaller than 0.05. These findings show that Customer Engagement plays a mediator role in the relationship between Digital Marketing Capability and Marketing Performance. Therefore, the mediation hypothesis is declared accepted.

In terms of the model's predictive capabilities, the R-square value for Customer Engagement is 0.285. This shows that Digital Marketing Capability is able to explain the variation in Customer Engagement by 28.5%, while the rest is explained by other variables outside the research model. The R-square value for Brand Trust is 0.275, which means that Customer Engagement is able to explain the variation in Brand Trust by 27.5%. Meanwhile, the R-square value for Marketing Performance is 0.643, which shows that Digital Marketing Capability, Strategic Agility, Brand Trust, and Customer Engagement together are able to explain the variation in Marketing Performance by 64.3%. This value indicates that the model has a strong predictive ability to explain Marketing Performance.

Furthermore, the Q-square value in Customer Engagement is 0.232, Brand Trust is 0.227, and Marketing Performance is 0.565. All of these Q-square values are greater than zero, so it can be concluded that the model has good predictive relevance. The highest Q-square value is found in Marketing Performance, which indicates that this construct has the strongest level of predictive relevance in the research model.

Based on the value of the fit model, an SRMR value of 0.062 was obtained. This value is below the threshold of 0.08, so the model can be declared to have a good level of suitability. Thus, the results of the structural model evaluation show that the research model has met the criteria for the significance of the relationship between constructs, has adequate predictive capabilities, good predictive relevance, and an acceptable level of model suitability.

3.5 Discussion

The findings of the study show that digital capability does not seem to be enough when it is only understood as technology ownership or digital presence. Many organizations are able to adopt digital platforms, but fail to translate those capabilities into market outcomes due to limited orchestration capabilities and low customer responsiveness. This perspective reinforces the argument of Kamble et al., (2023) and Zahoor et al., (2023) that new capabilities create value when integrated with customer-facing relational processes.

In the context of digital MSMEs, Digital Marketing Capability is more appropriately understood as infrastructure for relational value creation rather than just technical capabilities in operating digital platforms. Capability opens up wider interaction opportunities, but the quality of relational outcomes still depends on how the organization builds responsiveness, interaction consistency, and customer relevance on an ongoing basis. When digital communication becomes too transactional or loses personalization, engagement tends to weaken even though the organization has a high digital presence.

Customer Engagement then develops as a relational activation process that connects capability with customer participation. Engagement is important because intense digital

interactions do not always result in relational closeness if customers do not experience emotional involvement or behavioral attachment to the brand. Wallace et al., (2021) and Huang et al., (2022) show that digital customers increasingly evaluate brands through interaction quality rather than exposure frequency alone.

Furthermore, engagement does not necessarily develop into trust if customer experience is inconsistent or digital communication loses credibility. At this point, Brand Trust functions as a relational stabilization mechanism that reduces uncertainty while strengthening relational continuity in an increasingly volatile digital market.

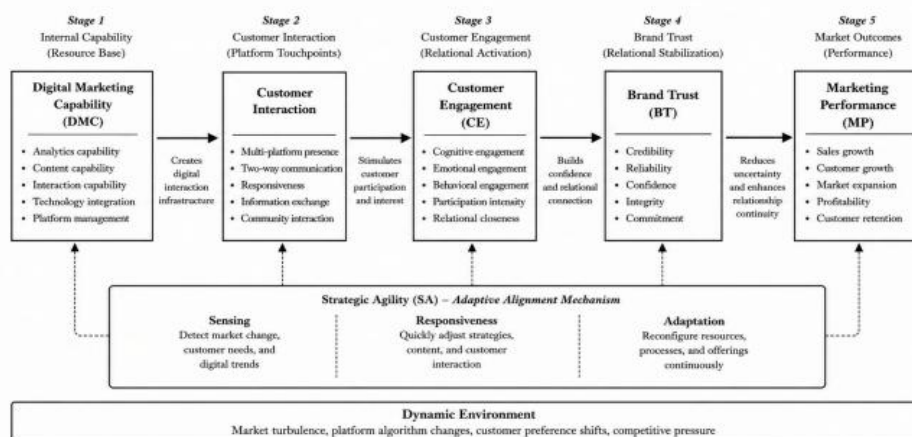


Figure 3. Capability to Performance Process Flow

Strategic Agility also shows an increasingly important role in the context of a highly turbulent digital market. Capability without agility has the potential to become a rigid capability because the organization may have adequate resources and technology adoption, but fails to adapt to changes in customer expectations and market dynamics. Atanassova et al., (2025) and Tyrväinen & Karjaluo, (2025) explain that agility strengthens the alignment between capability deployment and environmental change, especially when organizations face competitive turbulence and platform uncertainty.

That perspective helps explain why previous studies have found an inconsistent capability–performance relationship. Capability seems to be less effective when organizations focus only on technology deployment without strengthening customer responsiveness, relational continuity, and adaptive adjustment. On the other hand, capability becomes more valuable when the organization is able to integrate digital interaction with engagement formation and trust stabilization simultaneously.

The mediation series in this study shows that market outcomes develop through a gradual relational transformation process: capability expands customer interaction, interaction strengthens engagement, engagement builds relational confidence, and trust maintains the stability of customer relationships to produce sustainable marketing outcomes. The order of engagement → trust becomes more logical than trust → engagement because customers generally develop trust after experiencing relevant engagement and interaction experiences with brands.

This approach expands the capability literature from variance explanation to a more customer-centered mechanism-based explanation. Marketing value does not seem to be just a consequence of resource possession, but the result of an organization's ability to orchestrate capability, responsiveness, and customer relationship processes in an integrated manner in an increasingly dynamic digital environment.

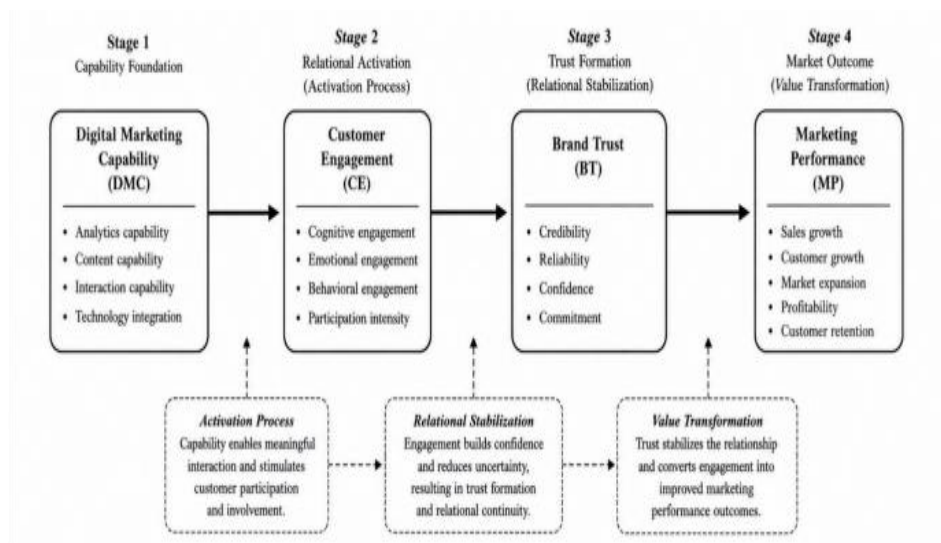


Figure 4. Serial Mediation Mechanism

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

This research demonstrates that digital capabilities do not automatically lead to superior marketing performance among MSMEs. Marketing value is created when organizations are able to orchestrate Digital Marketing Capability and Strategic Agility through relational processes involving Customer Engagement and Brand Trust. Digital Marketing Capability should therefore be understood not merely as technological adoption, but as a relational infrastructure that enables organizations to develop meaningful customer interactions, strengthen engagement, and build trust. The findings highlight that marketing performance emerges through a gradual transformation process in which digital capability expands customer interaction, interaction strengthens engagement, engagement contributes to trust formation, and trust ultimately supports sustainable marketing outcomes. This perspective extends the capability–performance literature from a resource ownership-based view toward a more process-oriented and customer-centered explanation.

Furthermore, this study confirms that Strategic Agility plays an important role in aligning digital capabilities with changing market conditions. Digital capabilities may become ineffective when organizations focus only on technology adoption without developing responsiveness, adaptive strategies, and effective customer relationship management. Therefore, the success of digital MSME marketing depends not only on possessing digital resources but also on the ability to integrate capability deployment, customer responsiveness, and relational processes simultaneously. By positioning Customer Engagement and Brand Trust as sequential mechanisms, this study provides a deeper understanding of how MSMEs can transform digital capabilities into sustainable marketing performance in an increasingly dynamic digital environment.

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