

Consumer Trust Reconstruction Through Digital Marketing Communication in Virtual Retail Branding

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HOW TO CITE:

Raenita Dwimulya Tahir*, Alem Febri Sonni, and Muliadi Mau (2026). Consumer Trust Reconstruction Through Digital Marketing Communication in Virtual Retail Branding. International Journal of Special Education, 41(20s), 179-190

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ABSTRACT:

The rapid growth of digital marketplaces has transformed consumer trust formation within virtual retail environments, particularly in dropshipping businesses where sellers operate without physical inventory ownership. This study aims to reconceptualize consumer trust through E Retailer Branding based on digital marketing communication within Shopee's dropshipping ecosystem. Using a qualitative approach supported by NVivo analysis, data were collected through in depth interviews with Shopee Star and Star+ dropshippers selling fragile household products under the Vicenza brand. The study integrates Computer Mediated Communication Theory, Store Image Theory, and Trust Commitment Theory to explain trust reconstruction in anonymous virtual commerce settings. The findings reveal that consumer trust is primarily shaped through product visuals, responsive communication, store reputation, customer reviews, and digital interaction consistency. The study also identifies a strategic shift from personal branding toward institutionalized virtual store branding, where trust is transferred from individual sellers to store identities. Ratings, "Star Seller" badges, and responsive customer service function as symbolic trust mechanisms that reduce consumer uncertainty. This research contributes theoretically by introducing the concept of trust reconstruction within stockless commerce environments and offers practical implications for digital businesses operating in Asian marketplace ecosystems.

Keywords: Consumer Trust; E Retailer Branding; Digital Marketing Communication; Dropshipping; Shopee Marketplace.

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of the digital commerce ecosystem has facilitated the emergence of stockless retail models, such as dropshipping, which allow entrepreneurs to operate without physical inventory or complex infrastructure (Daiya & Maheshwari, 2026; Grinard, 2026). In

marketplaces like Shopee, this model has gained significant traction due to low market entry barriers and operational flexibility (Daiya & Maheshwari, 2026). However, the inherent lack of control over production, packaging, and delivery processes often leads to inconsistencies that undermine consumer confidence (Daiya &

Maheshwari, 2026). While e commerce platforms provide a baseline of security, consumers increasingly prioritize perceived trust in individual sellers to mitigate risks related to product authenticity and service reliability (Khaw, 2023). As physical interaction is absent, digital marketing communication comprising live streaming, visual cues, and responsive interactions has become the primary driver for building and maintaining this trust (Khunafa & Dewi, 2025; Kusnandar, 2024). Recent scholarship has extensively documented the positive correlation between digital marketing strategies and consumer trust. For instance, studies indicate that interactive tools like Shopee Live significantly enhance trust levels (coefficient of 0.295) and directly influence purchasing decisions (Kusnandar, 2024). Furthermore, social trust in online reseller ecosystems is often anchored in four core dimensions: peer testimonials, empathetic communication, transparency, and reseller visibility within digital communities (Sakinah, 2025). Despite these findings, a significant research gap remains: existing literature primarily focuses on establishing trust in general e commerce or platform level trust (Khaw, 2023; Sumartini & Mandasari, 2023). There is a lack of a comprehensive framework for "trust reconstruction" specifically tailored to virtual retailers who possess no physical stock and limited control over the supply chain (Daiya & Maheshwari, 2026). Most studies overlook how these retailers can systematically rebuild trust dimensions such as integrity and competence when traditional physical quality guarantees are unavailable (Delaunay, 2021). This research proposes a novel approach by examining how virtual retail branding can serve as a compensatory mechanism for the limitations of the dropshipping system. By leveraging digital marketing communication as a surrogate for physical presence, sellers can reconstruct trust through strategic transparency and high quality digital interactions (Saepudin & Fadya, 2026; Sutopo et al., 2026). This study shifts the focus from simple trust building to a more complex reconstruction of trust dimensions competence, benevolence, and integrity within a purely virtual

environment (Sakinah, 2025). The novelty lies in identifying specific digital communication anchors (e.g., chat responsiveness, store visuals, and verified reviews) that function as credible substitutes for direct product inspection, thereby fostering a "social safety net" for the consumer (Malawat & Hariyanto, 2024; Sakinah, 2025). The primary objective of this study is to reconstruct the conceptual dimensions of consumer trust for virtual stores operating without physical inventory. Specifically, the paper aims to: identify the key digital marketing communication variables that influence trust recovery in dropshipping; analyze the role of e retail branding in mitigating perceived risks; and develop a strategic framework for stockless retailers to maintain long term consumer loyalty. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive review of trust theories in digital commerce; Section 3 details the qualitative or quantitative methodology employed; Section 4 presents the findings regarding trust reconstruction; and Section 5 discusses the theoretical and practical implications for virtual retail branding in the modern marketplace. The theoretical reconstruction of trust in stockless retail environments has evolved beyond basic transactional security toward a multifaceted framework of reliability and ethics. Electronic trust (e trust) is significantly determined by service reliability and platform design elements that mitigate consumer uncertainty (Saoula et al., 2023). In virtual commerce, the absence of physical assets necessitates a transition toward ethical branding as a strategic tool to reduce perceived risk; research suggests that transparency in communication and the efficient handling of customer feedback are critical pillars for establishing long term loyalty (L.S., 2025; Younis & Zeebaree, 2025). Furthermore, the evolution of trust in e commerce is increasingly driven by digital strategies that prioritize user centric ethical standards and proactive engagement, which function as substitutes for traditional physical cues of credibility (Younis & Zeebaree, 2025). By integrating reliable system design (Saoula et al., 2023) with transparent ethical commitments (Younis & Zeebaree, 2025),

virtual retailers can project a stable brand image that compensates for their lack of physical infrastructure.

Trust Based Marketing and Crisis Communication

Empirical evidence underscores the efficacy of interactive marketing tools in establishing and restoring consumer confidence. For instance, trust based marketing strategies that integrate the customer journey with electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) and live streaming have been shown to be strong predictors of purchase intentions (Batubara, 2026). These tools allow for real time validation of product claims, which is essential for stores without physical inventory. However, when credibility is threatened such as by fake reviews or service failures brands must employ "reverse marketing" strategies (J^{PE}, 2025). This approach, grounded in crisis communication theory, focuses on transparency and user empowerment to "re produce" trust through a collaborative process between the brand and its community (J^{PE}, 2025). Additionally, while high advertising intensity and frequent new product launches can strengthen brand trust, researchers warn that excessive price based promotions may inadvertently signal lower integrity or product quality (Ren et al., 2022).

Social Presence and Meaning in Digital Communities

Beyond technical and strategic factors, trust is reconstructed through the subjective experiences and meanings consumers derive from digital interactions. Trust is increasingly viewed as a social experience co constructed within consumer community cultures, where the perceived "social presence" of a seller can replace physical experience (Ren et al., 2022; Saoula et al., 2023). Individuals reconstruct trust when they feel "empowered" through transparent, two way interactions, particularly during the resolution of service crises (J^{PE}, 2025). The meaning of loyalty in a virtual context is also being redefined by personalized experiences often facilitated by AI which enhance consumer comfort and the feeling that their individual needs are recognized (Younis & Zeebaree, 2025). For stockless retailers,

fostering this sense of social presence through empathetic and responsive digital communication is vital, as it transforms the intangible nature of the virtual store into a credible and reliable consumer experience (Saoula et al., 2023; J^{PE}, 2025).

2. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to provide a comprehensive and nuanced account of how virtual retailers reconstruct consumer trust within a stockless business model. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this investigation as it allows for the exploration of the "lived experiences" and subjective meanings that entrepreneurs attach to digital branding and communication strategies. The research focuses on the Shopee marketplace, a dominant platform in the digital commerce ecosystem where trust building is critical due to the absence of physical product inspection (Daiya & Maheshwari, 2026; Khaw, 2023).

The study utilizes purposive sampling to select five dropshippers who have achieved "Star Seller" status on Shopee. This criterion ensures that participants possess significant experience and proven competence in navigating the challenges of the dropshipping model, such as limited control over production and logistics (Daiya & Maheshwari, 2026). These high performing sellers represent "information rich cases" who have

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

(Khunafa & Dewi, 2025; Sakinah, 2025).

****Data Collection Instruments and Procedures****

Data were collected through semi structured, in depth interviews conducted via digital platforms. The interview protocol was designed to elicit detailed narratives regarding the participants' strategies for managing product quality complaints, utilizing interactive features like Shopee Live, and maintaining responsiveness in chat interactions variables known to significantly influence consumer trust (Khunafa & Dewi, 2025; Kusnandar, 2024). Each interview lasted

approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was recorded with the participants' informed consent.

To ensure a holistic view of the trust reconstruction process, the interviews focused on three core areas: the transition from physical product guarantees to digital communication anchors; the strategic use

Data Analysis Process

failures through transparent communication. This procedure allowed for the capture of diverse perspectives on how "social presence" and "competence" are communicated in a purely virtual space (Sakinah, 2025; Saoula et al., 2023).

Data Analysis Process

- **Transcription and Import:** All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo 15. The software was used to organize data into cases, allowing for efficient cross case comparison.
- **Open Coding:** The researchers performed an initial line by line analysis to identify raw concepts related to trust dimensions such as integrity, benevolence, and competence within the digital marketing context (Sakinah, 2025).
- **Axial Coding:** During this phase, the researchers identified relationships between categories, linking specific digital communication strategies (e.g., chat responsiveness, ethical branding) to their perceived impact on consumer trust reconstruction (Sumartini & Mandasari, 2023; Younis & Zeebaree, 2025).

- **Selective Coding:** The final stage involved synthesizing the core themes into a conceptual framework that explains how virtual retail branding serves as a compensatory mechanism for the inherent limitations of dropshipping (Daiya & Maheshwari, 2026; Saepudin & Fadya, 2026).

To ensure trustworthiness and credibility, this research employed data triangulation by cross referencing interview responses with the participants' actual Shopee store profiles, including their response rates, store visuals, and public consumer reviews (Khunafa & Dewi, 2025; Saoula et al., 2023). Furthermore, peer debriefing and a reflexive journal were maintained throughout the analysis process to minimize researcher bias and ensure the findings remained grounded in the participants' authentic experiences (J^W, 2025).

3. Results

The qualitative findings derived from the NVivo 15 analysis provide a systematic architectural view of how trust is reconstructed in the virtual retail domain. The data indicates that for dropshipping entrepreneurs, trust is not an organic byproduct but a "digitally engineered" construct (Sosianika et al., 2025). By analyzing the Word Cloud, Hierarchy Chart, and Project Map in sequence, we can decipher the mechanics of this reconstruction.



Figure 1. Word Cloud

The Word Cloud visualization highlights the lexical dominance of terms such as "Rating", "Shopee", and "Ulasan". This suggests that in the absence of physical touchpoints, dropshippers anchor their brand's reliability in the "social proof" ecosystem provided by the marketplace (Boente et al., 2025). The frequent emergence of "Strategi" and "Interaksi" confirms that

participants perceive trust as a variable that must be actively managed through customer relationship management rather than passive fulfillment (Boente et al., 2025). This aligns with recent findings that social proof and mobile responsiveness are central to achieving competitiveness in digital entrepreneurship models (Boente et al., 2025a, 2025b)

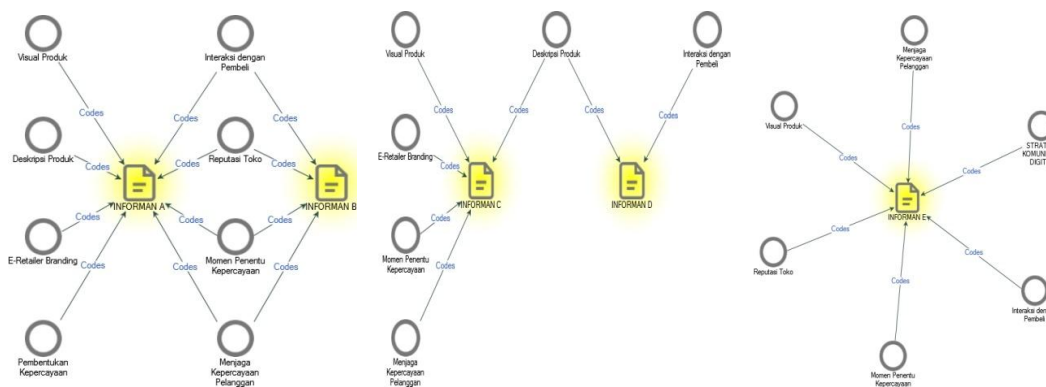


Figure 2. Comparison Diagram of Informants A, B, C, D, and E

The following is a synthesis of in depth analysis grouped into three main themes that were determined:

1. Consumer Trust

In the context of virtual retail, consumer trust does not develop instantly; rather, it is established through a series of cognitive and affective elements validated by the informants. Based on the data distribution across the three figures:

Trust Building: In diagram 1 Informant A explicitly emphasizes this initial phase. Initial trust is established by meeting fundamental expectations on the digital platform.

Trust Decisive Moments: This code appears consistently across different informant groups acknowledged by Informants A and B diagram 1 Informant C diagram 2, and Informant E diagram 3. This indicates the existence of critical touchpoints (such as transactional accuracy, complaint handling, or response speed) that determine whether a consumer will maintain a transactional relationship or abandon it.

Trust Maintenance: Retaining consumers in virtual retail requires consistency. This code spans the entire data spectrum from Informants A, B, C, to E, indicating that maintaining trust

post purchase is far more critical than merely securing the first transaction.

2. Reconstruction Through Digital Marketing Communication in Virtual Retail

Due to the lack of physical presence in virtual retail, digital marketing communication serves as a "bridge" to reconstruct the tangible shopping experience and mitigate perceived risks. The NVivo data shows that this reconstruction strategy relies on three main pillars

A. Visual Communication and Product Information: Product Visuals (Visual Produk), This serves as a universal code appearing for Informants A, C, and E. In the digital realm, clear and appealing visualization reconstructs the missing "touch and feel" sensory function of physical shopping.

Product Description (Deskripsi Produk): Specifically highlighted by Informants A, B, C, and D (diagram 1 & diagram 2). Transparent and detailed descriptions complement visuals to build a rational understanding for the consumer.

B. Interactive and Strategic Communication: Interaction with Buyers (Interaksi dengan Pembeli): This code is widely distributed across Informants A, B, D, and E. Responsive, two way

communication humanizes the virtual platform, provides instant reassurance, and reconstructs the role of physical store attendants.

Digital Communication Strategy (Strategi Komunikasi Digital): This prominently emerges with Informant E Diagram 3. It indicates that successful virtual retail requires an integrated communication approach (such as omnichannel efforts, educational content, or social media optimization) to reinforce brand messaging consistently.

3. Branding (E Retailer Identity and Reputation)

Branding in the digital ecosystem acts as a quality assurance mechanism that differentiates an e retailer from its competitors while accelerating consumer decision making. Based on diagram 1 and diagram 2 Informants A and C specifically highlight the importance of this dimension. Strengthening digital identity (such as professional logos, online storefront aesthetics, and a clear value proposition) helps the virtual store establish credibility right from the first impression.

Store Reputation (Reputasi Toko): This code appears for Informants A, B diagram 1 and diagram 3 Reputation often manifested through star ratings, positive reviews, and digital track records is the accumulation of successful branding and communication strategies. A solid reputation automatically lowers consumer hesitation and accelerates the consumer trust reconstruction process.

NVivo analysis across the five informants (A, B, C, D, and E) reveals an integrative model within the virtual retail landscape. Consumer Trust does not operate in isolation, rather, it is actively Reconstructed through high quality Digital Marketing Communication encompassing product visuals, transparent descriptions, and intensive two way interaction. This entire process culminates in and is reinforced by Branding (Store Reputation and E Retailer Branding). As digital branding grows stronger, the psychological barriers for consumers in virtual retail decrease, thereby creating a sustainable cycle of customer trust maintenance."



Figure 3. NVivo Hierarchy Chart (Treemap) Dominance Analysis by Number of Coding References

As illustrated in the treemap chart in Compared by number of coding references.png, the NVivo data is structured into two primary macro clusters based on the volume of coding references: the branding/trust cluster (blue block) and the digital communication strategy cluster (green block). The area size of each rectangle directly reflects the weight and frequency of references mentioned by the informants:

The E Retailer Branding Cluster (Blue Block): Within this domain, Momen Penentu Kepercayaan (Trust Decisive Moments) captures the largest surface area, followed closely by Reputasi Toko (Store Reputation). This nested structure demonstrates that e retailer branding is fundamentally driven by critical, trust defining touchpoints during the virtual shopping

experience, which cumulatively shape the overarching institutional reputation of the store.

The Digital Communication Strategy Cluster (Green Block): Under the umbrella of Strategi Komunikasi Digital, Visual Produk (Product Visuals) emerges as the most dominant sub code, eclipsing both Interaksi dengan Pembeli (Buyer

Interaction) and Deskripsi Produk (Product Description). This empirical breakdown highlights that sensory visual stimuli serve as the foremost and most frequently discussed marketing communication tool utilized by virtual retailers to capture consumer attention and mitigate perceived online purchasing risks.

Table 1. Number of Sentiment Coding References

Codes	Number of coding references	Number of items coded
E Retailer Branding	17	4
E Retailer Branding – Mixed	0	0
E Retailer Branding – Negative	0	0
E Retailer Branding – Neutral	17	4
E Retailer Branding – Positive	0	0
Visual relationship between nodes and respondents	0	0
Visual relationship between nodes and respondents – Mixed	0	0
Visual relationship between nodes and respondents – Negative	0	0
Visual relationship between nodes and respondents – Neutral	0	0
Visual relationship between nodes and respondents – Positive	0	0
Building Trust	1	1
Building Trust – Mixed	0	0
Building Trust – Negative	0	0
Building Trust – Neutral	1	1
Building Trust – Positive	0	0
Digital Communication Strategy	14	5
Digital Communication Strategy – Mixed	0	0
Digital Communication Strategy – Negative	0	0
Digital Communication Strategy – Neutral	14	5
Digital Communication Strategy – Positive	0	0

According to the NVivo sentiment coding summary table, the informants' discourse primarily centers around macro level branding and tactical operational communications. The distribution of the empirical coding metrics is interpreted below: The Prominence of E Retailer Branding: E Retailer Branding node accumulated

the highest density with 17 coding references extracted across 4 distinct informant sources. This signifies that establishing a robust digital brand identity represents the most heavily emphasized and thoroughly explored topic among the respondents within the virtual retail context. Ubiquity of Digital Communication

Strategy: Digital Communication Strategy node generated 14 coding references and achieved consensus coverage across all 5 informant sources (items). This universal coverage emphasizes that deploying a structured digital marketing communication framework is perceived by all respondents as an absolute necessity for virtual retail operations.

Foundational Role of Building Trust: The Building Trust node recorded a single reference from one informant source, suggesting its role as an initial touchpoint or a primary cognitive threshold before progressing into more extensive branding and communication activities.

Objectivity of Informant Sentiments: A critical finding from the data is that all active coding references (E Retailer Branding, Digital Communication Strategy, and Building Trust) are classified strictly under the Neutral sentiment category, with zero references marked as Positive, Negative, or Mixed. This metric indicates that the qualitative data is highly descriptive and structurally objective. The informants framed the execution of digital communication and branding strategies as objective, empirical realities and operational necessities in virtual retail, rather than expressing subjective emotional or evaluative biases.

To reinforce the visual findings from NVivo 15, direct quotes from informants representing key nodes are presented below.

Informant A

"Even though I don't hold the items directly, I make sure the photos and videos on my Shopee feed look professional and authentic. This visual strategy is important so my store doesn't look like an amateur dropshipper, and buyers feel secure in their transactions."

Informant B

"The key to maintaining a five star rating is in chat. I always respond when buyers ask for details or complain about delays. Quick and honest interactions are crucial; if we're responsive, our store's reputation remains intact even if there are shipping issues."

Informant C

"I utilize reviews from previous buyers as my main asset. Every time I get a positive review, I use it as promotional material. This is how I rebuild the trust of potential new buyers that, even though this is a virtual store, our service is real and responsible."

The integration between NVivo visual data and informants' narratives confirms that trust reconstruction in virtual retail is an active process that requires synergy between credible digital content and intensive customer relationship management (Saoula et al., 2023; 尹, 2025).

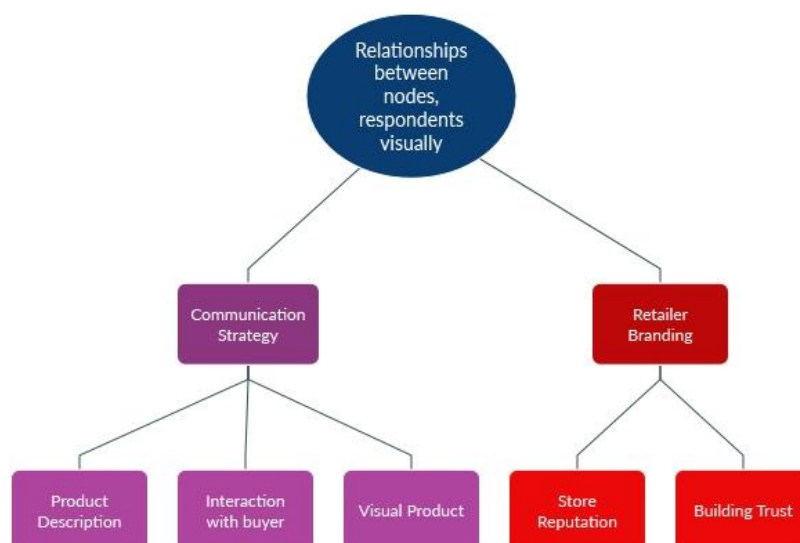


Figure 4. Conceptual Diagram of Virtual Retail Trust Reconstruction

As visualized in the conceptual diagram, the framework maps out the relationships between nodes into a highly structured, two pronged digital retail strategy. The visual hierarchy effectively splits the operational and perceptual efforts of a virtual retailer into two master categories:

The Tactical Pillar (Communication Strategy): Positioned on the left side, this cluster outlines the core execution of digital marketing communication. It establishes that a comprehensive communication strategy is operationally dependent on three foundational elements: clear Product Descriptions, ongoing Interaction with buyers, and immersive Visual Products. These variables function as tangible touchpoints that eliminate physical barriers in online shopping environments.

The Strategic Pillar (Retailer Branding): Positioned on the right side, this cluster encapsulates the psychological and institutional equity of the online storefront. It theorizes that long term retailer branding is driven by the consistency of Store Reputation and the initial breakthroughs in Building Trust. In conclusion, the visual breakdown demonstrates that while the Communication Strategy acts as the primary vehicle to deliver information and bridge sensory gaps, Retailer Branding serves as the vital psychological anchor that locks in consumer loyalty and structural trust in virtual retail environments.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that consumer trust within the dropshipping ecosystem is no longer constructed through physical interaction or direct product ownership, but rather through a digitally mediated process centered on communication quality, symbolic branding, and institutional reputation. The NVivo analysis revealed that trust in virtual retail operates as a "reconstructed social mechanism" in which consumers evaluate credibility based on digital signals such as product visuals, store ratings, responsiveness, and review ecosystems rather than traditional physical guarantees. This finding reinforces previous studies emphasizing

that trust in e commerce increasingly depends on social proof and communication transparency (Saoula et al., 2023; Sakinah, 2025), while extending the literature by showing how these mechanisms operate specifically in anonymous dropshipping environments.

One of the most significant findings is the dominance of product visuals as the primary communication anchor within digital marketing strategies. Informants consistently highlighted the importance of professional looking images and authentic videos in compensating for the absence of direct sensory experience. This supports the argument of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) Theory, which posits that digital interfaces can substitute physical interaction through symbolic and visual cues. In this context, visuals function not merely as promotional tools, but as trust surrogates that reconstruct the "touch and feel" dimension absent in virtual commerce. The hierarchy chart further confirms that visual products occupied the largest proportion within the digital communication cluster, suggesting that visual credibility is perceived as the first psychological filter in online purchasing decisions.

The study also found that interactive communication plays a critical role in humanizing virtual stores. Features such as Shopee Chat, Live Streaming, and responsive customer interactions emerged as central mechanisms for reducing consumer uncertainty. Informants repeatedly associated rapid response rates and empathetic communication with the maintenance of five star reputations and repeat purchases. These findings align with trust commitment theory, which emphasizes relational commitment and consistent interaction as prerequisites for long term consumer trust. In the absence of physical interaction, responsiveness becomes symbolic evidence of seller competence and benevolence. Therefore, communication speed is not simply operational efficiency, but a strategic trust building mechanism.

Another important finding concerns the transformation from personal branding to E Retailer Branding. Contrary to much of the

existing digital entrepreneurship literature that promotes personal identity visibility as a trust building tool, this study reveals that successful dropshippers intentionally minimize personal exposure and instead institutionalize trust within the virtual store itself. Trust is transferred from the individual seller toward the digital identity of the store through consistent visuals, store aesthetics, standardized descriptions, ratings, and review accumulation. This finding contributes theoretically to Store Image Theory by extending the concept of store image into a fully virtual and anonymous retail environment. In this context, the virtual storefront acts as an institutional actor capable of generating legitimacy independently from the seller's personal identity.

The findings also indicate that store reputation acts as a cumulative trust accelerator. Ratings, verified reviews, and badges such as "Star Seller" function as symbolic assurances that reduce perceived transaction risk. The prominence of "trust decisive moments" within the hierarchy chart suggests that consumer trust is strongly influenced by critical interaction points, particularly complaint handling, delivery transparency, and post purchase communication. This finding is consistent with crisis communication literature, which argues that trust recovery depends heavily on transparency and responsiveness during service failures (Järvelin, 2025). In virtual retail settings, moments of disruption become opportunities for retailers to demonstrate integrity and reinforce relational trust.

Furthermore, this study introduces the concept of "trust reconstruction" rather than conventional trust building. Traditional trust theories generally assume the existence of physical products, direct interaction, or institutional guarantees. However, in the dropshipping ecosystem, retailers often lack direct control over inventory, logistics, and packaging processes. Consequently, trust must be continuously reconstructed through communication practices and symbolic credibility mechanisms. This reconstruction process occurs through three interconnected dimensions: competence (demonstrated through detailed

product information and operational responsiveness), integrity (demonstrated through transparency and honest communication), and benevolence (demonstrated through empathetic interaction and problem resolution). The integration of these dimensions forms the conceptual basis for the proposed virtual retail trust model.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing discourse on digital trust by integrating Computer Mediated Communication Theory, Store Image Theory, and Trust Commitment Theory into a unified framework for virtual retail branding. Previous studies often examined digital communication, branding, or consumer trust separately. This research synthesizes these perspectives into a holistic explanation of how trust is reconstructed within stockless commerce environments. The study therefore advances the conceptual understanding of trust formation in marketplace ecosystems where physical presence is absent and seller anonymity is common.

Practical Implications for Asian Business

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study provides important implications for businesses operating in Asia's rapidly growing digital commerce ecosystem. As marketplaces such as Shopee, TikTok Shop, Lazada, and Tokopedia continue to dominate consumer purchasing behavior, trust has become one of the most critical competitive assets for online sellers, especially for dropshipping businesses that operate without physical inventory. Highlights that Asian digital businesses should move beyond excessive price competition and focus more on trust oriented strategies. Many online sellers in Asian marketplaces still depend heavily on discounts and promotional campaigns to attract consumers. However, the findings demonstrate that long term consumer trust is more strongly influenced by communication quality, store professionalism, and reputation management. Businesses that consistently provide clear product information, responsive communication, and professional visuals are more likely to retain customers and encourage repeat purchases.

The research shows that E Retailer Branding has become essential in virtual retail environments. In traditional commerce, trust was often built through physical stores and direct interaction. In contrast, digital marketplaces require businesses to establish credibility through their online store identity. Consistent store layouts, professional logos, organized product displays, and standardized communication styles help create a trustworthy image in the minds of consumers. This implication is particularly important for SMEs and microentrepreneurs in Asia who increasingly rely on marketplace ecosystems as their primary sales channel. The study emphasizes the importance of responsiveness and customer interaction in building digital trust. Features such as live chat, Shopee Live, and fast complaint handling are not merely operational tools, but strategic mechanisms that influence consumer confidence. In many Asian markets, consumers value attentiveness and fast responses as indicators of seller reliability. Businesses that maintain active communication and quickly resolve customer concerns are more likely to develop stronger emotional relationships with consumers and sustain positive reputations.

Another practical implication concerns the role of digital reputation systems. Ratings, reviews, and seller badges such as "Star Seller" function as trust substitutes in online transactions where physical inspection is impossible. Consumers heavily depend on these indicators to reduce uncertainty before making purchases. Therefore, online sellers should actively encourage customer reviews, maintain service consistency, and prioritize post purchase satisfaction. At the same time, marketplace platforms should continue strengthening reputation systems because they serve as foundational trust infrastructures within digital commerce ecosystems. The findings also suggest that businesses selling high risk products such as fragile household goods, electronics, or cosmetics must prioritize transparency and communication. Consumers purchasing these products online face higher perceived risks related to authenticity, packaging quality, and delivery safety. Providing detailed descriptions, clear packaging information, and transparent

complaint resolution processes can significantly reduce consumer hesitation and improve purchase confidence.

Finally, this research demonstrates that the future competitiveness of Asian digital businesses will increasingly depend on their ability to integrate digital communication, branding consistency, and trust management into one cohesive virtual retail strategy. Businesses that successfully transform digital interactions into perceptions of professionalism, reliability, and security will possess stronger advantages in sustaining customer loyalty within Asia's increasingly competitive marketplace economy.

5. Conclusion

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing discourse on digital trust by integrating Computer Mediated Communication Theory, Store Image Theory, and Trust Commitment Theory into a unified framework for virtual retail branding, advancing the conceptual understanding of trust formation in marketplace ecosystems where physical presence is absent and seller anonymity is common. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the future competitiveness of Asian digital businesses will increasingly depend on their ability to integrate digital communication, branding consistency, and trust management into one cohesive virtual retail strategy; businesses that successfully transform digital interactions into perceptions of professionalism, reliability, and security will possess stronger advantages in sustaining customer loyalty within Asia's increasingly competitive marketplace economy.

This research acknowledges several limitations. The research focuses exclusively on Shopee dropshippers operating in a specific product category, which may limit generalizability across other marketplace ecosystems or industries. Future research is encouraged to employ comparative cross platform analysis, quantitative validation models, or longitudinal approaches to further explore the evolving dynamics of consumer trust reconstruction in digital commerce environments.

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to [nama informan/pihak yang membantu penelitian] for their willingness to participate in this study. The authors also acknowledge the support of [nama institusi/pemberi dana, jika ada] for the guidance and resources provided throughout the research process.

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