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Strategic Content Capability and Social Engagement: A Pathway to Social Media Performance in Indonesian MSMEs

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ABSTRACT

The tremendous development of social media usage—which now exceeds 5.4 billion people worldwide—has brought digital platforms to the center of marketing strategy. However, existing research frequently ignores the impact of strategic planning and internal content skills on engagement and performance. By investigating the impact of Digital Content Capability (DCC) and Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) on Customer Engagement (CE) and Social Media Performance (SMP) among Indonesian fashion MSMEs, this study fills a significant knowledge gap. Data from 130 respondents were evaluated quantitatively using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS). The results suggest that DCC and SMMS have a considerable impact on CE, which then mediates their effect on SMP. The findings show that social media efficacy is based on more than just frequency or platform choice, but also on the strategic capacity to create relevant, consistent, and analytically driven content. This study provides both theoretical insights and practical methods for SMEs to improve their content strategies and digital outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The number of global social media users is projected to reach between 5.17 and 5.45 billion by 2025, representing 63% to 67% of the world population, with an average daily usage of 2 hours and 20 minutes [1]. This widespread digital presence has redefined marketing paradigms, shifting the dominant focus from traditional media toward social-media-driven strategies. In the last five years alone, social media advertising spending has grown by over **150%**, rising from US$97.5 billion in 2019 to an estimated US$244 billion in 2024 [2]. Digital advertising now accounts for 73% of total global ad spend, driven largely by short-form emotional content, influencers, and user-generated campaigns that significantly enhance engagement—especially on visual-first platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

Social media has evolved far beyond a promotional tool. It now functions as a strategic marketing intelligence platform that extends geographic reach, influences brand perception, and strengthens emotional connections with consumers [3]. With the

power of real-time analytics, businesses can predict and shape consumer behavior dynamically. However, as social media environments mature, the central challenge for firms has shifted from merely having a presence to strategically integrating social media within broader business ecosystems [4].

Despite its significance, the conceptualization of Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) remains fragmented. Existing models often emphasize operational execution—such as posting frequency, platform preference, and content formats—while overlooking the internal strategic capabilities required to produce content that resonates and performs [5]–[7]. Recent empirical findings by [8] show that social media strategies alone may not directly improve performance unless supported by appropriate internal capabilities and mediating variables like engagement.

This gap becomes even more apparent in the context of SMEs, as noted by [9], who found a disconnect between strategic content planning and social media outcomes. These findings suggest that internal capabilities—especially those related to content quality and strategic alignment—may bridge the strategy-performance gap. This highlights the emerging relevance of Digital Content Capability (DCC): the organization's ability to produce, adapt, and evaluate social media content in a way that is brand-aligned, audience-relevant, and strategically impactful.

which center on affective reactions, DCC represents a measurable, strategic, and process-driven capability. It serves as the executional core of SMMS and plays a vital role in shaping Customer Engagement (CE) and ultimately Social Media Performance (SMP). Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) and supported by Engagement Theory [10], this research explores the mediating role of CE and the structural influence of DCC within an integrated strategic model.

By examining the interrelationships between SMMS, DCC, CE, and SMP, this study aims to fill a critical gap in the digital marketing literature. It provides theoretical contributions to Marketing Science, Strategic Branding, and Engagement Behavior, while also offering practical guidance for SMEs and marketing practitioners on how to build effective and performance-driven content strategies that align with audience expectations and brand goals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's saturated digital environment, content alone is no longer sufficient to drive meaningful customer involvement; instead, the capability to design, manage, and evaluate content strategically—referred to as Digital Content Capability (DCC)—has emerged as a critical determinant of engagement. This reflects the shift from simply producing frequent or trendy posts toward developing content that is consistent, audience-centric, and aligned with strategic brand narratives. According to Engagement Theory [10], customer engagement emerges when individuals are psychologically and emotionally invested in digital interactions. However, most existing literature focuses on engagement from the audience's side [11], while relatively little attention has been paid to the firm's internal ability to produce strategic, high-performing content. This gap is significant, especially in the context of social media strategy implementation, where content is often assessed tactically, without recognizing the strategic competency underlying it.

According to the Strategic Content Capability framework by [12], content that communicates brand meaning, aligns with audience values, and follows visual and narrative consistency is more likely to impact performance than frequency or platform choice alone. This view is echoed in empirical findings by [13], who observed that content effectiveness is closely tied to planned, analytical, and audience-aware content development rather than emotional intuition alone. Therefore, Digital Content Capability (DCC) can be defined as an internal organizational resource that enhances the strategic impact of Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) and contributes significantly

to driving Customer Engagement (CE) and Social Media Performance (SMP).

2.1 Social Media Marketing Strategy on Customer Engagement

[10], [14], [15] define Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) as an integrated pattern of resource deployment through social platforms to generate strategic value such as engagement and branding outcomes. This aligns with Engagement Theory [10], which conceptualizes engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment. A well-formulated SMMS enhances these dimensions by creating immersive, audience-relevant experiences. Several empirical studies, such as [8], [12], confirm that customer-centric SMMS leads to higher levels of likes, shares, and comments. Therefore, it is hypothesized that SMMS has a direct and significant impact on Customer Engagement.

H1: Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) has a positive and significant effect on Customer Engagement (CE)

2.2 Digital Content Capability on Customer Engagement

Digital Content Capability (DCC) refers to an organization's ability to systematically produce, adapt, and optimize social media content that resonates with the intended audience and reflects brand strategy. Drawing on Engagement Theory and Strategic Capability Frameworks [12], DCC plays a pivotal role in eliciting higher-order customer engagement by ensuring the quality, clarity, and relevancy of content. Research from [13], [16] emphasizes that consistent, well-designed content—guided by analytical insights and platform fit—leads to higher user interaction and content sharing. Consequently, DCC is considered a strategic enabler of CE across its cognitive (attention), emotional (affinity), and behavioral (participation) dimensions.

H2: Digital Content Capability (DCC) has a positive and significant effect on Customer Engagement (CE)

2.3 Customer Engagement on Social Media Performance

Customer Engagement (CE) is widely recognized as a strategic driver that links digital marketing initiatives to measurable performance outcomes. According to Brodie et al. (2011), CE captures the multidimensional interaction—cognitive, emotional, and behavioral—between consumers and brand content across touchpoints. Empirical findings from [9], [17] suggest that CE acts as a channel through which SMMS influences Social Media Performance (SMP), including metrics such as reach, interaction rate, and virality. In this context, CE not only reflects the outcome of strategy but also operates as a facilitator that strengthens the strategy-performance connection. Furthermore, [18], [19] provide evidence that CE contributes to brand equity and indirectly affects financial performance across cultural settings. Thus, CE is conceptualized as a central mediating mechanism within the SMMS–SMP relationship.

H3: Customer Engagement (CE) has a positive and significant effect on Social Media Performance (SMP)

H4: Customer Engagement (CE) mediates the effect of Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) on Social Media Performance (SMP)

Table 1. Measurement Item

Construct	Statement Item	Coeffient Correlation
Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS)	1. Our social media strategy outlines clear performance goals 2. Our social media strategy is aligned with our overall marketing strategy	[12]

Construct	Statement Item	Coeffient Correlation
	3. Our business provides clear directions for executing social media strategy. 4. We use social media to track competitors. 5. We regularly evaluate our strategy based on performance metrics and feedback	
Digital Content Capability (DCC)	1. We have consistent visual guidelines and messaging style in every social media content. 2. We plan social media content based on long-term strategy, not just momentary trends. 3. We use analytics data (e.g. engagement rate, reach) to evaluate content performance. 4. Our content is customised to the characteristics and format of each platform (IG, FB, TikTok). 5. We update content regularly based on user feedback and monitoring results.	[6], [8], [12], [13]
Social Media Engagement	1. We actively follow updates from this brand on social media. 2. We feel emotionally connected to this brand through its social media presence. 3. We often like, comment, or share content from this brand. 4. We motivated to create or share my own content related to this brand.	[10]
Social Media Performance	1. Our follower count is steadily increasing. 2. We receive a high number of interactions (likes, comments, shares). 3. More people contact us via social media for product-related inquiries. 4. Our social media content drives customers to buy or ask more.	[9]

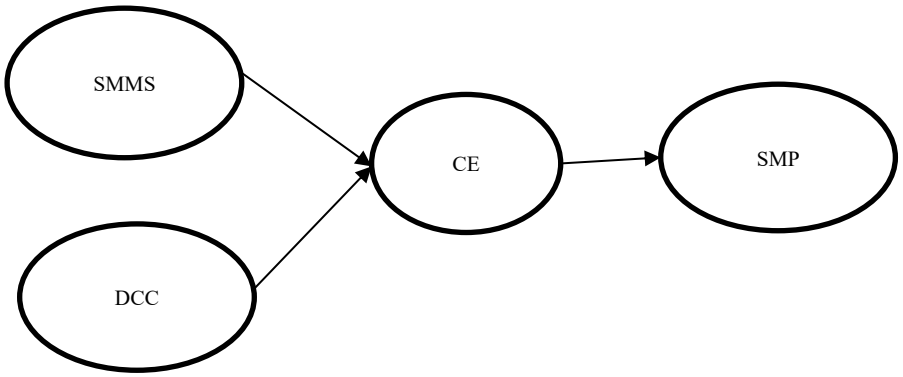

Figure 1. Framework Research Models

3. METHODS

This study employs a quantitative-causal approach to investigate the causal relationships between variables in the structural model, specifically the effect of Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) and Digital Content Capability (DCC) on Social Media Performance (SMP), as mediated by Customer Engagement (CE). The model was

validated using the Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach utilizing SmartPLS software, which is especially suitable for data with complex models and medium sample sizes.

Characteristic of Respondents

This study covered all MSME participants in the clothing (fashion) industry in Banten Province who used social media for marketing. Researchers reported that there were around 200 MSMEs that met the requirements, but the number of valid respondents examined was 130, taking into account the completeness of the data and the feasibility of SEM-PLS analysis. The demographic profile of these SMEs demonstrates a high use of digital platforms, notably social media, in their company operations. Most respondents said they have been using social media for more than two years, with Instagram and WhatsApp being the most popular marketing and client communication platforms. Furthermore, it shows an emphasis on inexpensive fashion for middle-income clients. These features provide a helpful environment to examine the strategic role of social media marketing and engagement in boosting social media performance, particularly among SMEs in the creative industry sector.

Table 2. Profile and Description charactersistic of Respondents

Profile Aspect	Description
Location	Banten, Indonesia
Business Type	Fashion-based SMEs
Number of Valid Respondents	130
Social Media Platform Used	Instagram, WhatsApp, Shopee, TikTok
Years Using Social Media	Most SMEs have used social media for 2–5 years
Average income per year	IDR <100,000,000 – 500,000,0000
Type of Owner	Mostly managed directly by owners or co-founders
Business Orientation	B2C with local/regional target market

Source: Table source from demographics research respondents

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) method was used to assess the causal links between Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS), Digital Content Capability (DCC), Customer Engagement (CE), and Social Media Performance (SMP). Furthermore, construct validity and reliability tests demonstrate that the measurement indicators utilized in this study accurately capture each hidden variable. Using the SEM-PLS approach, this study successfully identifies the important strategic and content-related aspects that increase the social media performance of fashion MSMEs, providing valuable insights for improving digital marketing strategies in similar industries.

4.1. Measurement Outer Model

This study used the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method to analyze the structural links between Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS), Digital Content Capability (DCC), Customer Engagement (CE), and Social Media Performance (SMP). The outer model was evaluated using indices of convergent validity, composite reliability, and discriminant validity. The findings show that all measuring items fulfill the necessary statistical thresholds, indicating that the indicators accurately represent the constructs. The application of SEM-PLS is effective in identifying the essential dimensions that drive SMP in the fashion MSME sector, with practical implications for fine-tuning digital content and social media tactics in dynamic markets.

1. Convergent Validity Test

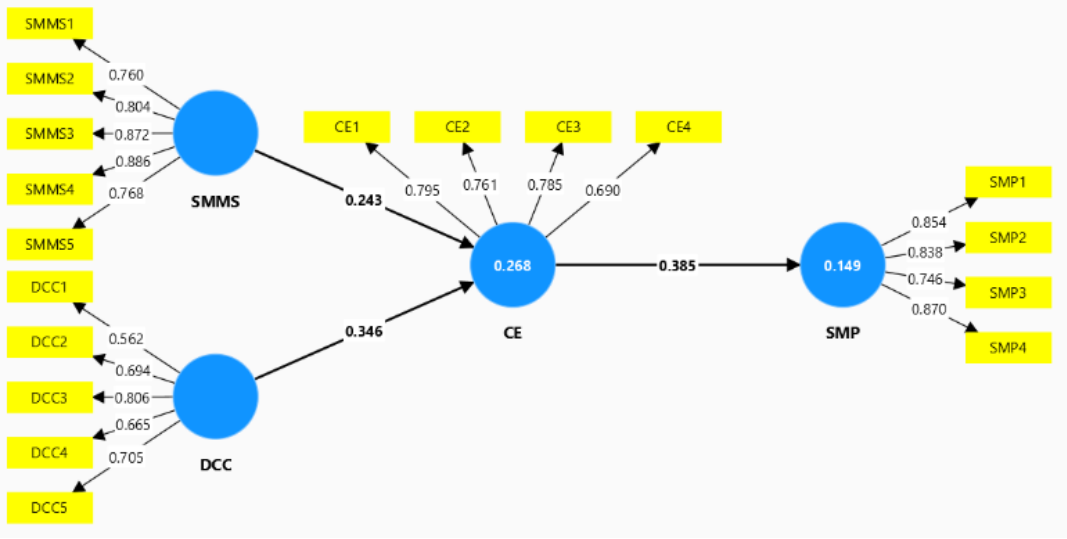

Figure 2. Analysis Data by SEM-PLS

Table 3. Outer Loading of Validity

	CE	DCC	SMMS	SMP	Validity
CE1	0.795				**Valid**
CE2	0.761				**Valid**
CE3	0.785				**Valid**
CE4	0.690				**Valid**
DCC1		0.562			**Valid**
DCC2		0.694			**Valid**
DCC3		0.806			**Valid**
DCC4		0.665			**Valid**
DCC5		0.705			**Valid**
SMMS1			0.760		**Valid**
SMMS2			0.804		**Valid**
SMMS3			0.872		**Valid**
SMMS4			0.886		**Valid**
SMMS5			0.768		**Valid**
SMP1				0.854	**Valid**
SMP2				0.838	**Valid**
SMP3				0.746	**Valid**
SMP4				0.870	**Valid**

Resource: Table from outer loading of validity indicators or items by SEM-PLS

Each indicator has an outer loading value greater than 0.6, indicating that they meet the convergent validity criteria (Hair & Sarstedt, 2021). The majority of SMMS and SMP items have loadings greater than 0.8, implying a significant indicator contribution to the latent construct.

2. Realibility Test

All variables in the model have high internal consistency so that they can be used in structural analysis without reliability issues. All constructs have a composite reliability value > 0.7, so the reliability of the construct is confirmed [20].

Table 4. Construct Reliability

Latent Variable	Cronbachs Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho-a)	Composite Reliability (Rho-C)	Reliability
CE	0.753	0.754	0.844	Reliable
DCC	0.731	0.784	0.818	Reliable
SMMS	0.878	0.894	0.911	Reliable
SMP	0.849	0.872	0.897	Reliable

Source: Table source analysis data reliability by SEM-PLS

3. Discriminant validity test

Every construct has a greater correlation value with itself than with other constructs, according to the Fornell-Larcker test. Construct discrimination is not being violated. Each construct does not overlap and has a unique identity.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity- Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Latent Variable	CE	DCC	SMMS
CE			
DCC	0.598		
SMMS	0.515	0.634	
SMP	0.467	0.358	0.534

Source: Table source analysis data reliability by SEM-PLS

Every construct has a greater correlation value with itself than with other constructs, according to the Fornell-Larcker test. Construct discrimination is not being violated. Each construct does not overlap and has a unique identity.

4.2. Measurement Inner Model

The Inner Model aims to test the hypothesis and the strength of the relationship between constructs. The Inner Model test is very important to understand how strong and relevant the relationship between variables is.

1. Path Coefficient

Table 6. Discriminant Validity- Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Latent Variables	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Description
CE -> SMP	0.400	0.063	6.073	0.000	Supported
DCC -> CE	0.363	0.084	4.122	0.000	Supported
SMMS -> CE	0.247	0.086	2.826	0.005	Supported

Resource: Table source from direct test hypothesis, by Bootstrapping

Customer engagement (CE) favorably and significantly impacts social media performance (SMP). This implies increased customer participation improves social media performance (interaction, reach, and conversion).

CE is significantly influenced by Digital Content Capability (DCC). This demonstrates that emotionally charged, pertinent, and genuine material can increase audience engagement. Though it has a lesser impact than DCC, social media marketing strategy (SMMS) also benefits CE.

Table 7. Total Indirect Effects- Mean, STDEV, T Values, P Values

Latent Variables	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Description
DCC -> SMP	0.145	0.042	3.190	0.001	**Supported**
SMMS -> SMP	0.099	0.040	2.375	0.018	**Supported**

Resource: Table source from direct test hypothesis, by Bootstrapping

Customer engagement (CE), digital content capability (DCC), social media performance (SMP), and social media marketing strategy (SMMS) are all favorably and significantly correlated. According to the path coefficient, SMMS directly affects CE (β = 0.243, T = 2.826, P = 0.005), suggesting that structured digital marketing techniques significantly increase consumer interaction on social media platforms. DCC also substantially impacts CE (β = 0.346, T = 4.122, P = 0.000), showing that content with emotional resonance encourages greater audience participation.

In addition, CE significantly directly impacts SMP (β = 0.385, T = 6.073, P = 0.000), demonstrating its critical function in improving digital performance outcomes like engagement metrics, reach, and conversion. This is further supported by the indirect effect analysis, which shows that CE mediates the impact of DER on SMP (β = 0.133, T = 3.190, P = 0.001) and that CE mediates the effect of SMMS on SMP (β = 0.094, T = 2.375, P = 0.018). According to these findings, interaction serves as a catalytic mechanism that increases the impact of strategic marketing and emotional content on business success across digital platforms.

The relationship between digital emotional resonance and social media performance, as well as between social media marketing strategy and social media performance, has been demonstrated to be mediated by customer engagement. This means that neither strategy nor emotional content will be effective if they cannot create audience engagement.

This mediation effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and strengthens the structure of your model.

Table 8. R Square

	R-Square	R-Square adjusted
CE	0.268	0.257
SMP	0.149	0.142

Resource: Table source from direct test PLS-SEM algorithm

According to an R2 value of 0.268, the two independent variables of Digital Content Capability (DCC) and Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) combined explain 26.8% of the variation in Customer Engagement (CE). The remaining 73.2% of the variation is influenced by variables not included in this model. In social and behavioral sciences, a R^2 value of 0.25 to 0.50 is regarded as moderate to strong [20]. This outcome is suitable for exploratory research in strategic digital marketing.

Meanwhile, the R^2 value of 0.149 for Social Media Performance (SMP) suggests that the Customer Engagement (CE) construct explains 14.9% of the variation in performance outcomes. Although the effect is modest, it is still considered meaningful, especially in the context of MSMEs, where social media performance is highly contingent on

external factors such as platform algorithms, industry content trends, and broader economic conditions. Thus, CE remains a relevant mediating factor, and DCC plays a critical role in enabling engagement that leads to improved performance.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between Social Media Performance (SMP) and Digital Content Capability (DCC) and Social Media Marketing Strategy (SMMS) among fashion-based MSMEs in Banten, Indonesia, using Customer Engagement (CE) as a mediating variable. The results complement previous research (Brodie et al., 2011; Tafesse & Wien, 2018) that highlights engagement as a reaction to carefully created and audience-relevant material by confirming that both SMMS and DCC highly influence CE. According to Brodie et al. (2011), CE shows up as a powerful predictor of SMP, emphasising its function as a mediator between performance and strategic planning.

Prior studies [6] that focused mainly on direct strategic impacts, without accounting for behavioral mediators, validate and expand the connections SMMS → SMP and DCC → SMP through CE. By establishing DCC as a quantifiable internal capability and demonstrating how strategy-driven and content-driven components work together to improve engagement and digital performance, this study adds to the body of theoretical knowledge. For SMEs looking to improve social media results through improved content management and strategic planning, the findings have both theoretical and practical ramifications.

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