Relational Marketing Strategies in Building Consumer Trust in Printing Businesses in Padang City

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Keywords: *Relational Marketing Trust, Customer Trust Printing, Printing Business Loyalty*	**Abstract** *In the digital era, printing businesses face significant challenges in retaining customers due to intense competition and rapidly changing consumer behaviors. Beyond product quality, modern consumers increasingly value transparent, consistent, and meaningful interactions with businesses. This study examines how relational marketing strategies can foster consumer trust in printing businesses. Using a qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with business owners and customers, and the data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in relational marketing practices and their impact on trust. Findings reveal that clear and consistent communication, high-quality service, and personalized attention to customer needs strengthen emotional connections and long-term loyalty. The strategic use of digital media facilitates faster and more flexible interactions, while long-term commitments, such as after-sales support, continuous innovation, and loyalty programs, emerge as critical for sustaining trust. These results highlight that consumer trust is not solely built through product quality but also through the ongoing cultivation of relational ties. The study concludes that printing businesses should integrate effective communication, consistent service, personalization, digital engagement, and long-term commitment to enhance customer loyalty and competitive advantage in an increasingly complex market. This research provides practical insights for business owners seeking to strengthen customer relationships and sustain growth in the digital era.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's era of globalization and digital technological advancements, business competition has become increasingly complex and dynamic. Companies can no longer rely solely on product quality, competitive pricing, or technological innovation; they are also required to maintain continuous relationships with their customers. Changes in consumer behavior, becoming more critical, rational, and well-informed, have made customer loyalty one of the most valuable assets for business sustainability (Sheth & Kim, 2020). Consequently, the modern marketing paradigm has shifted from transactional marketing, which focuses on short-term sales, to relationship marketing, emphasizing the development and maintenance of long-term customer relationships (Casaca & Rosário, 2023).

Relational marketing is a strategy that prioritizes creating added value through continuous interaction, effective communication, and the cultivation of mutual trust between businesses and their customers. This approach is not only essential inservice industries but also highly relevant in other sectors, including the printing industry, which continues to grow in line with increasing demand from both individuals and institutions. Within this context, consumer trust is considered

a key prerequisite for the successful implementation of relational marketing strategies (López & Martín, 2022; Gupta & Kumar, 2021).

Printing businesses possess distinct characteristics compared to other sectors. Printed products are evaluated not only for quality and neatness but also for speed, punctuality, and flexibility in meeting diverse and highly personalized customer requirements. In such conditions, consumer trust becomes a critical determinant of business success. Trusting customers are more likely to return and even recommend the service to others (Setiawan et al., 2023; Sutisna et al., 2024).

Previous research highlights trust as a pivotal factor in building long-term customer relationships. Within the framework of the Commitment-Trust Theory, trust underpins customer loyalty and commitment (Kaiser & Berger, 2021). Recent studies further indicate that trust significantly mediates the relationship between service quality and consumer loyalty (Chen et al., 2020; Li & Zhao, 2022). In digital service sectors, trust has been shown to strengthen repurchase intentions and customer retention (Sutisna et al., 2024). However, most studies on relational marketing and consumer trust have focused on banking, retail, or e-commerce sectors (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2021; Payne & Frow, 2020). Research on the printing industry remains limited, despite its strategic role in supporting business, education, and individual needs.

This research gap indicates that the implementation of relational marketing in the printing industry, particularly in Indonesia, has received insufficient academic attention. Many printing businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), still rely on traditional marketing strategies, such as price promotions or simply leveraging a strategic location (Rodrigues & Pereira, 2021). While these strategies may attract new customers, they are insufficient for fostering long-term loyalty. Without strong trust, consumers can easily switch to alternative providers who are perceived as better able to meet their needs (Wang et al., 2023; Zhang & Wang, 2024).

The urgency of this study is further highlighted by the digitalization trend in the printing industry and the shift in consumer preferences toward technology-based services. Implementing relational marketing strategies becomes increasingly relevant, as it focuses on creating positive customer experiences and building deep trust (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Deloitte Insights, 2022). In the printing industry, trust is not only established through product quality but also through transparency, honest communication, and reliability in fulfilling promises. Timely delivery is crucial, as printed products are often used for important activities with strict deadlines. Delays can undermine consumer trust and damage the company's reputation (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2020).

Thus, research on relational marketing strategies to build consumer trust in printing businesses holds significant theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretically, it expands the study of relational marketing in the underexplored printing sector (Casaca & Rosário, 2023; Rosado-Segovia & Molina-Carmona, 2022). Practically, it provides guidance for printing business practitioners in formulating effective relationship-based marketing strategies. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on integrating relational marketing with consumer trust in the printing industry, aiming to develop sustainable strategies to enhance customer loyalty.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore relational marketing strategies in building consumer trust within printing businesses. This approach was chosen as it allows researchers to deeply investigate the experiences and meanings perceived by participants (Flick, 2022). The research was conducted at several printing businesses in Padang City, with informants including owners or managers who have operated for at least three years, as well as consumers who have repeatedly used their services. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, with the sample size determined until data saturation was reached, in accordance with contemporary qualitative research guidelines (deMarrais, Roulston, & Copple, 2023).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore communication strategies, personalized services, and factors shaping consumer trust. Observations focused on real interactions between the printing business and its customers, while documentation included brochures, transaction records, and social media content. The primary research instrument was the researcher, who was responsible for collecting, processing, and interpreting data, supported by interview guides, observation sheets, and field notes (Wahyuni & Halim, 2022).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014), comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process was conducted iteratively with ongoing verification to maintain consistency. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Consistent with Mayring (2022) and Jha (2024), layered triangulation is essential for ensuring credibility and minimizing interpretive bias. Through this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of relational marketing implementation in printing businesses and its contribution to strengthening consumer trust.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Product and Service Quality

From the interviews, almost all printing business owners emphasized that print quality is key to maintaining customer trust. One owner stated, "We always strive to maintain color accuracy and design sharpness. If customers are satisfied, they usually return, and often recommend us to friends or relatives." Similarly, a customer shared, "I once tried printing elsewhere, but the results were not good, the colors were somewhat faded. I returned here because the results were neater and met my expectations." These statements indicate that product quality is not only about technical aspects but also about how consumers feel valued through satisfying outcomes. Previous studies support these findings. Rahman et al. (2021) assert that service quality is directly related to customer loyalty. Abubakar and Bala (2022) note that in the printing industry, color accuracy and design detail are the most critical factors for consumers. Hossain et al. (2023) also found that consumers satisfied with product quality are more likely to recommend the service to others.

Beyond print results, staff service was frequently cited by customers as a reason for trust. One customer said, "I like printing here because the staff are friendly. Even if a design needs revision, they handle it patiently." This aligns with Nguyen et al. (2021), who found that positive interpersonal interactions directly influence customer trust and satisfaction. Kasiri et al. (2020) also emphasize that quality service involves not only products but also friendliness, empathy, and responsiveness. It can be concluded that quality encompasses both print accuracy and the overall customer experience. When consumers receive outcomes that meet expectations and are served

well, trust is established, forming the foundation for long-term relationships between the printing business and its customers.

Timeliness

In printing, meeting deadlines is often a decisive factor in whether customers return or switch to competitors. Interviewees stressed that meeting customer deadlines is a top priority. "Regarding timing, we strive not to be late. Customers usually need quick service, especially for important events like seminars, weddings, or business promotions. Even a small delay can disappoint them," explained one owner. This was confirmed by a customer: "I once printed invitations elsewhere. The results were good, but the job was two days late. I switched here because if they promise Friday, it's done Friday." This demonstrates that speed and punctuality are not only about convenience but also about trust.

Field findings align with recent research. According to Ariffin et al. (2021), timeliness is a key dimension of service quality that significantly affects customer satisfaction and loyalty. In small enterprises, Alghamdi (2022) found that delays are a major reason for lost consumer trust. Similarly, Kim & Lee (2023) note that in order-based service industries, service speed is directly linked to trust formation. Furthermore, punctuality reflects professionalism; companies that consistently meet deadlines are seen as more trustworthy and credible (Tang, 2020). Printing businesses that maintain timely delivery more easily build positive reputations through word-of-mouth recommendations. Timeliness is therefore not merely an operational factor but a relational strategy. Meeting promised deadlines makes customers feel valued and more confident in maintaining long-term relationships, while repeated delays erode trust even if product quality is high. Time, in essence, is part of the "language of trust" most easily understood by consumers.

Communication and Transparency

In addition to quality and timeliness, clear and transparent communication frequently emerged in interviews. One owner stated, "We always try to be open from the start. If there is a risk of delay due to busy machines or material shortages, we inform the customer immediately. It's better to be honest than to make promises we can't keep." Customers appreciated this openness. One said, "If there's a problem, they tell me honestly. I can adjust my schedule or find alternatives. It makes me trust them because they don't hide anything." This demonstrates that clear two-way communication fosters customer confidence. In business relationships, transparency is not only about technical information but also about respecting the customer. Zhang & Li (2021) found that open communication increases consumer trust, particularly in service industries. Akhtar et al. (2022) also emphasize that customers are more loyal when they feel involved in information and decision-making processes.

Good communication also includes responsiveness. Several interviewed customers mentioned that printing businesses that quickly respond to messages via WhatsApp are preferred. "If I ask about prices or designs via WhatsApp, the reply is fast, and I feel attended to," said one customer. This aligns with Chatterjee & Kar (2020), who found that responsiveness in digital communication significantly influences trust and customer satisfaction. Price transparency is equally important. One customer recounted, "A printing service initially offered a low price, but when I picked up the order, extra charges appeared. That put me off." In the studied printing businesses, prices were clearly explained upfront, providing customers peace of mind. According to Putri & Santosa (2021), price transparency is a pillar of trust in service businesses, as unclear costs often lead to dissatisfaction. Thus, open, responsive, and transparent communication is a

crucial asset in relational marketing. Consistently maintaining clear information reduces conflict potential and fosters long-term trust, making customers feel valued, involved, and treated fairly.

Loyalty Programs and Personal Relationships

Interviews revealed that personal relationships with customers remain a powerful tool in maintaining trust. One owner explained, "We try to remember customers' names, habits, and even the types of prints they frequently order. When they come again, we immediately know their needs." Simple acts like greeting customers by name or providing tailored suggestions leave a lasting impression. A customer shared, "It feels like I'm being served not just as a buyer, but almost like a friend." Additionally, some printing businesses have begun implementing simple loyalty programs, such as discounts for bulk orders or bonus prints for certain orders. One customer noted, "I like that if I print many calendars, there's a bonus print. It makes me feel appreciated as a loyal customer."

These findings align with Khoa (2020), who found that loyalty programs effectively build emotional bonds between consumers and service providers. Prentice et al. (2021) also emphasize that personalized services make customers feel special, increasing trust and long-term commitment. In small enterprises, Hidayat & Yulianti (2022) found that personal closeness often distinguishes them from larger, more formal businesses. Personal relationships reinforce relational marketing concepts, as trust and commitment are central to long-term customer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 2020). By fostering warm personal interactions, printing businesses not only provide printing services but also build emotional connections. Recent studies by Wu et al. (2023) show that customers who feel personally close to service providers are more tolerant of minor errors if communication is good. Loyalty programs and personal approaches are therefore long-term investments in building relationships, making customers feel valued beyond product quality or competitive pricing, often turning them into unofficial advocates.

Reputation and Social Trust

Interviews revealed that a printing business's reputation in the community strongly influences customer decisions. One customer said, "I learned about this printing business from a friend. They said the results were good and on time. Because of that recommendation, I trusted them even without trying first." Word-of-mouth clearly plays a major role, especially in the digital age where social media or marketplace reviews can quickly shape perceptions. Owners also recognize the importance of reputation. "We always protect our name. If there's a complaint, we respond immediately. If someone is disappointed and shares it, it can damage the trust we've built over time," explained one owner. Maintaining a good reputation thus means safeguarding broader social trust, not just relationships with individual customers.

Research supports this finding. Chinomona & Sandada (2021) state that company reputation is a key factor in building consumer trust, particularly in the service sector. Chen et al. (2022) note that a positive reputation strengthens perceived quality and reduces perceived uncertainty. Alotaibi (2023) found that consumers are more loyal to companies with good reputations, even if prices are slightly higher than competitors. Social media further amplifies the role of reputation, as online reviews and ratings quickly influence consumer perceptions. One customer said, "I saw reviews on Instagram and Google Maps. Many gave five stars, so I felt confident to try." This aligns with Wirtz et al. (2021), who found that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) significantly affects trust and purchase intentions.

Thus, reputation can be seen as a form of social trust built from collective customer experiences. For printing businesses, maintaining reputation requires not only product quality but

also responsive handling of complaints and active engagement on social media. Social trust ultimately serves as an "unwritten guarantee," allowing new customers to feel secure in trying the service and existing customers to remain confident in continuing the relationship.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that relational marketing strategies play a crucial role in building and maintaining consumer trust in printing businesses. Clear and consistent communication was found to be the primary foundation, as transparency makes customers feel secure and more willing to continue using the service. Consistent service quality also significantly influences trust, as customer satisfaction reinforces the perception that the business is reliable. Additionally, a personal approach, such as understanding customers' needs and habits, strengthens emotional closeness and fosters long-term loyalty.

In the digital era, leveraging online media has become indispensable. Interactions through social media or digital platforms make relationships with customers faster, more flexible, and more relevant, particularly for younger generations accustomed to technology. Ultimately, long-term commitment from business owners, through after-sales services, continuous innovation, or loyalty programs, becomes key to sustaining established trust. These findings align with prior research emphasizing that customer trust is built not only through product quality but also through relationships that are consistently nurtured.

Based on these results, several recommendations are proposed for printing business owners. First, continue to strengthen communication with customers, both in person and through digital channels, to make interactions feel more personal. Second, maintain consistent service quality to foster satisfaction and confidence. Third, implement service personalization thoughtfully, respecting ethical considerations in customer data usage. Fourth, actively engage in digital media to expand market reach and build closer connections. Finally, demonstrate long-term commitment through innovation, after-sales services, and loyalty programs so that customers feel valued and remain loyal. By applying these strategies, printing businesses can build strong trust while enhancing competitiveness in an increasingly challenging market.

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