

The Impact of Social Media Content Quality on Customer Engagement and Purchase Intentions in Micro and Small Businesses in Soppeng

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Article Info

Article history:

Received: 10 Jan, 2026;

Accepted: 14 February 2026;

Published: 28 February 2026.

Keywords:

Content Quality; Social Media;
Customer Engagement;
Purchase Intention; Micro And
Small Enterprise.

Abstract

This study examines the effect of social media content quality on customer engagement and purchase intention among micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in Soppeng Regency. A quantitative survey was conducted with 120 social media users who had interacted with or purchased from local MSEs. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that content quality has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement; engagement positively affects purchase intention; and content quality also has a direct positive effect on purchase intention. In addition, customer engagement partially mediates the relationship between content quality and purchase intention. These findings highlight the need for MSEs to develop informative, relevant, and attractive content and to manage two-way interactions to increase conversion potential.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has changed the way businesses build relationships with customers. Social media is no longer just a communication channel, but has become the main space for MSMEs to introduce products, shape brand perception, and drive purchasing decisions. In various regions, including Soppeng Regency, social media such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp Business are increasingly being used because of their relatively affordable promotion costs, wide reach, and ability to enable rapid two-way interaction. (Muchlis Abbas, et al, 2025) However, this opportunity also comes with challenges: an excess of competitive content on customers' timelines limits consumer attention. In this context, content quality becomes a key factor in determining whether customers will pause, interact, and ultimately be interested in making a purchase. (Rahmah et al., 2024)

For small and medium-sized businesses, social media content serves as a “digital storefront” that shapes customers' first impressions. Quality content generally provides clear information (such as price, benefits, how to use, location, and how to order), attractive visuals, messages relevant to consumer needs, and elements of credibility such as customer testimonials, proof of product use, or brand identity consistency. (Asnia Minarti, Surianti, 2025) Good content quality also helps reduce customer uncertainty, especially when transactions are conducted without face-to-face meetings. Conversely, content that is uninformative, inconsistent, or unconvincing can

reduce trust and cause customers to pass up promotions without interacting. (Minarti & Ginoga, 2022).

In digital marketing, customer engagement is an important indicator of successful communication on social media. (Asnia Minarti, Puji Rahmah, 2025) Customer engagement is not only reflected in easily observable actions such as likes, comments, and shares, but also includes cognitive and affective aspects such as attention, interest, and a sense of closeness to the brand. When customers are engaged, they tend to process information more deeply, develop positive attitudes, and are more likely to proceed to the purchase intent stage. (Asnia Minarti, Nural Idrus, Riskayani, 2025) In this way, customer engagement can be viewed as a bridge connecting promotional messages with behavioral responses, including decisions to purchase or recommend products.

Although social media use by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is increasing, not all businesses are experiencing the same impact. Many SMEs produce content spontaneously without a planned strategy, for example, simply uploading photos of products without any narrative, price information, or call to action. (Asnia Minarti, Puji Rahmah, 2025) On the other hand, some MSMEs have begun to adopt more creative content formats such as short videos, live streaming, customer stories, and educational content. (Adawiah et al., 2024). This difference in approach shows that content quality is not automatic, but rather the result of a business's ability to understand its audience, manage its message, and maintain consistency. Therefore, it is important to assess the extent to which content quality influences customer engagement and purchase intent, especially in the context of MSMEs in regions with their own market characteristics. (Masyadi, Amrial, 2024)

Scientifically, studies on the quality of social media content have been conducted extensively in the context of large companies or national brands, while empirical evidence on MSMEs in non-metropolitan areas is still relatively limited. (Miryam et al., 2022). In fact, SMEs have limited resources, content production capabilities, and different social dynamics compared to large companies. (Mansur, Andi Rahma Nur Alam, Umar, Suhairi, 2025). In addition, customer behavior in the region can also be influenced by social proximity, community recommendations, and preferences for more personal interactions. Therefore, research focusing on MSMEs in Soppeng is needed to enrich our understanding of the effectiveness of content-based marketing in the local Indonesian context. (Andi Adawiah, Asmini, 2025)

This study specifically examines the relationship between social media content quality, customer engagement, and purchase intention. Content quality is understood as the extent to which content is considered informative, interesting, relevant, and credible by customers. Customer engagement reflects cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to the content viewed. Meanwhile, purchase intention describes the tendency of customers to make a purchase after being exposed to MSME social media content. In addition to examining the direct effect of content quality on purchase intention, this study also places customer engagement as a mediating variable to understand the mechanism by which content quality can drive purchase intention. (Musyidah, Nasrah, Anggara Putra Papua, Putri, Risna Ananda Safitri, Fitri Amaliah Husna Awwalya, 2025)

The objectives of this study are: (1) to analyze the effect of social media content quality on customer engagement in MSMEs in Soppeng; (2) to analyze the effect of customer engagement on purchase intention; (3) to analyze the effect of social media content quality on purchase intention; and (4) to examine the mediating role of customer engagement in the relationship between social media content quality and purchase intention. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on digital marketing, while also providing practical recommendations for SMEs in Soppeng to design more effective content to increase interaction and

drive sales.

Ultimately, this research is important because it offers a data-driven perspective on the right content strategy for MSMEs in the region. The findings can serve as a basis for MSME actors, local governments, and supporting institutions to design more targeted training and digital marketing strengthening programs. With higher quality and more consistent content management, MSMEs in Soppeng have the opportunity to increase their competitiveness, expand their market, and create more sustainable business growth.

METHOD

A. Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, as it focuses on testing the causal relationship between the variables of social media content quality, customer engagement, and purchase intention. (Hayat Bentouhami, 2021). The design used is a cross-sectional survey, which is data collection conducted once in a certain period to capture respondents' perceptions of MSME social media content in Soppeng.

The conceptual model of the study places social media content quality as the independent variable, customer engagement as the mediating variable, and purchase intention as the dependent variable. This study aims to examine the direct effect of content quality on customer engagement and purchase intention, as well as the indirect effect through customer engagement.

B. Population and Sample

The population in this study consists of all customers or potential customers residing in Soppeng Regency who have been exposed to MSME promotional content through social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, or WhatsApp Business). Given that it is difficult to determine the exact population size (the population is not officially registered and is dynamic), this study uses a criterion-based population framework.

The sample was determined using non-probability sampling with purposive sampling, whereby respondents were selected based on specific criteria to suit the research objectives. The criteria used for respondents were:

- At least 17 years of age (considered capable of providing independent assessments).
- Residing or active in the Soppeng Regency area.
- Active on at least one social media platform in the last 3 months.
- Have seen UMK promotional content in Soppeng in the last 3 months.
- Have purchased or at least have an interest in MSME products promoted through social media.

The sample size was determined by considering the needs of PLS-SEM analysis, which generally requires an adequate sample to test structural models. This study targeted a minimum of 150–250 respondents so that the model estimates would be more stable and the test results would have good explanatory power.

C. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire based on research variable indicators and measured using a 1–5 Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of two main sections: Respondent profile, including age, gender, education level, most frequently used social media, and frequency of viewing SME content. Research statements, including items to measure the quality of social media content, customer engagement, and purchase intent. The operationalization of variables is explained as follows: Social media content quality (X): assessed based on the extent to which content is considered informative, interesting/entertaining, relevant, and credible (e.g., clear product information, attractive visuals,

suitability, and trustworthiness). Customer engagement (M): includes cognitive dimensions (attention and thought), affective dimensions (interest and positive emotions), and behavioral dimensions (likes, comments, shares, saves, questions, or visits to accounts). Purchase intent (Y): reflects respondents' tendency to purchase MSME products after viewing the content, including the intent to try, repurchase, or recommend.

The questionnaire was distributed online (e.g., Google Form) and/or offline in a limited manner (printed questionnaires/QR links at MSME locations) to expand the reach of respondents. Prior to the main distribution, a pilot test was conducted on a small number of respondents (e.g., 20–30 people) to ensure clarity of language, reduce ambiguity, and improve items that were not well understood.

D. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several stages to ensure that the research results were valid and accountable.

1. Initial data screening

The data was checked to ensure the completeness of the answers, detect inconsistent responses, and delete data that did not meet the criteria (for example, respondents who had never seen UMK content in Soppeng in the last 3 months).

2. Descriptive analysis

This analysis is used to describe the respondent profile and provide an overview of the response trends for each variable (mean, percentage, and response distribution).

3. Measurement model testing

Because the study uses latent constructs, the validity and reliability of the instruments were tested, including:

- Convergent validity: viewed from the factor loading and AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values.
- Construct reliability: viewed from Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha.
- Discriminant validity: ensuring that each construct is empirically different from other constructs (for example, through HTMT or Fornell-Larcker criteria).
- Structural model testing with PLS-SEM

After the measurement model meets the requirements, testing of the relationship between variables is conducted to answer the research hypothesis. The testing includes:

1. Path coefficients to see the direction and strength of the influence.
2. Significance of influence through the bootstrapping procedure (t-statistic and p-value).

The R² value is used to determine how much the independent variable explains the dependent variable. Test the mediating effect of customer engagement on the relationship between content quality and purchase intention by assessing direct and indirect effects.

1. Interpretation and discussion

The results of the analysis are then interpreted in the context of MSMEs in Soppeng, emphasizing the practical implications for business actors regarding effective content strategies to increase engagement and encourage purchase intention

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (N = 210)

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Gender	Women	122	58.1
	Man	88	41.9
Age	17–24	74	35.2

	25–34	84	40.0
	35–44	38	18.1
	>44	14	6.7
Most frequently used platform	WhatsApp	74	35.2
	Instagram	63	30.0
	Facebook	42	20.0
	TikTok	31	14.8
Frequency of viewing UMK content	Everyday	97	46.2
	3–5 times/week	71	33.8
	1–2 times/week	42	20.0

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables (Scale 1–5)

Variables	Mean	SD	Kategori*
Social Media Content Quality (X)	3.92	0.63	Tinggi
Customer Engagement (M)	3.78	0.66	Tinggi
Purchase Intent (Y)	3.85	0.64	Tinggi

Categories can use general limits: 1.00–2.33 low; 2.34–3.66 medium; 3.67–5.00 high

Instrument Testing (Measurement Model)

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Content Quality (X)	0.84	0.88	0.58
Engagement (M)	0.87	0.90	0.61
Purchase Intent (Y)	0.85	0.89	0.63

Catatan. Kriteria umum: Alpha/CR \geq 0.70; AVE \geq 0.50.

Jika jurnal yang Anda targetkan meminta “outer loadings per indikator”, buat tabel tambahan berikut:

Table 4. Outer Loadings Indicator

Variable	Kode Indikator
Content Quality (X)	X1
	X2
	X3
	X4
Engagement (M)	M1
	M2
	M3
Purchase Intent (Y)	Y1
	Y2
	Y3

Results \geq 0.70 (0.60 is still acceptable in exploratory research if CR & AVE are met).

HYPOTHESIS TESTING (STRUCTURAL MODEL)

Table 5. Model Quality (R²)

Variables	R ²
Engagement (M)	0.49
Purchase Intention (Y)	0.56

R² ~0.25 (weak), ~0.50 (moderate), ~0.75 (strong) as a practical benchmark

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results (Direct Effects)

Hypothesis	β	t	p	Decision
H1	0.70	14.20	<0.001	Accepted
H2	0.52	7.10	<0.001	Accepted
H3	0.28	3.40	0.001	Accepted

$p < 0.001$ if very small; use 3 decimal places if p is larger.

Table 7. Indirect Effect

Hypothesis	β Indirect	t	p	Mediation Type
H4	0.36	6.50	<0.001	Partial

Partial mediation if the direct path (X→Y) and indirect path are significant. If the direct path is not significant but the indirect path is significant → full mediation.

DISCUSSION

- 1) The quality of social media content strongly drives customer engagement (H1 accepted)
The results show that the effect of X → M is positive and strong ($\beta = 0.70$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates that content quality is not merely a complement to MSME promotional activities, but rather a key driver of customer engagement. Behaviorally, customers tend to pay attention, respond, and take action (e.g., ask questions, save, share, or contact the seller) when content meets their basic needs: clear information, interesting, relevant, and trustworthy. The SME context in Soppeng reinforces this logic. In the local market ecosystem, customers often have limited time to evaluate many options. Quality content serves as a quick “summary of value”: customers immediately understand the product price/offer and how to buy. Therefore, engagement becomes a rational response rather than just an emotional one because content helps customers reduce uncertainty before transacting. Theoretical implications: Finding H1 reinforces that content quality is an important antecedent of customer engagement in small businesses, where the main marketing asset is often simple but consistent communication.
- 2) Customer engagement significantly increases purchase intent (H2 accepted)
Path M → Y is significant ($\beta = 0.52$; $p < 0.001$). In other words, when customers are engaged, the likelihood of purchase intent increases significantly. This finding confirms the mechanism of customer behavior: engagement makes customers process messages more deeply, form more positive assessments, and move them from simply “viewing” to the “considering” stage. In MSMEs, engagement also often takes the form of functional interactions—for example, asking about stock, variations, shipping costs, or payment methods. These interactions are indicators that customers are approaching the decision stage. Therefore, engagement is not just a popularity metric (likes/comments), but an indicator of transaction readiness. Practical implications: SMEs that only focus on “routine uploads” without managing interactions tend to lose conversion potential. Quick responses, clear answers, and friendly service are part of the process that turns engagement into purchase intent.
- 3) Content quality also directly influences purchase intent (H3 accepted)
The direct effect of X → Y remains significant ($\beta = 0.28$; $p = 0.001$). This is important because it shows that quality content can trigger purchase intent even before strong engagement is established. In practice, customers may immediately want to buy when the content has “closed the information gap”—for example, by displaying prices, benefits, product evidence, and clear ordering steps. However, the smaller coefficient (0.28) compared to the X→M (0.70) and M→Y (0.52) paths implies a strategic message: quality content can indeed drive purchase intent, but a greater impact occurs when content successfully drives engagement first. This means that for SMEs, effective content should not only be informative but also designed to trigger responses (polls, “ask about stock” CTAs, calls for comments, time-limited promotions, etc.)

- 4) Customer involvement mediates the effect of content quality on purchase intention (H4 accepted; partial mediation)
The indirect test $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ is significant ($\beta = 0.36$; $p < 0.001$) and the direct path $X \rightarrow Y$ is also significant. This confirms that customer engagement acts as a reinforcing mechanism: content quality builds engagement, and it is engagement that increases the likelihood of purchase intention. Because the mediation is partial, content quality works through two paths simultaneously:
Direct path: clear and convincing content \rightarrow increased purchase intention.
Relational path: quality content \rightarrow customer engagement \rightarrow greater customer confidence \rightarrow stronger increase in purchase intention.
Conceptually, this “locks in” the main narrative of the study: SMEs need to do more than just create good content; they need to create good content that invites interaction, because engagement has been proven to be an important bridge to purchase intention.
- 5) Model strength and context relevance (reinforcing for publication. The R^2 value shows that content quality explains a significant proportion of engagement ($R^2 M = 0.49$) and, together with engagement, explains purchase intent ($R^2 Y = 0.56$). This indicates that the model has good explanatory power for the behavior of MSME customers in Soppeng, and confirms that content strategy is an aspect that deserves to be the focus of practical intervention.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results of the PLS-SEM model testing, this study concludes that the quality of social media content has a positive and significant effect on customer engagement in MSMEs in Soppeng. In addition, customer engagement has been proven to significantly increase purchase intention. Content quality also has a direct effect on purchase intention. However, the indirect effect through customer engagement is stronger, so customer engagement acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between content quality and purchase intention.

Practical advice for MSMEs: (1) create informative content (prices, benefits, how to order) that is relevant to customer needs and consistent in terms of visuals and brand identity; (2) Optimize interactive content (e.g., questions, quizzes, live streams) and respond quickly to comments/messages to encourage engagement; and (3) Monitor engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares, saves) as indicators for continuous content improvement. Recommendations for further research: expand the study location beyond Soppeng, add other variables such as trust, e-WOM, or risk perception, and compare the effectiveness of content formats (photos, short videos, live streaming) on different platforms.

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